University of South Carolina

Scholar Commons

Fall 2019

Examining the Experiences of Retained Non-Rural Teachers Serving in High-Turnover Rural School Districts

Whitney Leigh Prowell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons

Recommended Citation

Prowell, W. L.(2019). *Examining the Experiences of Retained Non-Rural Teachers Serving in High-Turnover Rural School Districts.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/5527

EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF RETAINED NON-RURAL TEACHERS SERVING
IN HIGH-TURNOVER RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Whitney Leigh Prowell

Bachelor of Arts
Furman University, 2008

Master of Education
University of South Carolina, 2012

Education Specialist
University of South Carolina, 2014

_____

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Education Administration

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2019

Accepted by:

Douglas A. Smith, Major Professor

Henry Tran, Committee Member

Peter Moyi, Committee Member

Matthew J. Irvin, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my family. To my son Carter, your birth inspired me to reach my goal of completing my doctoral degree as an example to you that anything is possible if you put in the work. May this dissertation motivate you to develop a love for learning, deep thinking and to become intellectually curious throughout your life. To my husband, Quan, thank you. Thank you for all of the long days and nights, supporting me and loving me throughout this process. To my sisters, Ashley and Morgan, I appreciate your prayers and well-wishes. You have continued to be my cheerleaders throughout my life. To my parents, John and Linda, with sincerest gratitude for all you have given me, this would not have been possible without all you have done for me. You taught me the importance of education, hard work and setting high goals. Your support and unconditional love truly helped me achieve this goal. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe factors and conditions necessary to retain non-rural public school teachers in high-turnover rural districts in South Carolina. Research on retaining non-rural teachers in rural districts is scarce. This phenomenological interview study describes rural teaching experiences from the perspective of non-rural teachers and provides insight into factors that influence the decision-making of non-rural teachers regarding continued employment in their district.

Data was gathered from interviews with 11 participants. South Carolina was selected because it is a highly rural state with a severe teacher shortage. A phenomenological design helped to answer the study's overarching research question: *how do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?* The findings from this study can guide meaningful conversations regarding strategies to retain non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural areas.

A thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four themes. The first theme, Unique Perks, describes a wide variety of benefits beyond monetary that influenced participants' retention. The second theme, Culture and Climate, relates to the positive atmosphere of the district because of administrator leadership and behaviors. The third theme, Complacency and Comfort describes a level of satisfaction teachers felt, which allowed them to remain in the district without seriously considering any other options. The fourth theme, Commitment to Community, details experiences that established a

deep level of dedication from the teacher to the community they served. The findings of

this study are significant for states similar to the study site and for those that wish to

better understand how to retain non-rural teachers in rural school districts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CERRA ....Center for Recruitment, Retention & Advancement

NCES ....National Center for Education Statistics

PACE ....Program of Alternative Certification for Educators

TFA .... Teach for America

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In fall 2018, about 56.6 million students will attend elementary and secondary schools in the United States, including 50.7 million students in public schools and 5.9 million in private schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Between fall 2015 and fall 2027, total U.S. public school enrollment in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 is projected to increase by three percent, from 50.4 million to 52.1 million students, (NCES, 2018). In the 2015-2016 school year, there were 3.8 million public school teachers, up .8 million from the 1999-2000 school year (NCES, 2018). Despite rising student enrollment, public schools are only projected to employ about 3.2 million full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers in fall 2018, down .6 million from the 2015-2016 school year (NCES, 2018).

Of the 3,377,900 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2011–2012 school year, 84% remained at the same school, eight percent moved to a different school, and eight percent left the profession during the following year (NCES, 2018). Though eight percent may sound minor, it accounts for 270,232 teachers leaving the teaching profession in a single year. These statistics indicate high levels of teacher turnover, though the demand for teachers continues to increase. Teacher demand is estimated to increase 20% from 2015-2025 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). High demand for teachers, low levels of teachers entering the field and high levels of teacher attrition is a recipe for disaster. These conditions create a shortage of teachers, especially in more challenging geographic areas (Sutcher et al., 2016). The teacher

shortage issue is complex and due to a variety of factors related to both teacher recruitment and retention. Many researchers have investigated teacher recruitment and retention, and schools spend a lot of time and resources on strategies to recruit teachers. However, popular teacher recruitment initiatives will not address school staffing issues if organizations do not address the sources of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Background and Significance

The teaching profession as a whole is facing a growing shortage of highly qualified teachers, a fact that has often been discussed in the media as well as in the field of research (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016). Ingersoll (2014), similar to other estimates, found that 40 to 50% of teachers leave the field within the first five years of teaching. Knowledge of teacher turnover rates is not exact as teachers leaving the profession mid-year are not included in these datasets (Walker, 2019). As a result, U.S. teacher attrition rates are likely much higher than reported. The consequences of teacher shortages include a revolving door of inexperienced teachers (CERRA, 2018), consolidating classes and making larger class sizes (NCES, 2018) as well as lower student achievement (NCES, 2018).

Teacher recruitment and retention are important responsibilities of educational leaders to maintain high-quality teachers in the classroom. Teacher retention is important for a school's success as teachers are the most important resource to improve student achievement (Goldhaber, 2015). Schools with high turnover often experience lower academic achievement (Redding & Henry, 2018). Aguenza and Som (2012) defined retention as "the process of physically keeping employee members in an organization as

it is one of the key fundamentals that are necessary for organizational success" (p. 88). Teachers need to be retained for consistency in educational programming, to provide a foundation for building stakeholder stability, and to develop a holistic community that has the potential to become educated, contributory and self-sustaining. Small amounts of turnover are good so the school does not become stagnant, but large amounts of turnover lead to instability in a school (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Experience is on-the-job training (Watson, 2017), and the longer a teacher stays in a school system, the more connected they become with students, colleagues and the community, which can lead to greater effectiveness. A teacher is schooled in pedagogy, teaching methods, learning and development theory, curriculum, and content knowledge in their specific area of training (Watson, 2017). These specific skillsets must be valued and nurtured in a school environment conducive to retaining these highly skilled teachers.

Nearly half of school districts, a third of schools, and a fifth of students in the U.S. are located in rural areas (NCES, 2016). Many rural districts serve a high population of minorities and students living in poverty, making them harder to staff. Roughly 64% of rural counties have high rates of child poverty, as compared to 47% of urban counties (Schaefer, Mattingly, & Johnson, 2016). Currently, over 50% of rural students come from low-income families across 23 states, up from 16 states back in 2015 (Showalter, Klein, Johnson, & Hartman 2017). Rural school districts face additional economic, geographic, and social challenges than their urban counterparts (Shaefer et al., 2016). These challenges compound the teacher turnover problems in these areas making the shortages much more severe. Despite many methods geared toward recruitment and retention strategies and efforts, rural school districts still do not have a clear understanding of

effective, impactful and measurable recruitment and retention strategies. Research must continue in this area to provide additional insight and strategies to help with the problem.

This study is significant because it seeks to highlight the experiences of non-rural teachers that are retained in rural districts that experience high turnover. These rural school districts play an integral role in educating students, many of which are already experiencing disadvantages from living in poverty (Shaefer et al., 2016). In order for these students to have an opportunity to receive an effective education, they need to have access to schools fully staffed with teachers. For these reasons, this study sought to understand the experiences of teachers retained in rural districts that suffer high turnover. A more complete understanding of the daily lived experiences of rural teachers provides valuable insight into the motivators of teacher retention.

Purpose

According to Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey (2014), one of the critical causes of inadequate school performance is the inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers. Staffing schools is a function of both teacher recruitment and teacher retention. Currently, schools are recruiting teachers and losing large numbers of teachers each year. According to Darling-Hammond (2003), 20-30% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years. Other researchers argue that even higher percentages of teachers leave the profession in the first five years (Ingersoll, 2003). It makes sense to identify strategies to retain the teachers already in the profession instead of continuing the revolving door of recruiting new teachers and losing them. In addition, there are benefits to the stability of teachers. The longer they are retained, the more

skilled they become and the deeper relationships are built in the community, with peers, students, and families (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study was to better understand how to adequately staff schools, specifically how to retain non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts. A focus on teacher retention is not intended to undermine the importance of teacher recruitment or ignore the fact that these two issues are related. However, for the purpose of this study, the scope was narrowed primarily to teacher retention with the understanding that teacher recruitment is the first step towards retaining and maintaining a high-quality teaching staff at a school. Specifically, the focus of this study was the perceptions of non-rural teachers retained in high-turnover rural school districts as these districts generally have challenges recruiting and retaining teachers who are not from rural backgrounds (Lavalley, 2018).

Rural areas are generally disadvantaged socio-economically and in addition, they are disproportionately disadvantaged by teacher turnover (Lavalley, 2018). Research is desperately needed to help in underprivileged areas. In order to meet the challenges posed in the background and significance section, there was a need for further inquiry to help bring clarity regarding conditions necessary to retain non-rural teachers in rural settings. In order to propose appropriate recommendations, there was a need for deeper understanding regarding non-rural teacher perceptions of experiences that impact their decisions to remain employed in rural districts. The findings of this study will help inform rural policymakers and school leaders, so they are better equipped to provide what is necessary to retain teachers in rural settings.

A phenomenological study design guided conceptually by the literature and Chapman's Model of the Influences on Teacher Retention (1983), which is discussed further in Chapter Three, was used to answer the research questions. Perceptions of non-rural teachers retained in high-turnover rural school districts were investigated, specifically the lived experiences that motivated teachers with non-rural backgrounds to continue employment as rural school teachers in high-turnover rural districts.

Research Context

A more complete review of the literature is provided in Chapter Two but is outlined here. A brief description of the relevant research and literature, as well as an overview of the conceptual framework, is discussed in this section.

Review of Relevant Literature

Research and statistics show concerns with both teacher recruitment and retention (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaeffer, 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ulferts, 2016). These two aspects of talent management are connected; however, recruitment efforts will not be successful in providing stability to schools if retention is not addressed (Ingersoll et al., 2014). High rates of teacher attrition are reported as a cause of the teacher shortage (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Several researchers have studied teacher attrition to determine factors affecting high attrition rates. Dissatisfaction, low salaries and personal reasons including pregnancy, child rearing, health problems, and family moves were cited in the research for teacher attrition (Berry, Petrin, Gravell, & Farmer, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2014). Teacher stability is important to fully staff school districts with effective teachers. A revolving door of inexperienced and ineffective teachers can have a lasting negative impact on students (Redding, 2018).

Rural school districts face additional challenges when it comes to teacher retention, which is a concern as 49% of American school districts are rural (NCES, 2016). The definition of rural varies between government agencies, but for this study, the U.S. Census Bureau's (USCB) definition of *rural* will be used, which classifies *rural* as open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 people. The USCB urban-rural classification system considers an area as urban when a population is 50,000 people or greater; all other areas are considered rural (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). Many rural districts serve a high population of minorities and students living in poverty, making them harder to staff (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Walker, 2019).

In addition, due to funding formulas, smaller enrollments of students mean smaller budgets for rural districts. Rural districts need funding for recruitment, professional development to address rural teaching concerns, mentoring, building and resource maintenance as well as greater transportation expenses due to the large geographic size and low population density (Taylor, 2012; Redding, 2018). These deficiencies in finances cause additional issues with rural teacher retention. Many researchers have studied rural teacher retention, and a review of relevant literature identified four critical factors that affect rural schools: 1) human resources policy factors (Ingersoll et al., 2014), 2) economic incentive factors (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018; Tran & Smith, 2018a), 3) personal factors (Adams & Woods, 2015) and 4) community factors (Keiser, 2011; Lavalley, 2018).

Human resources policy factors that impact teacher retention include both principal support, e.g., principal's leadership style, opportunities for mentoring and professional development as well as working conditions, e.g., limited staff and resources.

In a study by Ingersoll et al. (2014), 43% of teachers cited a lack of principal support as their primary reason for leaving. Goodpaster, Abedokun, and Weaver (2012) found teachers who enjoy their principal's leadership style are more likely to be retained (Eddins, 2012; Shead, 2010; Yager et al., 2011). Aragon (2016) found mentoring to have a positive impact on teacher retention as it helped teachers feel more competent working with diverse populations, communicating with families and working with students with a variety of needs. Similar results were reported in studies that focused on rural districts (Adams & Woods, 2015; Aragon, 2016). In addition, providing professional development, which is found to be more limited in rural districts, has been shown to increase retention (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011). Concerns with the work environment have been shown to negatively impact retention (Ingersoll et al., 2014). In rural districts, these concerns include having limited staff and resources (Aragon, 2016).

Having a limited staff can lead to a shortage in special education and fine arts programs, which require rural teachers to teach more than one subject/grade level or to teach outside their certification areas (Berry et al., 2012; Aragon 2016). Rural teachers may also have smaller class sizes, have to teach a wide variety of abilities in one classroom and be expected to perform additional duties beyond academic teaching like supervising extra-curricular activities, which often leads to dissatisfaction and increases rural teacher turnover (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Limited resources have been found to negatively impact retention. A lack of up-to-date technology (Microsoft, 2017), well-maintained facilities, and inadequate instructional materials lead teachers to feel dissatisfied with their work environment, which then leads to attrition (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Keiser, 2011; Lavalley, 2018).

Economic incentive factors such as salary, signing bonuses, loan forgiveness, and housing incentives have been researched heavily and have been shown to impact teacher retention. Teacher salaries are a highly researched area with contrasting findings among studies. While some researchers argue salary may be an explanation for shortages in the field, studies on the impact of increased salaries have not substantiated that claim. Salary has been found to be lower in education as opposed to other occupations, with rural district salaries being below non-rural district salaries (Allegretto, Corcoran, & Mishel, 2018; CERRA, 2018). Some studies show that salary is a factor but not in isolation (Allegretto et al., 2018; Tran & Smith, 2018a). Researchers have found that increased salaries may lower the probability of a teacher leaving, but only for the first few years of teaching (Guarino et al., 2006). Salary bonuses have also been researched as a strategy to help with retention but have not been found to be a dependable strategy to use in retaining teachers (Liu, Johnson, & Peske, 2004; Steele, Murmane, & Willet, 2009; Winter & Melloy, 2005).

Most salary bonuses are paid in installments over several years, and in some cases, teachers do not stay long enough to receive the full bonus (Aragon, 2016; Liu et al., 2004). A bonus must be large enough to make a difference for this strategy to have an impact (Aragon, 2016; Liu et al., 2004; Winter & Melloy, 2005); however, this would be hard to test empirically as it would be very expensive. In a study by Tran and Smith (2018b), where they conducted an analysis to examine which factors most influence college students' consideration of teaching at the rural school district, salary bonuses were found to have less influence than administrative support. Teacher loan forgiveness programs have been widely used at every level, federal, state and even district loans in

some areas; however, empirical research has not shown significant correlation between loan forgiveness and increased teacher retention (Maranto & Shuls, 2012; Tran, Hogue, & Moon, 2015). Finding housing in rural districts may be a challenge for a rural teacher not from the area. To help teachers overcome this challenge, housing incentives such as *teacherages*, rental property owned by the district and leased to employees for a small fee; federal housing assistance programs such as Teacher Next Door, which allows teachers to receive a substantial discount to buy houses owned by the government; and special low-rate mortgages have been implemented (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). These strategies are fairly new and need to be researched further to determine their effectiveness on retaining teachers.

Personal factors such as self-efficacy, pedagogical training, commitment, and job satisfaction have been shown to have significant correlation with teacher retention. Adams and Woods (2015) found self-efficacy or one's belief in his or her ability to accomplish a task and teacher retention to be correlated. Increased self-efficacy leads to an increase in retention. School leaders can increase self-efficacy by providing a positive school environment, training, and support (Adams & Woods, 2015). Studies on the impact of pedagogical training on retention have been inconsistent. Most studies show that increased training leads to increased retention. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2012) found that the preparation route of teachers had little impact on retention, whereas Marinell and Coca (2013) found teachers entering the field through alternative routes were less likely to be retained. Teacher commitment has been shown to impact retention. Those teachers with a commitment to the field or to the community they serve are more likely to be retained (Shuls & Maranto, 2014). Job satisfaction and its correlation with

retention has been heavily researched. Several studies find job satisfaction has a strong positive correlation to teacher retention (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Teachers that experience job satisfaction are likely to be retained.

Community factors such as geographic isolation and social isolation have been shown to impact teacher retention in rural communities. Rural communities are characterized by their small size and isolated locations (Lavalley, 2018). In addition, these communities are found in areas far from restaurants, shopping malls and grocery stores (Lavalley, 2018). Greater distance from popular businesses, larger communities, and family along with a lack of entertainment and adequate shopping have been reported as additional complications in rural teacher retention (Keiser, 2011; Lavalley, 2018). The culture of rural districts may be very different from cultures of teachers moving to the area to teach, which can be a difficult transition for the teacher, leading to attrition. Relevant literature advises that teachers not satisfied with the social conditions of rural life are less likely to be retained (Keiser, 2011; Lavalley, 2018). "Grow Your Own" programs have been used to combat the concerns created by geographic and social isolation (Lowe, 2006). Several states have "Grow Your Own" programs, which support people already living in the community to become teachers in their own community and can lessen the chance for rural turnover due to social isolation obstacles for teachers that cannot adapt to such settings (Dwyer, 2007; Lavalley, 2018).

South Carolina is a highly rural state, with 33.7 percent of the population living in rural areas (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). The state experiences high teacher turnover rates (Tran, 2018) even after receiving national attention for gross inequalities between the educational experiences in districts across the state. South Carolina has

worked on both teacher recruitment and retention strategies for many years. The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA) is the state's organization that provides reports on teacher turnover based on data from the S.C. Department of Education. CERRA receives state funding to aid in addressing problems associated with the teacher shortages across the state. In addition, CERRA oversees many state recruitment and retention strategies to include the Rural Recruitment Initiative, Pro Team, Teacher Cadet, Teaching Fellows, and the Program for Recruitment and Retention of Minority Teachers. The state of South Carolina also offers teacher loan forgiveness for borrowers of either the SC Teacher Loan or the SC PACE Loan for teachers that agree to teach in identified critical geographic or subject areas (CERRA, 2018). Even with all of these interventions, the state continues to face a high level of attrition.

The review of relevant literature exposed a few gaps in the research. One gap is the lack of research detailing the daily experiences from the viewpoint of non-rural teachers serving and retained in high-turnover rural school districts, which this dissertation research sought to address.

Conceptual Framework

Chapman's Model of the Influences on Teacher Retention (1983) posits teacher retention is an overall result of career satisfaction. He describes four major interconnected areas that influence a teacher's career satisfaction: a) personal characteristics, b) educational preparation and learning experiences, c) environmental conditions and d) performance skills. He suggests that higher levels of career satisfaction will lead to teacher retention. A complete discussion of this framework and recent

relevant literature can be found in Chapter Three. This section provides a brief overview of the framework.

According to Chapman (1983), personal characteristics such as a person's sex, socio-economic status, and race affect their career choices. He asserts a person's pre-service training, the amount and adequacy of education he or she attained, his or her initial commitment to teaching, as well as his or her first employment (teaching) experience, will affect his or her career choices. In addition, Chapman (1983) theorizes a teacher's professional and social integration into teaching to include a person's social ties to the school; the extent that the person feels valued and successful, as well as the individual's salary, will influence their career choices. According to Chapman's (1983) theory, if a teacher is satisfied with their teaching career it is likely that the teacher will stay in the profession.

Statement of the Problem

Maintaining an adequate supply of teachers is an important task, as a quality education impacts students and the community as a whole. Despite many strategies and efforts geared toward improving rural teacher retention, rural school districts still do not have a clear understanding of effective, impactful and measurable teacher retention strategies, especially for teachers that do not have backgrounds in rural areas.

South Carolina is a prime example of a state continuing to face teacher shortages despite receiving major attention from the media. *Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools, a* 58-minute documentary, which was released in 2006, highlighted the poor facilities and educational experiences both teachers and students faced in poor rural districts in South Carolina (Ferillo, Rainey, Wehunt, Sibert, &

Conroy, 2006). The documentary received national attention. The S.C. Supreme Court ruled that the state had failed in its duty to provide what it says is a "minimally adequate" education to children in the state's poorest school districts, which were all rural, in the landmark case *Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina*. This case was later dismissed. South Carolina is a highly rural state experiencing teacher shortages; however, rural districts in the state are receiving a disproportionate share of teacher retention challenges. Historically, rural districts struggle to retain teachers (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Lavalley, 2018), and South Carolina is no exception to this trend.

Thirty-two of the 36 South Carolina school districts classified as high-turnover are rural school districts. Teacher recruitment and retention remain a struggle for South Carolina rural public schools due to high rates of attrition (CERRA, 2018). The incentives for new and experienced teachers to apply for and remain in teaching positions in South Carolina are much lower than in other states with better pay and support. During the 2017-18 school year, there were 550 vacant South Carolina teaching positions. Approximately 6,705 of the 53,146 public school teachers did not return to their positions. An overall teacher shortage of 2,487 teachers in South Carolina is projected to occur by 2027-28 (CERRA, 2018).

South Carolina has been working on both teacher recruitment and retention for a while through "Grow Your Own" strategies such as Pro Team, Teacher Cadet, Teaching Fellows, Program for Recruitment and Retention of Minority Teachers; loan forgiveness through the South Carolina Teacher Loan Forgiveness and even support for high-turnover school districts through the latest Rural Recruitment Initiative managed by CERRA;

however, these strategies have failed to eradicate the issue and teacher retention numbers are still a concern.

According to annual reports provided by CERRA, S.C. college and universities' education programs are producing less new teachers. In 2016-2017, they only produced 1,684 new teachers, a 30% decrease in the number of program completers of the last four years. To compound this problem, greater numbers of teachers are leaving the field. A total of 6,482 certified teachers did not return to their teaching positions in the 2016-2017 school year, a 21% increase from the previous year. Of the 6,482 S.C. teachers that did not return, 4,842 (74%) are no longer teaching in South Carolina, 2,465 (38%) taught five years or fewer and 803 (12%) taught one year or less. Of all first-year S.C. teachers in 2016-2017, 22% are no longer teachers in S.C. (Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement, 2017). Though these averages are not specific to rural districts in the state, state turnover data proves rural school districts are disproportionately affected.

When a phenomenon such as the rural teacher shortage continues despite receiving attention and efforts to improve it, such phenomenon needs to be further investigated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to investigate the puzzling phenomenon, which negatively impacts so many people, literature was reviewed and a gap in the literature was found. After reviewing the literature, it was noted that perceptions and experiences of non-rural rural teachers retained in rural school districts are not widely known; therefore, the target population of this study was teachers who self-identify as non-rural teachers and who have been retained a minimum of five years in his or her current rural school district. This gap led to the identification of research

questions, which are detailed in the following section. The findings of this study will enable school leaders and policymakers to make informed decisions on best practices to retain non-rural teachers in rural settings.

Research Questions

The reader will observe that the research questions flow from the following a) the statement of the problem, b) purpose and c) research context. Data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted to respond to the following research question:

How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment? Four guiding questions ensured the overarching question was answered.

1. How do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

2. How do teacher participants describe the influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

3. How do teacher participants describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

4. How do teacher participants describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

The specific intellectual goal was to understand and identify experiences that motivated teachers to continue employment in high-turnover rural school districts. The overall purpose of the study was to help reduce the teacher shortage by providing guidance that will translate into teacher stability in the already disadvantaged public school districts in rural South Carolina.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question posed above, the most appropriate method of inquiry was qualitative research. Qualitative studies are used to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study seeks to understand how non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment. A quantitative approach would not be appropriate as the research question does not ask about a cause-and-effect relationship (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several qualitative methods were considered to include narrative research, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 2009) as described in Chapter Three, but ultimately it was decided that a phenomenological study would be most appropriate to answer the research questions. Phenomenology is the study of people's conscious experience (Prasad, 2015). The research questions required an understanding of participants' experiences, how they interpret and describe experiences and finally, how they make decisions as a result of their lived experiences.

Phenomenological interviews were used as the primary method of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Guided by the interview protocol (Appendix D), which contains open-ended interview questions developed from the literature review and conceptual framework as well as an unstructured follow up for additional detail to the semi-structured questions in the initial interview, eleven participants were interviewed once with several opportunities for follow up. Criteria for participant selection is outlined in the next section and further discussed in Chapter Three. Interviews were audiotaped, took place at a mutually decided location and lasted approximately 45 minutes. In

addition to interviews, observational notes were used to collect important data during the interview process.

Interview data was collected and a trained third party confidentially transcribed the data. I reviewed transcriptions to ensure they were free from obvious mistakes (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and also to make notations, as necessary. Opportunities for the first round of member checking were provided where participants read through transcripts related to their interview and provided clarification, when needed (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Next, I began the coding process, which was cyclical as I often had to go back and recode data. NVivo, an electronic coding software, was used to help with organizing data, codes and metacodes. The software assisted with deconstructing raw data in order to reconstruct the data in a way that gave meaning to the study. Descriptive coding was used to first summarize data in short phrases (Saldaña, 2016). As codes were created and reviewed, pattern coding was used to create chunky categories based on meaningful patterns found from the first round of coding (Saldaña, 2016). After this step, another opportunity was provided for member checking. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the categories and provide clarifying statements when necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A peer cross-checked codes and reviewed categories with me (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and data was recoded again resulting in the development of deeper understanding. After receiving feedback from both participants and a peer, thematic analysis was used to identify four major themes from categorized data (Glesne, 2011). These themes brought meaning to the data collected and were articulated using rich, thick descriptions and connected back to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participant and Site Selection

It was established that South Carolina was the study site in the Statement of the Problem section. Purposeful sampling was used to select South Carolina, as the state is saturated with information closely aligned with the research question (Patton, 2015). South Carolina continues to struggle serving rural communities and has very high turnover rates in rural districts despite several attempts to combat the issue. The research question, *how do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?* requires high-turnover rural districts to be identified. In order to select sites to meet the criteria, South Carolina's Rural Recruitment Initiative's definition of high turnover, which is an average of greater than 11% turnover over the past five years as reported on S.C. Department of Education Report Cards, was used for identification. This definition identified 36 South Carolina school districts considered high-turnover districts. The National Center for Education Statistic's (NCES) definition of *rural* was used as a second delimitation. Four high-turnover districts were removed as they were not considered rural. Of the 36 high-turnover districts in South Carolina, 32 were considered rural. These 32 school districts were potential sites for the study. Using these sites ensured participants were selected from high-turnover rural districts.

Eleven participants were selected using purposeful, criterion and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling was used to identify information-rich individuals with a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012). Criterion sampling was used where predetermined criteria was set in order to select participants with the most knowledge about the topic being investigated

(Patton, 2015). Target participants were recruited who were employed as teachers in one of the 32 high-turnover rural districts in South Carolina and taught in the district for a minimum of five years. Five years was selected as a target minimum as several studies found teachers were likely to stay in a district after they were "retained" for a minimum of five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll et al., 2014). Once initial participants were selected that matched the criteria, snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants. Participants were asked to refer additional individuals who met the criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored experiences of South Carolina rural teachers retained in high-turnover rural school districts. Phenomenological interviews were the primary source of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of this study was to contribute to educational leadership by providing thick, rich descriptions of the lived experiences of rural teachers retained in high turnover school districts in South Carolina.

Chapter One provided an introduction to the proposed study that would answer the research question: *How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?* The issue of teacher retention in high-turnover rural school districts was presented in this chapter. Chapter Two includes a discussion of relevant literature that describes the rural context associated with teacher retention; motivators of teacher retention in four sections a) human resources policy factors, b) economic incentive factors, c) personal factors and d) community factors and strategies specific to South Carolina. Chapter Three fully outlines

the methodology and methods that were used for data collection and analysis in this study. Chapters Four and Five then present the study's findings and implications.

Definitions of Terms

Attrition- Attrition can refer to teachers who leave a school by a variety of means to include, resignation and leaving the field of education, transferring to another school in the same district, another district, another state, etc., or retirement (Ingersoll et al., 2014). For the purpose of this study, attrition refers to teachers who leave the field of education altogether.

High-Turnover- The S.C. Rural Recruitment Initiative Proviso defines high turnover as turnover in a single year greater than 11%.

Non-rural teacher- In this study, these teachers self-identify as being non-rural. These teachers have lived in non-rural areas for a significant portion of their life.

Retention- Lavalley (2018), similar to other researchers, found that high numbers of teachers leave the field within the first five years of teaching. For this reason, a teacher who has been "retained" is a teacher who has remained in the same school district for a minimum of five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Rural Area- The USCB urban-rural classification system considers an area as urban when a population is 50,000 people or greater. All other areas are considered rural (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012).

Teacher Turnover- Teacher turnover occurs when teachers move from or leave their current teaching position, leaving a vacancy that needs to be filled (Ingersoll, 2003). These teachers may or may not still be in the field of education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In Chapter One, I explained and justified the need to conduct a qualitative study that would examine the conditions and experiences that resulted in rural teacher retention. I identified the overarching research question and the four guiding questions. These questions were best answered using qualitative study, and specifically, phenomenological design. These research questions acknowledge the research framing a scholarly discussion of my topic and also reflect my professional interest and experience in teacher retention.

In Chapter Two, I carefully review important literature relevant to my proposed inquiry and show how my research questions flow from the literature and are reasonable and appropriate questions that add to the literature and provide us with a greater understanding of issues that plague the process of teacher recruitment in rural school districts.

I have organized my literature review in the following manner. In "Background," I review factors that impact the teacher shortage, to include issues with both teacher recruitment and teacher retention. This broad body of literature describes and explains problematic factors and how they lead to a greater chance that students are taught by inexperienced and ineffective teachers, which can negatively influence student achievement and success.

In the next section, "Rural Context," I define rural for the purpose of this study and review the literature concerning factors that impact the teacher shortage specific to rural schools. This literature was collected from the many empirical articles that report both quantitative and qualitative findings. The literature reviewed in this section identifies four critical factors that impact rural schools, which are a) human resources policy factors, b) economic incentive factors, c) personal factors and d) community factors. My synthesis of the literature highlights these four areas and show how they impact rural teacher retention.

In the third section, "Human Resources Policy Factors," I examine research related to principal support and working conditions. Principal support is broken down into three sections that each impact retention, to include principal leadership style, mentoring and professional development. Working conditions, which is a broad term, is broken down into two sections to include the impact of limited staff and the impact of limited resources on teacher retention.

In the fourth section, "Economic Incentive Factors," a discussion on relevant research regarding salary, loan forgiveness and housing incentives as motivators for teacher career choices is provided. Many of these factors have been studied thoroughly in regards to general teacher retention. Findings from major studies are provided in this section.

In the fifth section, "Personal Factors," literature describing the impact of teacher self-efficacy, pre-service training, commitment, and job satisfaction is reviewed. According to the research, these factors play a major role in a teacher's decision to stay

or leave. In addition, most of these factors can be improved by teacher preparation programs and principal support.

In the sixth section, "Community Factors," I examine the rural lifestyle and how it impacts teacher retention. Geographic isolation is a part of rural teaching that cannot be changed. If a school was not isolated geographically, it would no longer be rural; however, social isolation is a factor that could be improved. Relevant literature describing the impact of geographic and social isolation on teacher retention is reviewed in this section.

In the section titled, "South Carolina Retention Strategies," I review teacher retention data specific to South Carolina. South Carolina retention strategies such as the Rural Recruitment Initiative are discussed. Information from the CERRA's Reports is utilized a great deal in this section.

In the final section, "Conclusion," I include a brief restatement of the critical conclusions from my review of the literature and show how each of the components from aforementioned sections are organized into four key areas, which align with the four guiding research questions. In this section, I also address the gap in the literature, which supports my proposed study.

Background

Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) estimate the annual teacher shortage will reach about 110,000 by the 2017-2018 school year. These researchers assert teachers are quitting the profession at high rates, and unfortunately, schools are not able to recruit teachers as fast as they lose them. This issue coupled with the growing increases in elementary and secondary enrollments has resulted in shortages

24

of highly qualified teachers throughout the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Brownell et al., 2018). The consequences of teacher shortages include hiring teachers with less than satisfactory credentials, consolidating classes, larger class sizes, and high turnover (Jimerson, 2003; Tran, 2018). The teacher shortage issue is complex and due to a variety of factors related to both teacher recruitment and retention (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). It is important to note that factors that are important to recruit teachers may not be the same factors that are important to retain the same teachers (Ulferts, 2016). School districts must become great at both recruiting and retaining teachers; if they are not able to retain the teachers they recruit, the problem will not be solved. Popular teacher recruitment initiatives will not address school staffing issues if organizations do not address the sources of teacher turnover (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

Teacher attrition is a significant contributor to the teacher shortage. Attrition is the term that describes the declining number of teachers in the field of education. Attrition is due to low recruitment numbers and high turnover numbers. Although studies are inconsistent regarding teacher turnover rate for educators in comparison to other occupations (Guarino et al., 2006), they are consistent in finding that high attrition is a major factor in teacher shortages. According to Berry et al. (2012), when asked about attrition, administrators acknowledged 37% of the special education teachers left for personal reasons. Better salaries in competing districts were reported for 13% of the special education teachers that left. Although this study looked at special education teachers, its findings are still significant. Similar results have been reported for general education teachers.

Loeb et al. (2005) also looked at the factors affecting teacher turnover but focused their attention on satisfaction of novice teachers. These teachers were more likely to suffer from dissatisfaction with teaching than experienced teachers. Ingersoll et al. (2014) suggested that school leaders work on improving job dissatisfaction. Contrary to popular belief, retirement turnover is low in comparison to teacher turnover due to job dissatisfaction. Nearly half of all of the teacher participants reporting they were leaving their job reported they were departing either due to job dissatisfaction or out of a desire to pursue a better job, another career, or to improve career opportunities in or out of education. Thirty-nine percent of teacher turnover was due to family or personal reasons such as departures for pregnancy, child rearing, health problems and family moves (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Low rates of teachers entering the field combined with high attrition rates for teachers causes a teacher shortage. High numbers of teachers leave the field within the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Specifically, Ingersoll (2014) finds that 33% of teachers leave the teaching occupation altogether in their first three years, and 46% leave in the first five years. This high rate of teacher turnover is an issue that must also be addressed for the sake of student success.

Without teachers staying in the field long enough to gain valuable experience, there is a constant revolving door of inexperienced teachers in schools. In education, greater teacher experience is often linked to greater teacher effectiveness (Ingersoll et al., 2014). According to the work of Sanders and Rivers (1996), the impact of a teacher is lasting, regardless of if this is a positive (advance student achievement) or a negative (decelerate student achievement) effect. They found even after two years, the

performance of fifth-grade students was still affected by the quality of their third-grade teacher. Students who began at the same level of achievement had vastly different outcomes depending on the combination of teachers they were assigned. Chetty, Friedman and Rockoff (2014) found that differences in teacher quality were linked to later life outcomes, such as college attendance and labor market earnings.

Maintaining high-quality teachers in all classrooms is an important responsibility of educational leaders. Every student deserves a highly qualified and effective teacher in his or her classroom. Over the last three decades, many researchers have studied teacher recruitment and retention strategies, with the goal of finding ways to fully staff all schools with certified and effective teachers. Research on teacher retention has included teacher principal leadership/support (Johnson et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Adams & Woods, 2015), working conditions (Ingersoll et al., 2014), and financial compensation (Allegretto, Corcoran, & Mishel, 2018; Tran, 2018).

Rural Context

Though American discourse often neglects rural school districts, research is needed in this area to improve rural education (Showalter et al., 2017). Schools in rural areas are characterized by the small sizes of their classes, low numbers of certified teachers, hiring difficulties, and low compensations (Dupriez et al., 2016; Lavalley, 2018). Although some teachers report being satisfied with the rural environment's serenity and beauty and the behavior of rural students in comparison to urban students (Dupriez et al., 2016), the teacher supply is worse in rural areas (Shaefer et al., 2016). Malkus et al. (2015) reported 40% of remote rural districts struggle filling positions. To

make matters worse, rural districts don't have many candidates in their applicant pool (Jimerson, 2003).

Although rural teacher recruitment and retention are less researched than urban teacher recruitment and retention in the United States, they are equally as important. Nearly half of school districts in America are rural (NCES, 2016). Diversity in rural communities differs among areas of the country and therefore, it is difficult to universally define rural education (Eppley, 2009). The concept of "rural" varies, especially among government agencies and seldom do these definitions agree. Multiple definitions of rural make it more difficult to study rural education. The U.S. Census Bureau (USCB), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are three federal government agencies whose definitions for rural are widest in use. In utilizing any definition, one must take into account the parameters of the study.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of "rural" that was used was from the U.S. Census Bureau, which classifies "rural" in America as open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 people. In general, a rural area or countryside is a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities. Areas not classified as urban are considered rural. Classic rural areas have a low population density and small settlements. The USCB urban-rural classification is fundamentally a delineation of geographical areas, identifying both individual urban areas and the rural areas of the nation. Specifically, the USCB urban-rural classification system considers an area as urban when a population is 50,000 people or greater. All other areas are considered rural (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012).

There are some perceived advantages to working in rural districts. These advantages include fewer behavioral issues, greater opportunities for one-on-one instruction, less red tape, a greater chance for leadership, more parent and student participation, greater teacher impact on decision making, and smaller class size (Dupriez et al., 2016; Zost, 2010). In addition, some teachers enjoy a slower-paced life, relaxed atmosphere (Tran & Smith , 2018b), or being embedded in the community (Davis, 2002). Though some teachers in rural school districts have noted advantages for working in such an environment, the data shows that rural districts struggle in retaining teachers, especially in the subject areas of math, science, and special education (Aragon, 2016). Teacher retention numbers prove there are major issues with retaining teachers in rural areas.

Rural school leaders face additional geographic, economic, and social issues that compound the shortage of teachers, making the shortage more pronounced in such areas. Rural school districts are defined by their small size and isolated location (Monk, 2007; Watt et al., 2014). Many, not all, rural schools serve a high-poverty population, making them less desirable places to work (Jimerson, 2005; Watt et al., 2014). The term "hard-to-staff" generally includes highly urban or rural areas, especially those serving high-minority or high-poverty populations (Caulder, 2017; Monk, 2007). Johnson et al. (2012) also acknowledged the additional challenges for schools that serve high proportions of low-income and minority students to retain effective teachers. About 64% of rural counties have high rates of child poverty, as compared to 47% of urban counties (Schaefer et al., 2016). Students in rural areas have higher occurrences of low literacy,

special needs, poor academic performance and rarely enroll in colleges (Dupriez et al., 2016).

In addition to serving large populations of disadvantaged students, most rural districts face financial challenges due to inequitable funding formulas. Smaller enrollment of students equals a smaller budget (Redding, 2018; Reeves, 2003). Unfortunately, rural school districts have many needs such as funding for recruitment, professional development to address rural teaching concerns, mentoring to support new teachers and increase retention, building and resource maintenance as well as greater transportation expenses due to the large geographic size and low population density (Taylor, 2012).

Collectively, adverse conditions make it hard for rural school districts to fully staff schools. Finding solutions to the teacher shortages in hard-to-staff rural school districts is essential to ensure all students are provided an appropriate educational experience. Results from teacher retention studies highlight both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence the decision to leave the profession. Throughout the research, four main factors are described as influencers to teacher decisions related to teacher retention in rural school districts. Human resources policy factors, economic incentive factors, personal factors, and community factors are four consistent factors described. In this section, I will go into further detail on these major influences addressed in teacher retention research.

Human Resources Policy Factors

In many rural areas, human resources policy factors such as principal support and working conditions are problematic. Some problematic working conditions include

limited staff, which results in teaching more than one subject and/or outside of one's certification area, lacking up-to-date technology, facilities and educational resources (Berry et al., 2012), and having limited access to professional development or support services for students with great needs (Eddins, 2012; Lavalley, 2018). Research on human resources policy factors that influence teacher retention will be discussed in this section.

Principal Support

Social conditions guided by administrative leadership and support have been cited as a major factor in teacher satisfaction (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Research suggests that school administrators play a critical role in teacher retention as teachers having support are influenced to stay (Burke et al., 2013; Tran & Smith, 2018b). Factors such as a quality physical environment for teaching and learning have proven to be highly significant in retention (Lowe, 2006). Lack of principal support has been found to be a reason teachers leave (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008; Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007). In a study by Ingersoll (2002), 43% of the teachers that left due to "dissatisfaction" cited receiving inadequate support from their school administrators as their primary reason for experiencing dissatisfaction.

According to Tran (2018), most rural teachers are from rural areas and have a desire to teach locally, while others are led by openness to teaching in places with high turnover and sense of public service. The key barriers to success in rural districts are lack of preparation programs for the rural environment, lower salary, lack of support from the administration and feeling undervalued. Administrative support is key to making the work environment more comfortable, helping staff connect with students, increasing staff

31

self-confidence and it makes them feel like they are being heard. Additional barriers are lack of financial incentives and bonuses, appreciation from society and inadequate access to resources and shopping (Tran, 2018). Administrative support includes strong principal leadership that fosters a positive school culture by providing clear direction, teacher mentoring and meaningful professional development as well as providing respect and a community of learning where colleagues can collaborate (Harris, 2015; Johnson et al., 2012). A discussion of relevant literature on the impact of principal leadership style, mentoring and professional development on teacher retention is below.

Principal's Leadership Style. The leadership style and decision-making strategies of the principal have been found to influence teacher retention. According to Boyd et al. (2009), who used a Likert scale to survey 930 Israeli teachers, a transformational leader affects teacher job satisfaction and therefore improves retention. Shead (2010), who used a Likert scale to study teacher satisfaction in Texas, found teachers who felt empowered by their principal experience job satisfaction were more likely to be retained. Similarly, S. Yager, Pederson, R. Yager, and Noppe (2011) found in their study using open-ended survey questions that teacher empowerment was essential. Eddins (2012) found that teachers who rated their principals favorably on a job satisfaction survey were more satisfied with their work and were more likely to be retained. According to Goodpaster et al. (2012), who studied rural teacher retention in Indiana, principals who built positive relationships with teachers saw an increase in teacher retention. Tickle (2008) found that teachers who had a negative teaching experience but received principal support were more likely to be retained. Feeling disrespected by administrators was a factor that was reported to increase teacher attrition

after just one year of employment (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008). Hammer et al. (2005) reviewed relevant research and suggested principals work to improve their school culture in order to increase retention.

Mentoring. Ingersoll (2003) suggested first-year teachers in all settings were less likely to leave if they were provided full mentoring support in their first year. Similarly, Adams and Woods (2015) found mentoring had a positive influence on teacher retention in rural districts. This study looked at teacher retention in rural districts that predominately served Alaska native students and found teacher retention among new teachers who received mentoring increased from 67% to 77% over a period of six years. Dwyer (2007) reviewed data from the 2007 National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda random sample survey of first-year teachers and found that teachers who were provided mentoring and felt competent in their roles in regards to working with a diverse population, communicating with families and working with students with a variety of needs were less likely to transfer. Zost (2010) studied the retention of rural special education teachers in Nebraska. His study showed many rural districts were able to hire teacher candidates but failed to retain them for various reasons. He concluded that building resiliency in new teachers and educators during the first several years of teaching through mentoring may be part of the answer to addressing the high rate of teacher turnover in rural areas. Mentoring and professional development provide opportunities for teachers to create clear plans to address stressors and have a positive influence on all teachers' retention, not solely novice teachers. Opportunities for mentoring programs are important for retention as well as opportunities for professional growth (Adam & Woods, 2015).

Professional Development. Providing quality professional development opportunities has been found to be critical in increasing teacher retention rates (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011). Unfortunately, in rural areas, accessing high-quality and relevant professional development can be challenging due to the physical distance from colleges and other providers of teacher training (Lavalley, 2018). This is especially unfortunate when many rural teachers are not as prepared to teach and may benefit greatly from additional on-the-job training. Many times, the least experienced teachers are teaching the most educationally vulnerable student populations (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Access to relevant professional development could significantly help a teacher build skill and self-efficacy, leading to retention (Adams & Woods, 2015). Collegial isolation and an inability to learn from others due to limited staffing also causes concern for teachers as there may only be one staff member teaching certain content in a rural school (Davis, 2002). Rural teachers may be required to teach grade-levels or content outside of their certification area. For these reasons, professional development is even more critical. Without meaningful training, teachers become frustrated, which leads to turnover.

Working Conditions

The working conditions of a school can act as either a powerful support or deterrent for teacher retention (Ingersoll et al., 2014). According to a study by Darling-Hammond (2003), poor working conditions, to include poor facilities and having to pay for supplies, destroyed the morale of teachers causing turnover. According to Ingersoll (2003), teacher dissatisfaction with the work environment, not salary, was one of the principle reasons teachers left their schools. Similarly, Futernick (2007) found teachers

considered working conditions more than salary when selecting where to teach. Concerns with the work environment include poor student discipline, class sizes, and lack of empowerment by the administration. In a study by Ingersoll (2003), although teachers who left listed "higher salary" as the top strategy to retain more teachers, better student discipline was the next most popular suggestion, followed by smaller class size, and then more faculty authority. Poor work conditions and lack of administration support have been found to contribute to the teacher shortage (Sutcher et al., 2016; Watt et al., 2014). The primary issues include lack of professional communities, lack of essential resources and materials and discipline issues. Other factors are class sizes and the physical conditions of facilities. Teachers in rural areas often instruct out of the field due to the shortage of teachers. Principals, on the other hand, have also played a role, especially in cases where they put too much pressure on new teachers while providing them little or no support (Watt et al., 2014).

Futernick (2007) reported poor work conditions were a major motivator for teacher dissatisfaction and attrition. Specifically, he cited a lack of collegial support, lack of resources, excessive paperwork, too little time for planning and unnecessary meetings as major reasons teachers leave the field. Birkeland and Johnson (2003) studied teacher turnover, specifically investigating why they moved, and found new teachers often were assigned less desirable classrooms and more challenging students; teachers were assigned subjects outside of their qualifications; teachers were not equipped with curriculum materials; schools had inefficient discipline systems and school-wide behavior policies; lack of principal support and professional development and a lack of opportunities to interact with colleagues led teachers to leave the school or the profession. The majority

of the teachers in this study continued in the field of education but migrated to schools they felt would have better working conditions. These studies were not specific to rural schools; however, the findings were still relevant. Due to the smaller size and lower budgets in rural school districts, working conditions can be even more challenging. Rural retention literature focuses on limited staff and resources as two areas that affect retention. These two areas will be discussed in greater detail in this section.

Limited staff. A shortage of teachers in primary and secondary schools has become a common occurrence worldwide, regarding maintaining a high-quality education system (Sutcher et al., 2016). There is a strong relationship between students' educational achievement and high-quality teachers. Teachers are the core of the education workforce, playing a role in students' academic and social growth. The concept of a teacher shortage is achieved when the number of teachers needed is subtracted from those available, and the negative difference becomes the teacher shortage (Sutcher et al., 2016).

According to research conducted by Brownell, Bishop, and Sindelar (2018), education policymakers in the United States have invested much of their time and energy on finding, recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, but their efforts are yet to meet the high and chronic teacher shortage in the country. From 2000 to 2012, over 45 states used incentives in at least one of their district schools to attract teachers. Some of the tactics used included license reciprocity, cancellation of student loans and relocation bonuses, but the tactics failed to meet the need for quality teachers (Brownell et al., 2018).

Statistics reveal that the U.S.'s second largest state, Nevada, experienced a teacher shortage the 2016-2017 school year (Brownell et al., 2018). A state serving nearly 300,000 students had 1000 teacher vacancies and while the state targeted substitutes and unlicensed teachers, the positions remained opened by December 2016. In 2016-2017, the unified district school in San Francisco had 38 teacher vacancies (Sutcher et al., 2016). Having faced 6% vacancies, the districts relied on substitutes to fill vacancies. Additionally, the state of California, which has the largest number of public schools in the country, experienced an 80% shortage of teachers in all districts in 2017-2018. In 2015-2016, due to difficulties in staffing, California was forced to run on Provisional Intern Permits (PIPs) and Short-Term Staff Permits (STSPs) to fill math, science and special education positions (Aragon, 2016).

One reason behind the shortage is the overproduction in low-demand subjects and overstaffing in high-demand subjects such as in science and mathematics. For example, teachers qualified for arts, English and social studies are always available, but the science, special education, math, and international languages teachers are difficult to find. Regarding grade levels, Early Childhood Education teachers and those of elementary level are usually easy to find compared to the high school–level teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). Teacher certification programs are highly produced in some parts of the country while they are under-produced in other regions. This has created the worst of both worlds' scenarios where, when a teacher in one district is struggling to find a position, another district, on the other hand, is struggling to find the same type of teachers (Beesley et al., 2010).

From a geographical perspective, the states in the southwest, south, and west of the country face more difficulties in getting teachers of all types than states of the northeast and midwest parts of the country while countrywide, schools in the suburbs get staff faster than the urban and rural ones (Beesley et al., 2010).

Rural school districts are often small and have limited staff (Eppley, 2009; Jimerson, 2005). Most rural school districts have small enrollment in comparison to neighboring urban districts (Jimerson, 2005). Due to funding inequities created by funding formulas based on average daily enrollment or cost per pupil, rural school districts struggle to serve their students (Jimerson, 2005; Reeves, 2003). Schools with fewer students receive less funding; however, less funding does not equate fewer needs. Rural districts have additional expenses for staff members as small classes lead to increased labor costs. A special education or fine arts teacher costs nearly the same regardless if they serve a few students or a few hundred students (Reeves, 2003). There is often a shortage of rural teachers in special education and fine arts, programs that are needed to meet the most basic needs of students (Berry et al., 2012; Ferillo et al., 2006). This shortage compounded with a lack of funding causes rural teachers to be required to teach more than one subject area/grade level or teach outside of their certification areas with little to no support (Davis, 2002). Due to limited staff, rural teachers may have a wide variety of abilities within one classroom. In addition, they may be expected to perform additional services beyond academic teaching such as additional paperwork or supervising extra-curricular activities (Davis, 2002). Additional demands of the rural teacher were reported as a factor for high attrition (Monk, 2007). Having a limited staff adds additional hardships on rural teachers compared to urban teachers,

which leads them to feel unsuccessful and dissatisfied with the work environment and ultimately increases teacher attrition rates in rural areas.

Limited resources. Rural districts often lack basic resources and materials to include up-to-date technology and facilities as well as the necessary supplies and instructional materials (Hammer et al., 2005). According to Johnson et al. (2012), working conditions such as access to up-to-date technology or clean and well-maintained facilities were less significant than social conditions; however, other studies cited these factors as major influences of teacher attrition (Davis, 2002; Hammer et al., 2005). Rural districts providing outdated and inadequate curriculum guides, equipment and library materials lead teachers to feel less successful in their work, which leads to attrition (Davis, 2002; Keiser, 2011). Poor physical conditions of the school building have also been found to lead to attrition (Hammer et al., 2005). Many teachers are not attracted to school districts missing so many basic resources (Ferillo et al., 2006) and leave as soon as possible. Many times, teachers begin in a rural school district that is less desirable as a starting point, but once they gain experience these teachers move to non-rural school districts as experienced teachers (Barnes et al., 2008; Keiser, 2011).

<center>**Economic Incentive Factors**</center>

Economic incentive factors to include salary and other financial compensation and benefits have been researched heavily. Economic incentive factors are highly debated as a concern for teacher recruitment and retention. Studies have been inconsistent concerning the effect that economic incentive factors have on teacher retention. Compensation tends to be lower in rural schools than urban and suburban (Tran, 2018). Many, though not all, rural areas are seriously impoverished. According to

<center>39</center>

Fisherman (2015), 25% of rural children live in poverty. Poor rural districts have an additional challenge as they generally serve a population of students that come from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Due to inequitable funding formulas, these districts often receive less funding and therefore have fewer resources they can allocate to compensate teachers financially through salary and other means. The lower salary offerings of rural teachers compared to other public school positions along with eroding tax offerings present significant obstacles to rural teacher recruitment and retention (Tran, 2018). Rural public schools, especially those in economically disadvantaged states, face the adverse effects of teacher attrition (Tran, 2018). Though it is generally a small discrepancy in the compensation, other issues such as older buildings and fewer resources are compounded and make the lower salary a more prominent issue (Monk, 2007).

Financial incentives created to attract and retain teachers are generally provided to new teachers only; however, to lower teacher attrition, Lowe (2006) suggests incentives remain available to teachers throughout their tenure with the school district. This suggestion seems appropriate; however, Guarino et al. (2006) showed attrition was higher for young or new teachers in comparison to older or more experienced teachers. Even though older teachers with more experience are less likely to receive recruitment or retention incentives, they are less likely to leave the district or the profession.

Economic incentive factors such as salary, to include signing bonuses, loan forgiveness and housing incentives are all often described in the literature regarding rural teacher retention. These motivators will be discussed in further detail in this section.

Salary

Salary for teachers is highly researched; however, studies have contrasting findings regarding the effect that salary has on the teacher shortage. Some argue that salary may be an explanation for shortages in the field; however, that claim has not been widely substantiated by research. Salary is generally lower in the field of education as opposed to other occupations, and rural school district salaries tend to be lower than non-rural school districts (Monk, 2007). In a study by Tran and Smith (2018a) that investigated teacher recruitment and salary, the average reported minimum annual salary needed for respondents to consider teaching at the rural sample district was $47,606.60. This desired salary exceeded the average beginning teacher salary offered by South Carolina public school districts at the time of the study, which was $33,057.00. The difference between the desired and actual salary was $14,549.60, which represents a 36.07% gap. This study suggested salary levels must be increased to attract and retain teachers in rural public school districts like those in South Carolina. In a study by Allegretto et al. (2018), the researchers compared the weekly earnings of teachers with the weekly earnings of comparable occupations and found that teachers earned less than the other occupations that required similar levels of preparation in the study. Though educators may earn less than those in other blue-collar occupations, the role of salary was not found to be significant in isolation. Meaning, other factors in conjunction with lower salaries have been reported as factors of teacher shortages rather than a lower salary alone.

In a study by Milanowski (2003) where he analyzed the role of salary level in motivating undergraduate students with knowledge in science, math or technology to

consider a career in education, he found that higher starting salaries positively influenced students to consider teaching but only when combined with other factors. He found that to attract this sample group, "a beginning salary increase of about 25% would be needed to attract about 20% of the respondents" (p. 16) and an "annual starting salary 45% above the local average would attract 48% of the sophomore students and 37% of the juniors" (p. 11). A significant minority from this sample group is not likely to be attracted to teaching even with very large increases to entry pay. Salary was only one factor influencing the students' final decision. Strong attachment to another career choice, being responsible for others, dealing with children, standing in front of a class, taking work home, perceived intellectual monotony and lack of up-to-date equipment were all factors that deterred this group from education. Attracting students who are not committed to teaching may have a negative impact on retention. Although they may enter teaching, it is likely that they will not be retained if they did not have an initial commitment to teaching (Chapman, 1983). Guarino et al., (2006) studied the effects of higher salaries for teachers. They looked at teacher mobility and found that providing a higher salary did lower the probability of the teacher leaving the school, but only for the first few years of teaching. The effect of retaining teachers through a higher salary falls as the teacher gains teaching experience. Despite the frequent use of offering financial incentives to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools, research does not support these strategies as they show little, if any, effectiveness in recruiting people that otherwise would not consider a career in teaching or retaining teachers that begin a career in teaching (Liu et al., 2004; Lowe 2006; Maranto & Shuls, 2012).

Signing Bonus

  Financial incentives related to salary have been used to encourage teachers to stay at least five years in some school districts. This strategy has not been found to be a reliable way to retain teachers. In some cases, teachers do not stay long enough to receive the full bonus. To attract teachers with salary bonuses, the bonus must be large enough to make a difference (Liu et al., 2004; Winter & Melloy, 2005). In a study by Liu et al. (2004), a school district in Massachusetts offered new teachers a signing bonus of $20,000. Although $20,000 seems like a large sum of money, policymakers understood that they could not give this amount out in the first year or teachers could potentially take advantage of the bonus money and leave after one year. Instead, the signing bonus was paid out in installments over four years. The first year, teachers were given an $8000 bonus. Over the next three years, they were provided $4000 per year for each year they continued to teach in the district. Liu et al. (2004) noted the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program had little impact on attracting new teachers. A $4000 bonus spread over the course of a year was not a substantial financial increase; therefore, participants in the study did not feel as if the $4000 bonus influenced their decision in any way. In fact, only five of the thirteen participants in the study continued teaching in the district long enough to receive all the bonus money. Though the study was about general teacher retention rather than rural teacher retention and included a small sample size, the implications are relevant. In a study by Winter and Melloy (2005), researchers found a 10% signing bonus did not increase the attractiveness of teaching vacancies in schools. Regardless of experience, a 10% signing bonus was not enough to attract potential employees to the teaching vacancy, regardless of the school's classification. Winter and Melloy (2005)

suggested it was possible that signing bonuses would render better results if the bonus amount was much higher, such as a 25% increase; however, this would be hard to test empirically because it would be very expensive. Similar incentives were implemented in California (Steele et al., 2009). Again, those receiving the incentives were no more likely to remain in the school district than those who did not receive the incentives. Providing substantially higher salaries to all teachers is not feasible and in public schools, it is dependent on funding from the state.

Loan Forgiveness

Teacher loan forgiveness programs are generally offered in both rural and non-rural school districts. These incentives alone are not considered effective in retaining teachers in rural schools specifically. They may be effective in attracting people to the field of education in general; however, there are not many empirical studies that measure the effectiveness of such programs in regards to retaining teachers. There are federal loan forgiveness programs, such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness for public servants, to include teachers.

In addition, there are state loan forgiveness programs for teachers that vary by state. Loan forgiveness incentives such as the State Teacher Education Program (STEP) program in Arkansas that forgives $3000 per year up to three years have not shown success at retaining teachers. The monies are insufficient and are unable to retain the highest quality teachers (Maranto & Shuls 2012).

District loan forgiveness in conjunction with federal and state loan forgiveness is another incentive some districts use to retain teachers. In this case, school districts assume full or partial responsibility for the payment of student loans (Lowe,

2006). District-sponsored loan forgiveness that is exclusive to teachers in rural areas may be effective in attracting teachers to rural areas.

Housing Incentives

To recruit and retain teachers that come from non-rural communities, many rural school districts provide housing incentives that will help teachers get acclimated to the communities. Housing incentives may be effective for teachers living and teaching in rural communities; however, housing incentives may not be effective for teachers that teach in rural districts and prefer not to live in the rural area but instead commute to work.

Lack of suitable housing is an issue with teacher recruitment in rural districts. *Teacherages*, which are rental properties provided to professional employees by the school district for free or a nominal rental fee, is another strategy some districts use to attract teachers. This strategy can place a major burden on districts as they are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the building (Lowe, 2006). One rural district in Hurst Texas had shortages due to a lack of suitable housing for teachers. The superintendent, Dr. James Largent, worked with an architectural company and established a non-profit organization to build apartments for teachers. The rent was between $400 and $700 a month. The rental rates covered the cost of the construction of the apartments. With this strategy, the district did not bear the burden (Lowe, 2006).

"Teacher Next Door" is a federal housing assistance program that allows certified teachers to buy houses owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at a substantial 50% discount. This incentive is for those who work in economically distressed neighborhoods, to include many rural areas. Teachers receiving

this incentive are required to live in the house for at least three years (American Teacher, 2001). Some districts are able to provide a conventional mortgage with a low-interest rate, assistance with a second mortgage with a low-interest rate, down payment assistance in the form of loan forgiveness or rent reduction (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Housing incentives are fairly new in education and need to be empirically researched further in order to determine their effectiveness.

Personal Factors

There are several personal factors that influence a teacher's career choice. Personal factors are specific to an individual and are influences by their own personal experiences and interpretations of such experiences. In this section, the research on self-efficacy, pedagogical training, commitment, and job satisfaction will be discussed.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task (Bandura, 1977). Teachers who lack self-efficacy are less likely to find satisfaction in their work. Adams and Woods (2015) studied the correlation between teacher retention and improving teacher efficacy and found them to be interrelated. Improved teacher efficacy was shown to increase teacher retention. They defined teacher efficacy as "the quality of feeling successful as a teacher" (p. 251). Many factors, such as school environment, school-community relationships, and training and preparation, can affect teacher efficacy. Schools are more likely to retain teachers if teachers feel successful and efficient. Adams and Woods (2015) found that teachers are better able to cope with stressors when they have realistic expectations for their experiences and have

clear plans to meet those expectations. Building self-efficacy helps to improve the working environment for teachers as they feel more successful in their roles.

Pre-service Pedagogical Training

The quality of pre-service preparation a teacher receives influences teacher retention. Ingersoll et al. (2012) investigated how pre-service teacher preparation affected teacher retention for math and science teachers. They looked at the type and amount of education and preparation new teachers received before they began teaching. Their study found the type of college, degree, and preparation route had little bearing on teachers' likelihood of leaving teaching after one year, and teachers who attended more selective undergraduate institutions were not significantly more or less likely to return for a second year of teaching. The teachers who entered through traditional programs were only slightly less likely to leave than those who entered through an alternative route. They found teachers who received more education regarding teaching methods and strategies, learning theory or child psychology, or materials selection were significantly less likely to depart. Practice teaching, observing other teachers and receiving feedback on their preservice teaching were significantly related to teacher retention. Overall, teachers who received more pedagogical training were more likely to be retained. Marinell and Coca (2013) studied middle school teacher retention in New York City and also found that the pre-service pedagogical training a teacher received impacted retention. Using the New York City Department of Education data and open-ended surveys, they found teachers entering the field through alternative routes were more likely to leave. Teachers participating in traditional education pathways were more likely to be retained.

Commitment

Shuls and Maranto (2014) studied teacher recruitment and found appeals to mission work may be more effective than appeals to compensation. Though this study focused on recruitment, its findings may be applied to retention. Many studies focus on teacher incentives such as higher compensation or advancement opportunities and may miss a major reason teachers select a career in education in the first place. Many teachers are committed to the mission of education, and some are committed specifically to rural education. Davis (2002) investigated teacher perceptions regarding motivations that influenced them when deciding whether to leave or remain in small rural school districts in Montana. Using a questionnaire, he surveyed 126 teachers and found that a teacher's commitment to teaching in a rural community along with support from the school administrator in the rural school district were key factors in teachers remaining in their school district. According to a study by Lauglo (1975), teacher commitment to teaching was positively correlated to persistence in teaching and retention. Teachers are able to work beyond challenges and obstacles if they are committed to their career.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has a strong positive correlation to teacher retention; teachers who are satisfied with their job and school are less likely to leave (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Parrachione et al. (2008) studied teacher retention in Missouri, using a sample of 300 randomly selected elementary school teachers and found that satisfaction at the school and with the profession increased teacher retention. Teacher job satisfaction can be increased by providing favorable salaries (Ingersoll et al., 2014), providing mentoring and support (Adams & Woods, 2015; Berry et al., 2012), as well as providing a clean and

safe place to work along with resources needed to complete the job (Futernick, 2007; Ingersoll et al., 2014). In addition, Bishay (1996) found job satisfaction increased when teachers were provided additional job responsibilities. Job satisfaction is a key factor in teacher retention (Parrachione et al., 2008).

Community Factors

Rural schools are those that are not located in metropolitan or urban areas (Sutcher et al., 2016). Rural communities are characterized by their small sizes, sparse settlements, economies relying on agricultural industries, long distances from major cities, aging population and lack of access to shopping and other resources (Sutcher et al., 2016). Small size and isolated location are the main characteristics of rural school districts. Rural districts are found in areas that are often far from popular businesses, like restaurants, shopping malls, and grocery stores, and thus face issues retaining populations that those businesses attract (Miller, 2012; Monk, 2007). The principle reason teachers leave rural areas is social, cultural and professional isolation. In relevant literature, greater distance from larger communities and family, as well as a lack of entertainment and adequate shopping, have been reported as reasons teachers left their rural positions (Miller, 2012; Collins, 1999). Geographic and social isolation work in tandem and are major obstacles in rural teacher retention. Researchers have proposed solutions such as Grow Your Own programs to rural students to become rural teachers (Dwyer, 2007). Solely depending on teachers from the rural community to serve as rural teachers will not fully address the rural teacher shortage. In addition, recruiting solely from rural areas will decrease the quality and diversity of the applicant pool (P. Hudson & S. Hudson, 2008). Researchers are proposing implementation of pre-service programs to prepare all

teachers, to include rural and non-rural teachers, for careers in rural school districts (Azano & Stewart, 2015).

Geographic Isolation

According to Dupriez et al. (2016), the recruitment and retention of rural teachers is more difficult than recruiting and retaining those in the urban and suburban areas. According to Jimerson (2005), rural communities are physically removed from large population centers and the services to support these residents. Rural teachers often live in isolation and away from family and friends (Keiser, 2011). This difference in lifestyle and environment can be difficult for teachers that are not from rural areas. Research by Reeves (2003) reported teachers cited leaving rural districts because of long distances from metropolitan areas and a lack of adequate shopping. Lack of entertainment and services (medical and shopping), distance from families, geographical isolation, and the actual distance from the larger communities (Watt, Richardson, & Wilkins, 2014) cause rural turnover.

Communities geographically isolated find it hard to attract teachers, while those located at the suburb outskirts and major towns find it harder to retain their teachers (Caulder, 2017). Young people are not found to be attracted to the rural areas; and most that are were raised in a small community, or they have chosen to be committed to it (Watt et al., 2014). Many rural teachers who leave share they only moved to rural areas because they found it appropriate to start their careers from there, but with experience, they opted for better pay and work conditions in the suburbs (Watt et al., 2014).

Researchers suggested rural districts recruit from local candidates and provide new teacher programs to overcome geographic isolation obstacles (Beesley, Atwill, Blair,

& Barley, 2010; Ulferts, 2016). Most rural teachers who enjoy rural teaching were raised close to where they teach (Lemke, 1994). However, rural communities are not producing enough teachers from their own communities and must recruit from applicant pools that are not from rural areas. According to Monk (2007), rural communities have large shares of students with special needs and limited English skills as well as lower shares of students attending college, which has a negative impact on the applicant pool in rural districts of teachers from rural communities.

Social Isolation

According to Collins (1999), teachers preferring to teach in rural districts often have grown up in rural communities and find this type of community pleasurable. However, for those teachers who are not from rural areas, the quality of life in the community can be inadequate, which can cause dissatisfaction and leads to attrition (Monk, 2007). Since rural districts are small, the school becomes the central location for cultural, social, and leisure activities for the entire community. Often times, teachers who do not understand or have a desire for the rural community are recruited. These teachers must adapt to the culture of the community that may be contrary to their upbringing in terms of lifestyle and opportunities. Rural teachers are expected to understand and live in cultures often very different than their own (Davis, 2002; Keiser, 2011) and must adjust to the culture of the community in terms of social conditions (Davis, 2002). Due to the culture of many rural communities, teachers may lose some aspect of privacy, which is unfavorable (Davis, 2002; Keiser, 2011). Often times, these teachers are not aware of the social culture, customs, and expectancies of the school and community and may not be a good match for the rural school, which leads to attrition (Lemke, 2004). Murphy and

Angelski (1996) found from their sample of teachers who were retained in rural districts that these teachers had a spouse employed in the same community and/or were satisfied with a rural lifestyle and their school administrator. Although this study was conducted outside of the United States, its findings still have major implications for rural districts. As teachers migrate from other locations, some come to enjoy the rural way of life; however, many others quickly realize they are dissatisfied with the cultural setting, which results in them leaving the rural district (Murphy & Angelski, 1996). District administrators reported difficulty retaining qualified teachers who fit in with the school and community and will stay in the job (Lemke, 2004).

Grow Your Own Strategies

Several research studies identify social isolation as a deterrent to teacher retention (Lemke, 2004; Miller, 2012; Monk, 2007). Rural teachers have a hard time adjusting to an area that lacks social amenities such as entertainment, shopping, and other social interactions in which they are accustomed (Keiser, 2011; Monk, 2007). To overcome the barriers of social isolations, many rural school districts use "Grow Your Own" strategies to recruit new teachers from within their own area (Lowe, 2006). As the name suggests, districts encourage and support people already in the community to become teachers in their own community. Dwyer (2007) suggests "Grow Your Own" programs help eliminate the turnover that comes with hiring teachers that are not familiar with the area and become discouraged when confronted with the reality of rural living. "Grow Your Own" strategies generally involve targeting middle school and high school students who show an interest in teaching, and introducing them to the teaching profession early (Lowe, 2006). These students are generally supported through future teacher clubs,

where students have experience working with younger students and are provided support and encouragement as they work to become certified teachers (Dwyer, 2007; Lowe, 2006; Monk, 2007). Several states have "Grow Your Own" programs, which increase the pool of teacher candidates in rural areas and lessen the chance for rural turnover that occurs due to social isolation.

Experiencing Rural

Some, not all, rural districts carry a negative stigma, with negative stereotypes and misconceptions being popularized (Burton & Johnson, 2010). Rural districts are known for lower salaries, serving high poverty populations, and being socially and geographically isolated (Miller, 2012). Researchers describe the difficulty non-rural teachers serving rural communities have adapting to rural settings, and report high numbers of turnover as a result. Collins (1999) suggested rural teachers with rural backgrounds and experiences may be more successful in rural districts. He argued that rural districts "must target candidates with rural backgrounds or with personal characteristics or educational experiences that predispose them to live in rural areas" (p. 2). On the surface, this recommendation seems useful, theoretically; however, the practice of recruiting solely from a rural pool of applicants would limit the number, quality, and diversity of teachers (P. Hudson & S. Hudson, 2008). Burton and Johnson (2010) asserted having a rural relationship or connection to a rural community was an important component in recruiting initiatives. Similarly, Miller (2012) reported rural districts were more successful recruiting teachers with previous exposure to or immersion in rural communities. White and Reid (2008) offered a practical and inclusive recommendation. They suggested teacher education institutions integrate place

consciousness into teacher preparation programs. Place-based pedagogy is grounded in learning a student's sense of place or the lived experiences shaped by people, cultures, and histories (Azano & Stewart, 2015). White and Reid (2008) suggested teachers having experience in rural settings was essential to fully prepare pre-service teachers for success in rural schools. Teachers without exposure to rural settings can experience a culture shock which can ultimately lead to their turnover (Keiser, 2011). Butler (2013) recommended exposing pre-service teachers to the positive and negative realities of rural life as an effective strategy. Providing meaningful pre-service experiences in rural school districts for both rural and non-rural teachers is a strategy recommended by researchers to help with teacher recruitment and retention.

Summary

Teacher retention has been found to be a concern in all types of settings (urban, suburban and rural), but of these settings, rural school districts have gotten the least attention (Monk, 2007). Research shows greater teacher retention issues in rural schools compared to inner city and suburban schools combined (Davis, 2002). Ingersoll and Rossi (1995) found small schools with less than 300 students experienced higher turnover rates than those with a student enrollment of more than 1,000 students. Many researchers deem the issue of teacher retention in rural school districts to be even more serious than teacher retention in urban school districts (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Monk, 2007).

Nearly half of all schools in the United States are rural (NCES, 2016). Though there are a few perceived advantages to teaching in rural districts, perceived disadvantages are much more prevalent. Rural school leaders face challenges to retain teachers for a variety of reasons. Many rural districts serve high-poverty and high-minority populations

(Jimerson, 2005). In addition, these districts lack funding, which further de-incentivizes teachers. Popular initiatives such as heavily recruiting rural teachers from rural areas have been proposed (Collins, 1999); however, more recent studies show a need to look at heavily recruiting both non-rural and rural teachers to serve in rural districts, with an emphasis on the importance of exposing teachers to rural communities during pre-service teaching experiences (Azono & Stewart, 2015; Butler, 2013). In order to retain these teachers, studies suggest teacher preparation institutions must provide meaningful rural experiences so teachers understand the rural communities and are comfortable with them (Miller, 2012). From a review of the literature, four major factors are found to impact rural teacher retention: a) human resources policy factors to include principal support (principal leadership style, mentoring and professional development) and working conditions (limited staff and limited resources); b) economic incentive factors to include salary, loan forgiveness, housing incentives; c) personal factors to include self-efficacy, pedagogical training, commitment, and job satisfaction and d) community factors, to include geographic isolation and social isolation. These four factors are found to be motivators of rural teacher career choices and they guide my four guiding research questions and my overarching research question: *How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?*

1. How do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

2. How do teacher participants describe the influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

3. How do teacher participants describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

4. How do teacher participants describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

There have been several studies that investigate rural teacher shortages, rural teacher recruitment, and rural teacher retention; however, much of the research has been conducted outside the United States (Collins, 1999). These studies have produced several main factors that researchers find contribute to the issues rural school leaders face regarding staffing schools. Few researchers have extended earlier studies that identified factors regarding teacher retention and attrition by investigating teacher and principal perceptions regarding these factors (Davis, 2002; Zost 2010). These studies have the goal of identifying factors that cause teachers to leave and factors that cause teachers to stay. These studies find the rural environment (Monk, 2007), teacher's commitment to teaching in a rural community (Davis, 2002), support from the school administrator in the rural school district (Tran & Smith, 2018b) and building resiliency in teachers (Zost, 2010) to have an influence on teachers' perceptions of what motivates their career choices.

Academic literature focused on teacher perceptions regarding retention in the rural setting exists, but it is infrequent. Furthermore, due to the diversity of the "rural way of life," the communities can be very different, yielding very different responses. The findings in these studies have been very different and many times even contradictory. A factor in one setting that causes teachers to stay may be a factor that causes teachers to leave in another setting, or is a factor that has no significance. Rural research based on

teacher perception of what it takes to increase retention is scarce. Factors such as isolation, weather conditions, and remoteness have consistently been identified as factors driving teachers out of rural school districts; however, these factors are difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate (Murphy & Angelski, 1996). It is known that rural teachers can be retained. There is a need for more current research in the U.S. that examines, in detail, factors that encourage rural teachers to continue employment in rural districts.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

It has been established that there is a need for more current research that examines, in detail, factors that encourage rural teachers to continue employment in rural districts. Experiences and perceptions of teachers that choose to continue to remain employed in rural school districts need to be investigated further. Knowledge of these experiences would inform school leaders of the conditions that are most successful in retaining teachers.

This study explored the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of current rural teachers in order to gather key themes and outcomes that may help foresee future trends and highlight previously unknown factors that could provide a means to better understand the issues related to rural district teacher retention. The overarching goal was to identify the conditions and experiences that motivated rural teacher retention as described by participants. Although it is understood that recruitment and retention work in tandem to ensure schools maintain a high-quality staff without shortages, for this study there was a focus specifically on teacher retention. This chapter will present the methodological components of the study to include: methodological design, research questions, researcher perspective, epistemic orientation, conceptual framework, research site selection, data collection, participant selection, trustworthiness, reliability and validity, data analysis and coding, research ethics, limitations and finally, a summary.

Methodological Design

In this section, the methodological design will be reviewed in detail. The selection of a qualitative research method will be discussed first, and then various alternative approaches will be described along with explanations for why they were ultimately not chosen. Finally, the components of a phenomenological study will be described in detail.

Qualitative Research Methodology

The research topic is teacher perceptions of experiences, factors, and conditions that motivate retention in rural school districts. The research question is: *How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?* According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research questions are open-ended and general. The purpose of this study was to provide the perceptions of the participants, as opposed to constricting the study to the perspective of the researcher. Quantitative research questions that offer potential cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell, 2012) would not answer the research question and would be inappropriate for this study. According to Creswell (2012), a qualitative approach can be used to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. With the existing gap in the literature on the experiences of teachers in rural school districts, a qualitative study would augment rural education research. I was looking to gain a better understanding of the daily life of rural teachers in high-turnover districts and thus, a qualitative research method was best suited to explore this topic. Rural teachers' perceptions of experiences regarding factors that motivate retention in a rural school district are lacking in the literature and this study helps to fill this gap.

Alternative Approaches

A variety of qualitative methods of data analysis exist. The most common qualitative designs include narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 2009). Narrative research combines the views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative (Creswell, 2009). Narrative inquiry was not considered, as the intent of this study is to understand the participants' perceptions of experiences and reduce the researcher's personal experiences. In ethnography, the objects under examination include observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life (Creswell, 2009). Ethnography was rejected, as an investigation of participants' behaviors, customs and way of life was not the primary focus of the study. According to Creswell (2009), grounded theory is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study. Grounded theory was not considered, as the purpose of this study is to understand teacher perception of experiences rather than to derive a theory from data collected from participants. A case study is a strategy where a researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, or process of one or more individuals (Creswell, 2009). Case studies are bound by a specific case or site. A case study was inappropriate, as the goal was to better understand a phenomenon rather than gain an in-depth understanding of a case. In addition, the population experiencing this phenomenon is beyond the scope of one case or site.

Phenomenological Design

Phenomenology is a study of people's conscious experience of their "everyday life and social action" (Schram, 2003, p. 71). Creswell (2009) explains that

phenomenological research identifies the essence of human experiences as described by participants. The task of the phenomenologist is to identify a phenomenon and use participant responses to open-ended questions to describe how they live the phenomenon and depict the essence or basic structure of experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenological studies require researchers to ask participants to describe how they experience a phenomenon and then seek to determine the common experiences in participant responses to describe the phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011).

Phenomenological research is based on the assumption that there are core meanings mutually understood by those who experience the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). To gain an understanding of the experiences of participants, the phenomenological interview was the primary method of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to collecting data through the use of open-ended interviews of participants with direct experience to the phenomenon, I had to reflect on my own experiences and identify my biases, preconceptions, and assumptions. Once identified, these thoughts were noted and *bracketed* or set aside in order to allow myself to fully immerse into the experiences of the actual study participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The product of this phenomenological study is a richly descriptive analysis that presents the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

My goal was to better understand the lived experiences of rural teachers as described by teachers retained in high-turnover rural districts, and therefore, phenomenology, a method used to describe lived experiences of those closest to the phenomena being investigated, was the best method to answer the research question (Creswell, 2009). This phenomenological study included an open-ended interview

protocol with a population of participants who were able to provide information that was able to ultimately answer the research questions.

Research Questions

To understand teacher retention in the rural setting, a qualitative research design was established. Phenomenology attempts to acquire meaning by allowing researchers to thoroughly study ordinary human experience (DeMarrais, 2004). Developed from a review of relevant literature, the overarching research question was, *how do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?* Four guiding questions were used to ensure the overarching question was answered.

1. How do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

2. How do teacher participants describe the influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

3. How do teacher participants describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

4. How do teacher participants describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

Answers to the research question and the four guiding research questions were important as the current literature has left us short. Even with the massive amount of attention given to teacher retention as well as the many initiatives to help with teacher retention, high turnover still occurs. These research questions were appropriate to better

understand a phenomenon that continues to puzzle educational leaders (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Researcher Perspective

As an African American female who is employed as a South Carolina public school administrator, I have many experiences that influence the way I interpret the world. My experiences as an African American female in the public school system are not sufficient to understand the rural teacher shortage. I am employed at the same non-rural South Carolina school district in which I attended as a child. This does not cloud my understanding that there are major concerns in neighboring rural school districts. I have worked with many educators and students from rural school districts and understand that rural and non-rural school districts in South Carolina are quite different in regards to the resources (human and fiscal) available in the areas. I am fully aware of the "Corridor of Shame," which includes many rural districts in South Carolina, and I have actually visited many of these areas. I understand that rural school districts in South Carolina have large populations of minority students. As a minority, who understands the importance of education, I am personally interested in working to improve public education in rural South Carolina in order to help provide the best opportunities for all students. Although I began this research with my own personal experiences, biases, and ideas, I was sure to pay close attention to participants and what they had to share. I was really interested in their descriptions of *their* experiences. I know individuals experience the world differently and unequally, and I also believe that there are multiple truths. Two individuals may experience a similar incident and view it differently because of their own personal experiences, personalities, and interpretation of the incident. Thus, in this study,

I was not looking for "the one correct answer," as I do not believe one exists. Truths are based on people's personal lived experiences. Interacting with a variety of people allowed me to learn other people's truths. To gain the most intimate ideas of my participants, regarding their experiences and stories, I had to work long enough with the participant to gain rapport and trust.

In my research, participants were the "knowers" and I was the "learner." Knowledge is based on an individual's personal experiences and interpretations of their experiences and realities. Only my participant knew his or her own feelings, beliefs, and interpretations of their experiences; thus, these people were the "knowers." My participants were able to create knowledge as they communicated their thoughts based on their experiences with me.

Epistemic Orientation

I approached my research from a critical ontological perspective. Our society is one where inequalities exist. Individuals in our society work to support their own. People work to ensure that they will get the best that life can offer, even if it comes at the cost of disadvantaging others. Even in institutions such as public schools, inequalities exist because our society supports such oppression. People with power create the idea that public education is a place that can "level the playing field"; however, issues with equity and access are prevalent in such institutions and create "glass ceilings." Rural districts in South Carolina have an additional challenge as they generally serve a population of students that come from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. According to Fisherman (2015), "one in four rural children live in poverty, and of the 50 U.S. counties with the highest child-poverty rates, 48 are rural" (p. 9). I believe these people are

underprivileged and overlooked due to their lower social class as well as their race, in many instances.

As a critical theorist, I am interested in how social systems and institutions work and how they oppress some groups while privileging others. It is important to advocate for disadvantaged and oppressed groups of people. In this case, students in rural South Carolina public school districts are disadvantaged by the teacher shortage and a revolving door of teachers due to low teacher retention rates in these areas. As an educator, I understand there is a correlation between poverty, minority students and lower achievement. Without equal opportunities to learn such content from qualified teachers, students in South Carolina's rural school districts continue to be disadvantaged and oppressed as a result.

I do not believe in one objective Truth, as I believe there are multiple truths. As a researcher, I think that validating assumptions and subjectivity is important while working to gain truer knowledge. Listening to and validating the experiences of the oppressed leads to a more complete understanding of the world. I know knowledge can be gained by learning other people's stories and experiences. For my study, I listened to the stories of rural teachers who continue to serve in rural school districts in South Carolina. It was important to talk to these educators and understand their stories because these experiences help inform school leaders on best practices and ways to improve retention in rural districts.

Conceptual Framework

The goal of this qualitative study design was to construct meaning from the lived experiences of teachers in rural school districts. Specifically, this study sought to describe

how teachers in rural school districts describe the conditions necessary for continued employment. Chapman's (1983) Model of the Influences on Teacher Retention aligns with current literature reviewed and informed the creation of interview questions as well as the conceptual framework. After studying teacher retention concerns, Chapman noted a lack of clear models to guide inquiry. This lack of a clear model caused research on the topic of teacher retention to be sporadic and less cumulative. Thus, he reviewed previous research and presented a general conceptual model to help guide future inquiry. Though he created this model in 1983, it is still appropriate as the themes he presented are still relevant and can be found in the current literature on the topic. Chapman's Model of the Influences on Teacher retention stems from social learning theory, which suggests "psychological functioning can be explained in terms of the interaction of personal characteristics, previous behavior (learning), and environmental determinants" (Chapman, 1984, p. 645). Chapman (1983) was guided by the work of Krumboltz (1979), who contended social learning theory can be used to discover the interaction of genetic factors, environmental conditions, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses, and performance skills that produce movement along one career path or another. Krumboltz (1979) further asserted combinations of these factors interact to produce different career decisions. Chapman (1983) applied a more specific application of Krumboltz's (1979) theory (which was general to career choices) to teaching career choices. Figure 3.1 shows Chapman's (1983) conceptual model, which includes the influences associated with teacher retention, as suggested by his review of relevant research.
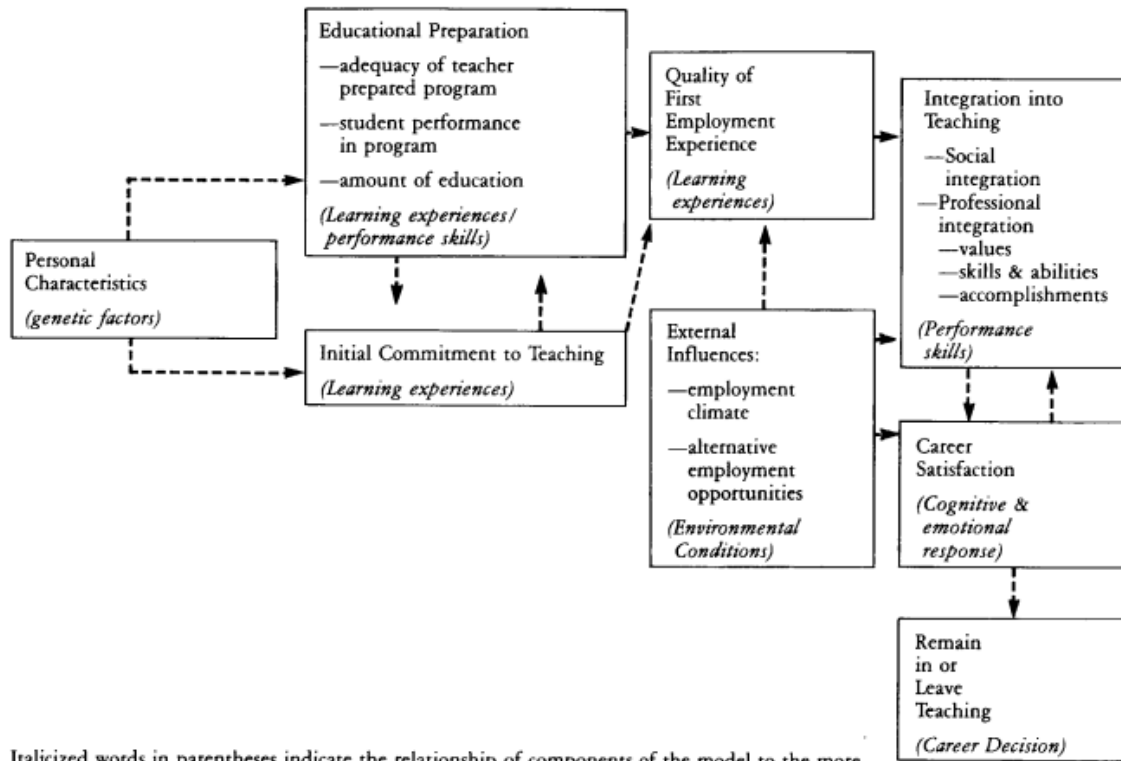
Italicized words in parentheses indicate the relationship of components of the model to the more general tenets of social learning theory.

Figure 3.1: A suggested model of the influences associated with teacher attrition. Adopted from Chapman (1983).

Chapman (1983) suggested there are four major interconnected areas that lead to or from career satisfaction: a) personal characteristics, b) educational preparation and learning experiences, c) environmental conditions and d) performance skills. He theorizes that an individual's level of career satisfaction will influence their decision to remain in or leave teaching.

Personal Characteristics

According to Chapman (1983), the three personal characteristics of the teacher that influence teacher retention are sex, socio-economic status, and race. In addition, more recent literature has included personal characteristics such as age (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004; Cui-Callahan, 2012; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012) and family responsibilities (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007).

Findings from studies regarding a teacher's sex as a factor in a teacher's career choice were complex and at times inconsistent (Bloland & Selby 1980; Bolin, 2007; Lortie, 1975; Ma & MacMillan, 1999). Most studies found the sex of teachers alone to be insignificant in regards to career choices; however, the importance of the sex variable was found to be significant when in interaction with other variables such as age, marital status, self-rated career satisfaction and a teacher's years of experience. Cui-Callahan (2012) found age to influence job satisfaction and ultimately retention. Buckley et al. (2004) found age and time in service as the most important factors in determining teacher attrition. Ingersoll (2011) found that turnover rates were higher for younger teachers. Several researchers found women to have higher job satisfaction and retention (Bolin, 2007; Chapman, 1983; Ma & MacMillan, 1999); however, Lortie (1975) found single women to be the most dissatisfied with teaching, less committed and less likely to be retained.

According to Chapman (1983), a teacher's socio-economic status influences retention. Teachers from families in the lower socio-economic class are more likely found to remain in teaching. The higher a teacher's socio-economic status, the more likely the teacher is found to leave teaching. Teachers from lower socioeconomic statuses may find teaching to be a highly regarded occupation, while teachers from higher socioeconomic statuses may find the teaching occupation to be low status (Bloland & Selby, 1980).

According to Chapman (1983), a teacher's race influences retention. Black teachers were more likely to remain in teaching than white teachers. Teaching has historically provided additional opportunities for minorities and is viewed as a

respectable occupation (Falk, Falkowski, & Lyson, 1981). Race and socioeconomic

status have correlations, which are more significant than race alone. Guarino et al.

(2006) found black teachers to be more satisfied in the teaching profession. Teachers who

are racially different than their principals, their colleagues, and the students they serve

leave at a significantly higher rate than teachers who share the same race (Bridge,

Cunningham, & Forsbach, 1978).

Educational Preparation and Learning Experiences

According to Chapman (1983), the four components of teacher training and early

teacher experience that influence teacher retention are the amount of education the

teacher has earned, the teacher's initial commitment to teaching, the adequacy of the

teacher preparation programs and student teaching the teacher received and the teacher's

first employment (teaching) experience.

Chapman (1983) postulated the amount of education a teacher has earned

influences teacher retention. The research regarding the correlation between the amount

of education a teacher has and his or her career choices is at times inconsistent. Bloland

and Selby (1980) found the greater the education, the more vested a teacher becomes and

the more reluctant the teacher would be to change careers. Corwin (1965) suggested

increased levels of education can lead to conflict with administrators, less satisfaction in

the career and greater willingness to change careers. More recently, Ingersoll et al. (2012)

found that teachers who received more education, to include teaching methods, learning

theory, and materials selection, were more likely to be retained. In addition, Chapman

(1983) theorized student teaching and the adequacy of teacher preparation programs

influences retention. Student teaching is considered by many to be essential; however,

more research is needed on the characteristics and components of a quality student teaching experience. Ingersoll et al. (2012) reported that student teaching, observing others and receiving feedback was significantly related to retention. Findings related to the adequacy of student teaching and other teacher preparation programs are unclear (Collins, 1999; Davis, 2002). Ingersoll et al. (2012) found the type of college, degree and preparation route had little bearing on teacher retention. Marinell and Coca (2013) found that the type of pedagogical training teachers receive influences retention, and specifically, those who enter through a traditional pathway are more likely to be retained.

According to Chapman (1983), a teacher's initial commitment to teaching influences retention. Lauglo's (1975) study of Norwegian teachers found a significant and positive correlation between students initially committed to teaching during university training and teacher retention. Low professional commitment increases teacher attrition, while a high commitment to the mission of teaching increases retention (Davis, 2002; Shuls & Maranto, 2014). In addition to commitment, a teacher's first employment (teaching) experience will influence retention (Chapman, 1983). Researchers find a positive first teaching experience would be positively related to retention (Buckley et al., 2004; Chapman, 1983). Teachers who experience early frustration have higher job dissatisfaction and may leave the teaching field early; however, teachers who have positive first-year experiences are more likely to experience job satisfaction and be retained (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Performance Skills

A teacher's self-efficacy and performance skills are important factors that teachers consider when making decisions about their continued employment. Positive

self-efficacy has shown to have significant correlation with teacher retention (Adams & Woods, 2015). Teachers that feel successful are more likely to be retained. Chapman and Hutcheson (1982) found people who remain in education rated themselves higher on self-rated skills and abilities than those who left. Though self-ratings may not accurately depict the skills and abilities of a teacher, Chapman (1983) suggested what people believe to be true about their skills and accomplishments may be equally or more important than their actual level of skill or accomplishment when it comes to measuring their motivation to remain in a career.

Chapman (1983) identified four indicators of importance in regards to performance skills: a) salary, b) the extent to which people assign importance to selected criteria of professional success, c) the extent to which people believe they have achieved ends that are widely valued, and d) the extent to which people feel they possess selected skills and abilities.

In the early 1960s, low salary was identified as a cause of teacher attrition, primarily for men more than women since at that time a teacher's salary was below the median salary for men and above the median salary for women (Chapman, 1983; Guarino et al., 2006). Salary can be found to be a concern for people who value salary as a criterion of success (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982). Salary is still a topic of high debate in regards to teacher retention (Allegretto et al., 2018; Guarino et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2004; Winter & Melloy, 2005). The same salary may represent a different level of accomplishment to different people depending on their backgrounds, expectations and the value they place on salary.

Environmental Conditions

Teachers consider environmental conditions when making career decisions. Environmental conditions include the employment climate as well as opportunities for alternative employment. People generally search for environments and careers where they feel valued, supported, respected and successful (Harris, 2015; Johnson et al., 2012). Teachers who feel supported are more likely to be retained. Providing a reasonable class size, safe school and faculty authority make teachers feel valued, supported and respected (Ingersoll, 2003). In addition, providing mentoring and meaningful professional development leads to teachers feeling supported and successful (Adams & Woods, 2015; Cochran-Smith et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2003). "The greater a teacher's involvement in the professional aspect of his or her career and the more social ties that person has to others in the school, the more likely that teacher will remain employed" (Chapman, 1983, p. 45).

A teacher's level of social integration influences retention (Chapman, 1983). In many work organizations, having friends employed by the same organization can help to reduce job turnover. Social integration is a difficult construct to apply to teachers because teachers are largely isolated from peers. According to Lortie (1975), teaching is individualistic, which reduces the number of interaction teachers have with their peers. Recognition and approval of others is a social construct that Chapman and Hutcheson (1982) found to be significant when looking at teachers who were retained. Similar to salary, this construct depends on the value teachers place on recognition and approval of others. If teachers do not consider the recognition and approval of others as a criterion of success, then such factors would not have a strong influence on teachers' career choices.

Marital status is another social construct that was found to have significance in teacher

retention. Having a spouse who is also a teacher may increase the likelihood a person will

remain a teacher. In addition, a spouse's preference regarding a teacher staying or

leaving the profession is one of the most impactful decision makers for a teacher

(Chapman, 1983; Guarino et al., 2006).

Synthesis

Figure 3.2 synthesizes the research questions, Chapman's (1983) Theory and the

review of relevant literature.

Research Questions	Chapman's (1983) Theory	Review of Relevant Literature
How do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?	Experiences during the first year of teaching, student teaching experience, professional integration (feeling successful/accomplished)	Principal Support (Ingersoll et al., 2014), Principal Leadership Style (Goodpaster et al., 2012), Mentoring (Aragon, 2016), Professional Development (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011) and Working Conditions (Goldring et al., 2014)
How do teacher participants describe the influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?	Professional integration (salary, recognition, and rewards)	Salary (Allegretto et al., 2018), Loan Forgiveness (Maranto & Shuls, 2012), and Housing incentives (Maranto & Shuls, 2012)
How do teacher participants describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?	Gender, Race, Marital Status, Initial Commitment to Teaching, Socio-Economic status, Amount of Education	Self-Efficacy (Adams & Woods, 2015), Pre-service Pedagogical Training (Marinell & Coca, 2013), Commitment (Shuls & Maranto, 2014), and Job Satisfaction (Ingersol et al., 2014)
How do teacher participants describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?	Social Integration	Geographic and Social Isolation (Lavalley, 2018)

Figure 3.2. Synthesis of research questions, Chapman's (1983) Model and themes from a
review of relevant literature.

Career Satisfaction

Career satisfaction and career persistence have positive correlation with each other (Chapman, 1983). Both factors have positive correlation with teacher retention. When a teacher is satisfied with his or her teaching career, it is likely that the teacher will be retained (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Parrachione et al., 2008). Overall career satisfaction leads to career persistence and a willingness of teachers to work to overcome barriers that would otherwise deter them from remaining employed as a teacher. Using Chapman's framework, interview questions were created that were directly related to the research question. Chapman's (1983) model has many connections to the current literature described in Chapter Two and helped guide the interpretation of the data.

Research Site Selection

When selecting the appropriate research site, I wanted to choose a site that greatly experienced the phenomenon studied (DeMarrais, 2004). Purposeful sampling was used to select the state, South Carolina (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to identify sites that are saturated with information closely aligned to the research questions. According to Creswell (2009), purposeful sampling is when researchers select sites that will best help them understand the research problem or research question. South Carolina was selected as the research site for several reasons.

South Carolina's issues with serving rural communities were a national topic of discussion when a 58-minute documentary *Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools* was released in 2006. This documentary was a visual depiction of the gross inequalities in regards to public education that were taking place in South

Carolina (Ferillo et al., 2006). Though the case was later dismissed, South Carolina made national news when the S.C. Supreme Court ruled that the state had failed in its duty to provide what it says is a "minimally adequate" education to children in the state's poorest school districts, which were rural, in the *Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina*. Rural retention is a concern across the nation but South Carolina is a highly rural state with high levels of turnover. Thirty-two South Carolina school districts are classified as high-turnover rural school districts. Finally, I reside in South Carolina, which made the state a convenient research site.

This study was centered on high-turnover rural school districts, so the sites selected were in high-turnover rural South Carolina school districts. Selecting sites that allowed access to participants that met the qualifications was important. I worked to identify high-turnover rural districts that employed enough teachers retained for the target minimum of five years who were willing to participate. To ensure a site with information-rich data was selected, purposeful sampling was used to identify the research site.

The Rural Recruitment Initiative managed by CERRA categorizes rural schools based solely on turnover rates (an average of greater than 11% over the past five years), which is a bit of a misnomer since some of the eligible districts are in non-rural areas. The 2017 CERRA report, based on S.C. Department of Education 2013-2017 Report Cards, available for the five academic years from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017 indicated the districts in Table 3.1 as having annual teacher turnover five-year averages of greater than 11%. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the USCB partnered to define "rural schools." Formerly, towns and rural areas were classified solely based on

population size and county boundaries. Presently, NCES uses 12 distinct categories to classify locale systems as rural, fringe, distant or remote. This classification system differentiates cities, suburban areas, towns and rural areas based on their distance from an urbanized area or urban cluster. NCES can identify and differentiate the locale of schools and school districts when the actual addresses are used.

To limit the eligible sites to only high-turnover rural districts for the purpose of this study, I applied the NCES classification system to identify only South Carolina school districts with a greater than 11% five-year teacher turnover average that also were considered town remote, rural fringe, rural distant or rural remote by the NCES classification system. Using the Geocode file provided by NCES, I was able to ensure that all selected sites met the criteria detailed above.

Figure 3.3 Displays the 12 NCES categories with their descriptions. In addition, categories considered rural for the purpose of this study have been identified.

NCES category	Category Descriptor	Considered rural for this study?
City – Large	Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population of 250,000 or more.	No
City – Midsize	Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.	No
City – Small	Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 100,000.	No
Suburban – Large	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population of 250,000 or more.	No
Suburban – Midsize	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.	No
Suburban – Small	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 100,000.	No
Town – Fringe	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urbanized Area	No
Town – Distant	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than	No

	10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.	
Town – Remote	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.	Yes
Rural – Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster.	Yes
Rural – Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.	Yes
Rural – Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster	Yes

Figure 3.3: NCES locale categories with descriptors and identification of inclusion in this study.

Applying the rural delimitation identified 32 South Carolina public school districts with an 11% or greater five-year teacher turnover average located in a town remote, rural fringe, rural distant or rural remote area as classified by the NCES classification system. The school districts eliminated were Charleston, Richland One, Richland Two, Sumter and the South Carolina Public Charter District (a virtual district). The lack of a large delimitation after applying a rural restriction is of importance itself. The majority of districts with high turnover are rural school districts. Of the 37 South Carolina school districts with a five-year teacher turnover rate greater than 11%, 32 districts are rural, four are urban and one is a virtual district. Table 3.1 includes all of the districts that meet the criteria set by this study. I only used participants from these sites to ensure participants were selected from high-turnover rural districts.

Table 3.1

South Carolina Teacher Turnover Rates, By District

SC District	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	5- year Average
Allendale	23.3	23.6	20.8	24.4	24.5	23.3
Anderson 4	11.9	13.7	15.1	14.2	11.4	13.3
Bamberg 2	12.3	19.0	19.2	21.8	21.0	18.7
Barnwell 19	20.2	21.5	18.1	14.6	12.1	17.3
Barnwell 29	20.8	17.0	14.4	14.2	13.4	16.0
Barnwell 45	17.1	15.7	11.7	10.0	8.5	12.6
Beaufort	12.8	12.2	12.1	11.7	12.1	12.2
Clarendon 1	25.2	29.0	27.4	21.8	15.0	23.7
Clarendon 2	16.6	14.8	13.6	12.2	12.7	14.0
Darlington	13.4	12.7	11.0	10.3	10.2	11.5
Dillon 3	11.6	10.1	10.7	11.3	11.7	11.1
Dillon 4	12.8	9.9	11.2	11.8	14.4	12.0
Dorchester 4	14.9	12.4	10.9	11.5	12.2	12.4
Edgefield	15.7	14.1	15.6	13.4	12.5	14.3
Fairfield	20.4	19.5	19.1	14.8	14.1	17.6
Florence 2	13.6	10.1	11.5	10.2	12.4	11.6
Florence 3	19.1	18.7	16.0	13.2	12.2	15.8
Florence 4	25.5	23.4	23.9	24.0	25.2	24.4
Hampton 1	16.3	14.6	14.1	14.2	11.3	14.1
Hampton 2	30.1	33.8	33.8	30.3	28.4	31.3
Jasper	22.5	23.0	23.8	23.9	21.7	23.0
Lee	25.8	23.4	25.7	22.3	26.4	24.7

SC District	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	5- year Average
Lexington 4	16.7	15.2	13.6	12.3	11.9	13.9
Marion	17.7	14.5	16.0	12.8	12.2	14.6
Marlboro	13.9	11.4	16.9	11.9	11.5	13.1
McCormick	21.7	20.9	11.8	28.4	26.5	21.9
Newberry	12.9	12.6	12.2	10.2	9.1	11.4
Orangeburg 3	15.7	14.9	14.5	13.4	13.9	14.5
Orangeburg 4	11.4	11.8	12.4	12.5	13.0	12.2
Orangeburg 5	17.6	16.7	15.3	15.2	15.7	16.1
Saluda	14.8	15.1	14.5	14.2	10.7	13.9
Williamsburg	26.8	20.2	16.0	13.4	13.5	18.0

SOURCE: SC Department of Education, 2013-2017 Report Card

Data Collection

Qualitative research is emergent and flexible in nature (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended interview questions that were developed from the literature review and conceptual framework. Phenomenological interviews served as the primary method of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to interviews, observational notes and reflections were used to record any important happenings during the interview process.

According to Leedy and Omrod (2010), phenomenological interviews allow participants and the researcher to work together to understand the phenomenon being investigated. DeMarrais (2004) defined qualitative interviews as a unique process that involves the researcher and participant engaging in a conversation focused on ideas and questions related to the research study with a goal of gaining the first-person perspective

about an experience. When information obtained during interviews triggered additional

questions, I was able to modify data collection plans while still in the field. I engaged in

a minimum of four interactions with each participant, through interviews and follow-up

conversations. The participants were able to do most of the talking, describing everyday

experiences related to the topic studied, while I listened very carefully (Leedy & Omrod,

2010). According to Leedy and Omrod (2010), effective phenomenological interviews

can last between one and two hours. For this study, each participant was asked to

participate in one interview, scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes with an

opportunity for follow-up. Interviews took place at a mutually determined location.

Interviews were audio recorded to assist with transcription and analysis (Creswell,

2005). A flexible interview protocol was used for the study to ensure all participants had

a standardized experience. The interview protocol is included as an appendix. Prior to

the interview, I shared with participants via email the request to participate in the study

(Appendix A), the informed consent form (Appendix B), the demographic questionnaire

(Appendix C) and the interview protocol (Appendix D). After the interviews, I followed

up with each participant a minimum of four times to gain a better understanding of

participant backgrounds and experiences. During the study, the May 1, 2019, SC

Teacher Rally lead by SC for ED occurred; and therefore, I followed up with each

participant regarding their participation and thoughts regarding the rally and its relation to

retention. Throughout multiple interactions during this study, I was able to gain a deep

understanding of each participant as a person, their backgrounds, experiences as rural

teachers and motivators for their retention.

Participant Selection

For the purpose of this study, I used purposeful, criterion and snowball sampling to select eleven participants employed as teachers in a targeted rural school district in South Carolina (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015). Creswell (2012) describes purposeful sampling as researchers intentionally selecting information-rich individuals to understand the central phenomenon. According to Patton (2015), criterion sampling uses a predetermined criterion set by the researcher to choose participants with the most knowledge about the topic under investigation. Using both purposeful and criterion sampling, I identified initial participants that matched the criteria and then used snowball sampling to identify additional participants. Snowball sampling took place after the study began. I asked participants to refer other individuals who met the criteria to participate (Creswell, 2012). Specific criteria were created for target research participants to be able to participate in this study. These criteria were: 1) current South Carolina rural public school teacher, 2) identify as an individual who has lived in a non-rural area, 3) teach in a high-turnover rural district as defined by South Carolina's Rural Recruitment Initiative's definition of high turnover, which is an average of greater than 11% turnover over the past five years as reported on S.C. Department of Education Report Cards, 4) taught at the current high-turnover district for a minimum of five years. The criterion of a minimum of five years was selected using findings from a study conducted in 2003 that found a high number of teachers leave the field within the first five years of teaching. Ingersoll (2003), similar to other estimates, found that 40 to 50% of teachers leave the field within the first five years of teaching. Specifically, he finds that 33% of teachers leave the teaching occupation altogether in their first three years and

46% leave in the first five years. I worked hard to select a variety of participants regarding hometown, age, gender, race, level of education, years of experience and district employed. This enabled me to identify common patterns that emerged across a diverse population.

Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

Trustworthiness indicates the level of truth a researcher provides readers through providing transparency and taking measures to establish credibility. Qualitative reliability indicates the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), qualitative validity strengthens the trustworthiness of a study and is established when the researcher uses certain procedures to check for accuracy. Validity is based on determining whether findings are accurate according to the researcher, participants, and readers of the study.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is interpretative research. As the researcher, I had to make interpretations about what I saw, heard and understood (Creswell, 2009). In my study, I was the research instrument, so it was important for me to be clear about biases and positionality to ensure trustworthiness. Like any individual, I brought my own background, history, context, biases and prior understanding, and I worked to share this information with the reader. Readers need to know my identity as a researcher, my investment in the topic as well as my intentions for the study (Yazan, 2015).

To ensure trustworthiness, I included a section on researcher perspective and a section on epistemic orientation in this chapter, which included my background, positionality, and biases to be transparent and help readers develop a more thorough

picture of the findings. I used member checking, a process where I solicited and received feedback from participants interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I sent transcripts of the interviews to the participants and asked for feedback regarding inconsistencies discovered in transcribed interviews. Once I made meaning of the data and categorized the data into themes, I shared the themes and descriptions with participants to allow them an opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy and credibility of findings.

Validity

To ensure validity, I used participants' accounts verbatim and used the process of member checking to ensure I was accurately describing participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009; Leedy & Omrod, 2010). I used *in vivo* coding to keep data as close to original as possible (Saldaña, 2016). I kept detailed field notes, which included my "thoughts, musings, speculations and hunches" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 200). I provided a rich, thick description with adequate details and enough insight so that readers could understand the phenomenon investigated deep enough to draw conclusions that could be applied to other settings (Creswell, 2009).

Reliability

To ensure reliability, I checked transcripts to ensure they were free from obvious mistakes (Creswell, 2009). I used an audit trail that contained notes regarding decisions about methods and procedures, steps taken during participant contacts and interviews with participants as well as lists of themes identified during the data analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I participated in the peer review process, which involved sharing codes, analyses, and findings with a peer to gain additional views of the interpretations drawn from the data (Creswell, 2009; Leedy & Omrod, 2010). Finally, I

used reflexivity, a process where I reflected on my impact on the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by keeping a detailed reflexive journal where regular entries were made containing personal reflections regarding assumptions, biases and any relationship to the study that may have skewed my interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis and Coding

The goal of data analysis in this phenomenological study was to search for common themes and patterns across participant descriptions (Leedy and Omrod, 2010). Thematic analysis was then used to identify patterns and four major themes (Glesne, 2011). This process involved making sense out of data by generating categories of information, or coding (Creswell, 2009). Data analysis was an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data collected, asking analytical questions and writing notes (Creswell, 2009).

I recruited participants by reaching out to teachers and school leaders in rural school districts. This process was slow, as many school leaders were difficult to reach and many teachers who fit the criteria were unwilling to participate. A few teachers who were willing to participate did not meet the criteria, as they did not currently teach in a rural school district. Many of these teachers were originally from rural districts in South Carolina; however, and for this reason they were interested in my study and wished to help. These teachers had connections and were willing to serve as gatekeepers, helping to recruit other teachers that did fit the criteria. Once three teachers were selected that met the criteria, the recruitment of additional participants began to move quicker.

A snowball sampling question was a part of the interview protocol and several additional participants were suggested by original participants. I was careful not to

overly rely on snowball sampling from participants, as many times, participants suggested participant candidates from their same school district. In order to gain participants from a wider variety of districts, I began emailing and calling superintendents and principals from districts that met the criteria. This method proved successful as an additional four districts were represented as a result of school leaders pointing me in the direction of potential participant candidates. I reached out to suggested participant candidates via email and phone calls and invited them to participate. I worked to gain twelve original participants from six different school districts. One participant no longer wanted to participate due to a perceived time constraint. I continued with the other eleven participants.

I used the interview protocol (Appendix D) to conduct audio-recorded interviews with selected participants. The interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Upon completion of interviews, I hired a trained third party to confidentially transcribe the interviews. I listened to the audiotapes and reviewed the transcriptions provided by the third party and included observational notes and details, when necessary. I employed the member-checking strategy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), contacting participants via email to provide opportunities for them to read transcriptions related to their individual interview and provide any clarification to ensure data presented were accurate.

Next, I began coding, a long and tedious process of organizing, categorizing and labeling data into chunks or segments (Creswell, 2009), which helped bring meaning to the data. I used NVIVO, an electronic coding software to help keep data organized. This program helped me to deconstruct the data in order to reconstruct it back in ways that gave meaning to the study. I carefully read all the raw data, such as transcriptions, text

messages, documents, emails, and field notes, to gain a general understanding, taking

notes throughout this process. I used the two-cycle coding method described by Saldaña

(2016). During the first cycle, I used descriptive coding, describing and summarizing data

in short phrases (Saldaña, 2016). Due to the nature of this study, an emphasis on *in vivo*

coding was employed. *In vivo* coding uses words or short phrases from participants' own

language in the data record (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The use of *in vivo*

coding emphasized the participants' voices and pointed to patterns in the data. In this first

cycle of coding, I created 210 original codes. These codes were words, phrases or direct

quotes from participants as found in transcripts or notes from emails, phone calls or text

messages.

Next, I engaged in the second cycle, pattern coding, a process where chunky

categories were identified based on meaningful patterns found in the data (Saldaña,

2016). Saldaña (2016) defined "patterns" as repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences

of action/data that appear more than twice. The short phrases from the first cycle of

coding were pulled together using pattern coding. I reviewed the full coded lists and

collapsed codes that had similar meanings, were synonymous codes or repetitive codes.

For example, the codes "small town" and "small city" were combined, and "Admin

support" and "support from administrators" were combined. After the first round of

collapsing codes, I was left with 140 metacodes. Codes were recoded and reorganized as

I continued to reflect on the data. Codes that were not directly related to the research

question were eliminated. For example, demographic repetitions like "years old" were

removed. I continued to review metacodes and quotes, and recoded data as a result of

analysis and interpretation. At this point in my analysis, I had 48 metacodes. I then

participated in the peer-review process, where a peer was provided data to review and code. We cross-checked our codes and categories and had a deep discussion about themes that emerged. After the peer-review process, I revisited codes and categories, making changes when necessary (Creswell, 2009).

Focused and Pattern Coding was used to come up with 17 chunky codes, which helped bring clarity to the data (Saldaña, 2016). After this round of coding, I followed up with participants and provided another opportunity for member checking, additional follow-up questions and clarifying statements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were able to clarify their experiences and provide additional information. Lastly, I engaged in thematic analysis to identify four major themes across the categorized data (Glesne, 2011). These four major themes brought meaning to the data and were described and connected back to the research questions.

Research Ethics

To ensure research ethics, I used a variety of measures to ensure the integrity of the study as well as the protection of study participants' identities. There is limited, if any, physiological or physical risk to study participants; however, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of study participants. Pseudonyms were also assigned to counties, school districts, schools, and school leaders to provide privacy and confidentiality. Additional identifiers that could connect interview responses to participants or their locations were withheld. All research data to include notes, audiotapes, transcriptions, and consent forms were stored on a password-protected device.

Many ethical standards were met through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. I submitted a full IRB application to the review board at the University of South Carolina for approval of the full study. Through the IRB application, concerns regarding the risks to participants, as well as other ethical considerations, were addressed. My IRB Letter of Approval is displayed as Appendix E.

Limitations

This phenomenological study adds to the gap in the literature regarding the retention of rural teachers with a non-rural background; however, there are a few limitations as there are with all studies. While this study is important, as it helps educational researchers, school leaders and policymakers better understand teacher retention and experiences of rural teachers, the findings of this study are not meant to be generalizable to all teachers, all rural teachers, all schools or all states. The findings are only applicable to the participants studied at the time they were studied; however, findings still inform policymakers and educational leaders. Access is a limitation as the rural districts were located far from where I live, and I had to travel to participants to conduct the study. By using interviews as a method of data collection, my presence may have biased responses, especially since I am a school administrator in the state of South Carolina. In addition, not all people are equally articulate and perceptive (Creswell, 2009). Finally, this study is limited to retained teacher perceptions and does not account for perceptions of school administrators, students, parents or teachers who have not been retained.

Summary

Chapter Three described how a phenomenological, qualitative study method was selected. Phenomenological studies allow researchers to use an inquiry method, which is needed to explore and understand the phenomenon, rural teacher retention (Creswell, 2005). Phenomenology was most appropriate for this study because it could best answer the research question: *How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?* Purposeful and criterion sampling were used to select eleven participants that met the established criteria, current South Carolina rural school teachers that have taught in the rural district for a minimum of five years.

Chapter Three described how data was collected through semi-structured, open-ended interviews with an unstructured follow up for additional detail to the questions in the initial interview and how the data will be analyzed and coded. Procedures for trustworthiness, reliability, and validity were described. Measures to ensure research ethics were also included in this chapter. This study adds to a gap in the literature, and the information found could be used by policymakers and educational leaders to improve retention and education in South Carolina rural school districts.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter One identified the purpose of the study: to understand the lived experiences that motivate non-rural teachers to continue employment as rural school teachers in high-turnover rural districts. Chapter Two discussed an overview of the literature on teacher retention, explaining additional factors specifically related to rural school districts, as well as illustrating the gaps within the literature. Chapter Three provided a description of the methodological components of this study, not limited to the methodological design, researcher perspective and epistemic orientation, data collection, and analysis as well as trustworthiness, validity and reliability. Also in Chapter Three, Chapman's (1983) Model of the Influences on Teacher Retention was discussed as the conceptual framework that informs this study and supports the importance of the study and its influences on teacher retention. Using these foundations, the following chapter will reveal the study's results and findings. This chapter is comprised of the following sections: 1) description of study site 2) description of the six districts represented, 3) a description of the 11 teachers interviewed, 4) the results, 5) the four themes and subsidiary themes, 6) my interpretation of the study's results, and 7) a brief summary.

The findings presented in this chapter were developed thematically from the interviews of 11 teachers retained in high-turnover rural districts in South Carolina. In compliance with the Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix E), the participants are granted strict anonymity. Therefore, the participants' identities are protected not only

using pseudonyms for their names, but also pseudonyms for schools and school districts. The pool is relatively small, and by divulging a teacher's gender, race and specific responsibilities, for example, it would in some cases identify him or her.

Description of Study Sites

As provided in Chapter Three, South Carolina was selected using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) as well as convenience sampling. The state has a high number of rural districts with high rural turnover. Of the 37 high turnover districts in South Carolina, 32 were considered rural.

After applying the rural delimitation, 32 South Carolina public school districts with an 11% or greater five-year teacher turnover average located in a town remote, rural fringe, rural distant or rural remote area as classified by the NCES classification system were identified. Only four school districts were eliminated. The lack of a large delimitation after applying a rural restriction is of importance itself. Of the 37 South Carolina school districts with a five-year teacher turnover rate greater than 11%, 32 districts are rural, four are urban and one is a virtual district. The majority of school districts in the state of South Carolina are rural school districts with high turnover. For this reason, South Carolina was an appropriate state to study rural teacher retention.

Wellby

This small district is located in a town with a total area of 3.3 square miles. This town has a population of about 3000 people. In this town, the racial makeup is about 80% African-American, 18% white and about 2% from other races. The median income for a family in this town is about $21,000. There is high poverty, with about 41% of the population below the poverty line. This town is located about 62 miles from the nearest

major city. It is home to one small university and one satellite campus of a technical college. This small district has two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, one alternative school, a program for infants and toddlers and an adult education program. It serves approximately 1,200 students. This district spends $15,579 per pupil, graduates 74.3% of high school students on time and serves a population where 92.8% of the district's students live in poverty. According to the 2017 S.C. Department of Education Report Card, this district had a five-year turnover rate of 23.3%. This district was declared a state of emergency by State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman and was taken over by the Department of Education.

Newbrook

This very small district is located in a town with a total area of 3.8 square miles. This town has a population of about 3000 people. In this town, the racial makeup is about 86% African-American, 13% white and about 1% from other races. The median income for a family in this town is about $22,000. There is high poverty, with about 35% of the population below the poverty line. This town is located about 50 miles from the nearest major city. It is home to one small college, one college-preparatory school, and one technical college. This very small district has one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. It serves approximately 682 students. This district spends $14,799 per pupil, graduates 83.7% of high school students on time and serves a population where 91.9% of the district's students live in poverty. According to the 2017 S.C. Department of Education Report Card, this district had a five- year turnover rate of 18.7%.

Eastshade

This small district is located in a town with a total area of 2.7 square miles. This town has a population of about 2350 people. In this town, the racial makeup is about 51% African-American, 47% white and about 2% from other races. The median income for a family in this town is about $40,000. There is moderate poverty, with about 19% of the population below the poverty line. This town is located about 53 miles from the nearest major city. There are several state and private colleges and universities within an hour's drive. This district boasts you can "enjoy the educational benefits without living in the hustle and bustle of the city." This small district has three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. It serves approximately 2,400 students. This district spends $8,555 per pupil, graduates 88.7% of high school students on time and serves a population where 50.5% of the district's students live in poverty. According to the 2017 S.C. Department of Education Report Card, this district had a five-year turnover rate of 12.4%.

Lochcrest

This small district is located in a town with a total area of 3.2 square miles. This town has a population of about 3200 people. In this town, the racial makeup is about 59% African-American, 40% white and about 1% from other races. The median income for a family in this town is about $30,000. There is high poverty, with about 24% of the population below the poverty line. This town boasts you can "enjoy the beauty of antebellum homes and great recreational facilities." This town is located about 30 miles from the nearest major city. This small district has five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. It serves approximately 2600 students. This district spends

$16,548 per pupil, graduates 85.8% of high school students on time and serves a population where 85.7% of the district's students live in poverty. According to the 2017 S.C. Department of Education Report Card, this district had a five-year turnover rate of 17.6%.

Cowfield

This very small district is located in a town with a total area of 3.8 square miles. This town has a population of about 2500 people. In this town, the racial makeup is about 64% African-American, 33% white and about 3% from other races. The median income for a family in this town is about $34,000. There is high poverty, with about 27% of the population below the poverty line. This town boasts you can enjoy the railroads, nature and a slow life pace. This town is located about 38 miles from the nearest major city. There are several state and private colleges and universities within an hour's drive. This very small district has one pre-k center, one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. It serves approximately 743 students. This district spends $11,287 per pupil, graduates 90.6% of high school students on time and serves a population where 84.2% of the district's students live in poverty. According to the 2017 S.C. Department of Education Report Card, this district had a five-year turnover rate of 21.9%.

Highgold

This medium-sized district is located in a town with a total area of 8.3 square miles. This town has a population of about 13,000 people. In this town, the racial makeup is about 75% African-American, 19% white and about 6% from other races. The median income for a family in this town is about $37,000. There is high poverty, with about 25% of the population below the poverty line. This town is home to two historically black

colleges and universities (HBCUs). This town is located about 37 miles from the nearest major city. This medium-sized district has eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and four high schools. It serves approximately 6,600 students. This district spends $12,202 per pupil, graduates 84.6% of high school students on time and serves a population where 85.8% of the district's students live in poverty. According to the 2017 S.C. Department of Education Report Card, this district had a five-year turnover rate of 16.1%.

Description of Participants

In this section, I describe the 11 specific interview participants in this study. As described in Chapter Three, participants were selected using both criterion sampling (Patton, 2015) and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007). Both the information provided by the teacher themselves during the interview and my personal observations during the interview are presented. Interviews took place at a variety of places. One took place in the teacher's classroom, three took place at public locations near the participants' school districts, and the rest occurred in public places in the Village of Sandhills, a large strip mall and residential area in Columbia, South Carolina. Together, the participant and researcher selected comfortable, private and quiet locations. The day and time of interviews were scheduled based on the preference and availability of the interviewee; therefore, the order of the interviews was random depending on how difficult the interview was to schedule.

Specifically, I interviewed 11 teachers from six different school districts. There were two districts where more than one teacher was interviewed. There were a few reasons for these overlaps. All of them stem from the participant selection methods

described in Chapter Three. One district had a high number of retained teachers that lived in Columbia, South Carolina. As I met these teachers and used snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007), additional teachers from the same district were suggested by their colleagues as teachers meeting the criteria. In an effort to recruit participants from a wider variety of districts, I emailed and called superintendents and principals from districts that met the criteria. Four additional districts were represented as a result of school leaders pointing me in the direction of potential participant candidates.

The following section is an individualized description of the 11 participants. These descriptions were developed from the interviews, as well as my field notes and analytic memos. Using both reported data, such as self-reported salary and the number of years of experience a teacher had in the field and in their current school district, as well as my own observations, such as the description of the teachers' manner or gestures used, are all used to develop a participant description. Table 4.1 provides as much descriptive data as possible without jeopardizing the anonymity of the participants.

Table 4.1
Description of the Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Race	Gender	District	Years of Experience	Years in Current District	Self-Reported Average Salary
Ashley	AA	F	Lochcrest	10	7	48,000
Bob	White	M	Newbrook	12	5	49,000
Heather	AA	F	Lochcrest	11	11	50,000
John	White	M	Cowfield	18	5	40,000
Kashvi	Indian	F	Wellby	21	9	52,000
Linda	AA	F	Lochcrest	21	4	62,000
Morgan	AA	F	Highgold	13	11	48,000
Nicole	AA	F	Eastshade	8	7	50,000
Quanaya	AA	F	Lochcrest	8	5	50,000
Rebecca	White	F	Highgold	4	4	30,000
Veronica	AA	F	Lochcrest	12	12	52,000

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide a breakdown of participants by race and by gender to provide a clearer picture of participant perspective. Seven of the eleven participants were black. Three participants were white. One participant was Indian. Two participants were male and nine were female.
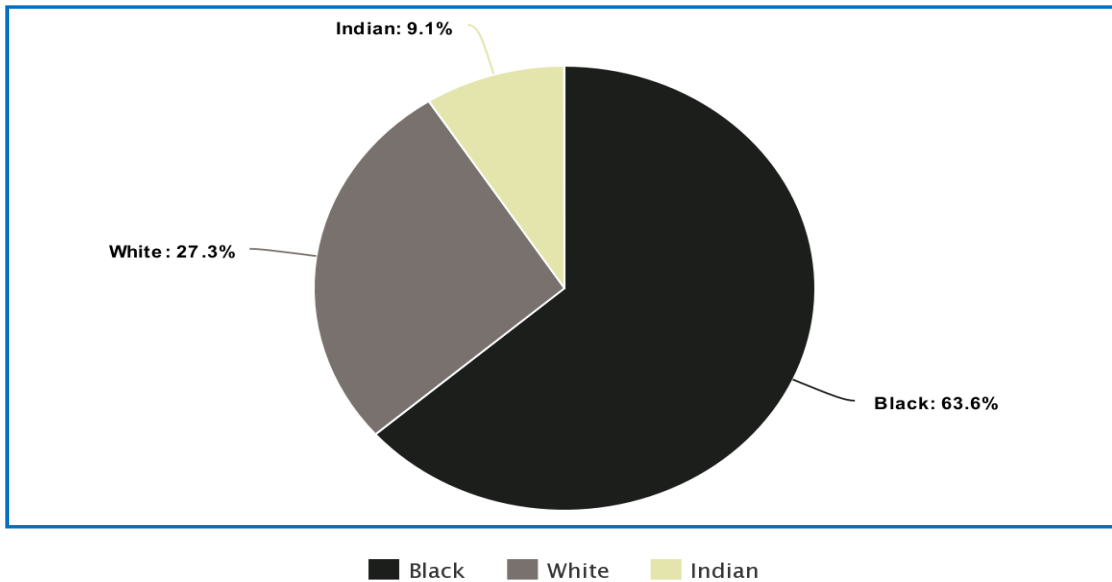

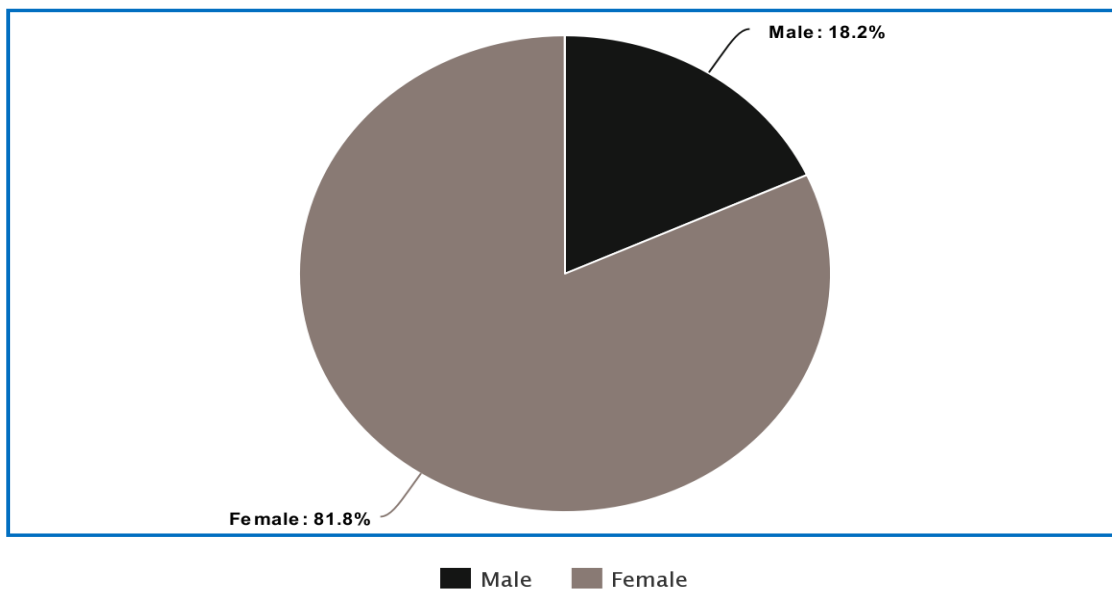*Figure 4.1:* Percentages of participants by race.

Figure 4.2: Percentages of participants by gender.

Ashley is a 39-year-old African-American female. She was born in Branchville, a rural area in SC, but spent over ten years of her life in Columbia, a non-rural area in SC where she currently resides. Though she was born in a rural area, due to her experiences in life outside of rural areas, she considers herself a non-rural teacher. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work from South Carolina State University, a Master of Social Work (MSW) from University of South Carolina, and a master's in teaching from Cambridge College. In addition, she is certified in administration with an education specialist degree in educational administration she earned from Cambridge College. She has ten years of experience as an educator between three different school districts; however, she has worked in Lochcrest, a rural district, for seven years. Her commute from her home to her school in Lochcrest is 45 minutes. Her self-reported average salary is about $48,000. She teaches first grade and has an average of 15 to 20 students in her class. She admired many of her teachers early in her schooling and always wanted to have a career in teaching. She enjoys working with children and serving as a positive role model for others. While being interviewed she spoke boldly about her experiences, both positive and negative, and was very professional in her demeanor.

Bob is a 50-year-old white male from Cleveland, Ohio, a large, non-rural city. He is a single man with no children. His personality was unique and intriguing. When he is not teaching, he often drives trucks as a second career; a job he reports allows him to make three times as much money as teaching. Bob received his bachelor's degree in geology from Cleveland State University and earned a teaching certificate after staying an extra year for certification. He currently works in Newbrook District and teaches physics and chemistry to high school students. He lives in a rural area, eight miles from

the school where he's currently employed. He has 20 years of experience in education with five years being in his third and current district. His average self-reported salary is $49,000, and he has an average of eight students per class each year, which he loves. Bob always found school to be exciting and fun, which is why he decided to be a teacher. His experience in college only solidified his wishes to be a teacher. Bob was very apprehensive when sharing information, often prefacing his statements with, "since this is confidential, I will tell you." He was intelligent and very interested in the state of education; however, he was not confident in himself. He went into great detail about his experiences, often getting off-topic, but was easily redirected.

Heather is a 42-year-old black female. She graduated from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville with a bachelor's in English literature. She also earned a master's degree in education from Southern Wesleyan. She is currently working on a second Master of Education with a reading specialist certification from Liberty University. She is originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, a large, non-rural city. Currently, she teaches 10th and 12th grade ELA at Lochcrest High School. She lives in a non-rural city, 30 minutes from her current job. She has 11 years of experience in education with all of her years being in her current district. She makes a self-reported average of $50,000 each year and has an average of 22 students in her classroom. She speaks with authority and confidence, sharing that she originally wanted to be a lawyer, but had a wonderful elementary school teacher who was influential for her. She always loved English and decided that becoming an English teacher would be a great idea. She was in the military for seven years and married a military man. Fort Jackson is what brought her to South Carolina. Once she resigned from the military, she completed

PACE, an alternative certification program, and became a teacher. Lochcrest hired her at a teacher recruitment fair.

John is a 46-year-old white male who graduated from Sheffield University with a bachelor's degree in recreation management. He is athletic and has a thick British accent. He is originally from Sheffield, a large, non-rural city in England. He shared that he had no desire to be a teacher, but just ended up in the field. Having graduated in England and after a year of unemployment, he decided to enroll in a teaching certification course. After completing the course and gaining certification to teach P.E., he was given the opportunity to move to the U.S. and specifically South Carolina on a soccer scholarship at Lander University. The only master's degree offered at Lander was education, so he studied education and earned a master's degree in elementary education. Upon graduation with a certification to teach P.E. and a master's degree in elementary education, he decided to teach. After graduating, he worked in a small South Carolina rural district. He met his ex-wife, another teacher in SC rural district, and they had a son. As a P.E. teacher, he stayed in the area and taught in rural districts in South Carolina close to his son. He currently works in Cowfield School District, teaching elementary P.E. He lives 30 miles from where he's employed. He has 18 years of experience with five years being at his third and current district. His average self-reported salary per year is $40,000. His average number of students in his classroom is 16.

Kashvi is a 48-year-old Indian female, originally from Mumbai India, a large, diverse city, which she compared to an "Indian New York." She is an upbeat and talkative person with a thick Indian accent. She often got off topic when discussing topics she was passionate about but was able to be redirected. She provided in-depth

answers to the questions she was asked. Kashvi received a dual bachelor's degree in mathematics and education from Mumbai University in India. She also received a master's degree in math in India. She has always loved children and had a passion for teaching, which is a well-respected career in India. Currently, she teaches math in Wellby as a high school teacher. She has a one-hour commute to work each day, which she doesn't mind. She has 21 years of experience with nine years being in her fourth and current district. Her self-reported average salary is $52,000, which she describes as "much better here in America than it was in India." In India, she taught an average of 250-300 students per year (60 in each class). In Wellby, she teaches an average of 150-180 students per year (23-25 in each class).

Linda is a bubbly, 43-year-old African-American female. She graduated from Columbia College in South Carolina. She earned a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and received master's degrees in curriculum and instruction from Lesley University, as well as administration and supervision from Southern Wesleyan University. She is originally from Hopkins, South Carolina, where she attended schools in a non-rural district. She spent most of her time in Columbia, a non-rural city. She shared that she always wanted to be a teacher and always loved working with children. She currently serves as a reading coach, which is the position that attracted her to her current school district, Lochcrest. A reading coach is still considered a teacher, with the same salary; however, the position is different in that reading coaches work more with other teachers in developing their strategies to ensure students are taught reading effectively. Her average self-reported salary is $62,000. Linda commutes 45 minutes to work each day. She has 21 years of experience with four years of being in her current

district. Linda has worked in three different school districts and describes herself as a person who is always trying to grow as a professional.

Morgan is a 38-year-old African-American female who graduated from South Carolina State University with a bachelor's degree in education and received her master's degree in technology in education from Lesley University. She is from Highgold, the rural area in which she currently resides and works (Highgold County School District). However, she has also lived in non-rural areas through military connections, to include Japan, for about three years. She considers herself to be a non-rural teacher due to her experiences living in different areas of the world. She is the 4th-grade social studies and science teacher and she lives about 10 minutes away from the school in which she is currently employed. She has 13 years of experience in education with about 11 of those years being in her current district. Her average self-reported salary is about $48,000 per year, and she generally has 24 students in her classroom. Business was her first career aspiration as she comes from a family of entrepreneurs; however, in 12th grade she participated in Teacher Cadet, a South Carolina Grow Your Own program, and that experience forever changed her mind about being an educator. From that point on she wanted a career in teaching.

Nicole is a personable 39-year-old black female from Branchville, South Carolina, a rural town. Though she is originally from a small town, she considers herself a non-rural teacher due to many experiences outside of rural areas. She graduated from South Carolina State University with a bachelor's degree in education. She began as a nursing student at a technical college, but the pace of nursing was too fast for her. So she changed careers and worked in upper management at McDonald's for seven years. After

getting in a bad car accident, which left her with a broken hip and slowed her down, she decided it was time for another shift in her life. She always wanted to be a teacher and felt she was ready at this point in her life, so she attended South Carolina State University and majored in education. She earned a teaching certificate and began teaching. She currently teaches third grade in Eastshade School District. She lives 15 miles from her current school, which is a 20-minute commute. She has eight years of experience in education with seven being in her current district. Her first year teaching was at a different rural South Carolina district, which was too far of a commute. Her average self-reported salary is roughly $50,000 a year, with an average of 28 students in her classroom.

Quanaya is a 32-year-old African-American female, who graduated from Furman University in South Carolina and earned a bachelor's degree in history. She attended the University of South Carolina, earning a master's degree in teaching social studies. She's originally from Columbia, South Carolina a non-rural city. She currently teaches in 11th-grade history and serves as the department chair at Lochcrest High School. She drives 35 minutes to work each day, which does not bother her at all. She has eight years of experience, with five of those years being in her current district and her other three being in Richland One. Her average salary is $50,000. She teaches an average of 25 students per classroom each year. She has wanted to be a teacher since middle school when she was in a mentoring program, which opened her eyes to teaching as a career. In high school, she participated in Teacher Cadet. Quanaya has hopes of becoming an administrator one day very soon. Lack of opportunities for growth in her district is a

topic she discussed in length. For most of the interview, she stayed on topic but did not go as deep as other participants with her responses.

Rebecca is an energetic and upbeat 26-year-old white female who graduated from the University of Iowa. She earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education and her master's degree in elementary education from Johns Hopkins University. She is from Deerfield, Illinois, a non-rural city. Currently, she teaches fourth-grade English Language Arts in Highgold County School District. She drives 45 minutes from Columbia to Highgold County each workday, a commute that she does not particularly like. She has four years of experience and they have all been at her current school. She will return to her current school next year. She shared that her average salary is $30,000 and she teachers an average of 25 students in her classroom each year. She is a member of Teach for America, which is how she relocated to her rural district. Teach for America allowed her to select a variety of states that she was willing to relocate to and South Carolina was the second one that she selected. Rebecca aspires to be an administrator in the next five years. She has always loved teaching; she was a camp counselor and a babysitter before becoming a certified teacher. Throughout the interview, Rebecca smiled and shared her thoughts candidly.

Veronica is a 38-year-old African-American female who graduated from Converse College in South Carolina, majoring in biology. She earned a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Concordia University-Portland. She's originally from Columbia, SC, a non-rural city. She is a single parent with one son who she speaks of often. She teaches gifted students as well as the seventh-grade AVID elective and science. She has a 35-minute commute, which she does not particularly enjoy. She is

interested in moving closer to her school but is torn as her parents are close to where she currently lives. Veronica has 12 years of experience in education, with all 12 years being in her current district. Her average self-reported salary is $52,000, and she serves an average of 70 students per school year. She originally wanted to be a pediatrician because she loves children but felt that she may be too emotional if a child was very sick. She changed her mind and majored in education. For many years, she did not use her degree in education but instead worked a job unrelated to her field at USC. She found this job to be boring. After much encouragement and many recommendations to become an educator, she completed PACE, an alternative certification program, and years later applied through CERRA and was contacted by her current district, Lochcrest, which she speaks very highly about.

Thematic Development

In the preceding sections, I described the sites for the study and the participants. These topics have provided the context for the following, which is a section dedicated to presenting the findings of this research study. Chapter Three provided a description of my thematic analysis, where through multiple rounds of coding I developed categories. Once categories were developed and all 11 interviews were fully coded, I then found themes and subsidiary themes across interviews. Finally, these themes were more deeply interpreted, often by returning to the original transcripts and following up with participants until meaning developed. Using this process, the following themes were developed: 1) Unique Perks, which include a variety of benefits or opportunities teachers receive by being employed in their specific district. Many of these benefits would be lost if teachers moved to a different district. 2) Culture and Climate, which includes the way

teachers feel about each other in the district. It includes a family-like feeling amongst

colleagues that is led by the administrators. Other positive behaviors of administrators to

include support and providing a feeling of professional autonomy are included in this

theme. 3) Complacency and Comfort, which includes teachers not seeking opportunities

outside of their current school due to part rejection, fear of rejection or teacher being

comfortable and satisfied with their current situation. 4) Commitment to the Community,

which includes a strong feeling of commitment to students, to working with community

or roles in extra-curricular activities in which teachers have a strong commitment.

Each of these themes are discussed in this section and are represented

organizationally in Table 4.2. Each, in different ways, help to fully answer the

overarching research question, how do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school

districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?

Table 4.2
Themes and Subsidiary Themes

Themes	**Subsidiary Themes**
Unique Perks	• *Financial Benefits* • *Housing Benefits* • *Opportunities for Teachers' Dependent Children*
Culture and Climate	• *Family-like Feeling in District* • *Commitment to Highly Respected Leaders* • *Administrator Support* • *Professional Autonomy*
Complacency and Comfort	• *Rejection or Fear of Rejection* • *Personal Choice to Avoid Change*
Commitment to the Community	• *Relationship with Students and Families* • *Holding Leadership Roles in Extra-curricular Activities* • *Altruistic Motivations*

Unique Perks

The first theme that emerged from my thematic analysis outlines the unique perks teachers perceived they would receive or continue to receive by continuing employment in the district. They are considered "unique" because they were often creative in nature and went beyond the usual benefits offered from human resources departments such as healthcare and base salary. Though a competitive base salary was a benefit described by one participant of eleven, most of the unique perks described as motivators for retention were less common. Unique perks are a variety of positive benefits districts offer (either explicitly or not) to teachers because of teachers being employed with the district. Many of the benefits were obtained through "employee choice," which allowed teachers who live in a different district to enroll their child(ren) into the district where they are currently employed while they are employed with the district. In many cases, the districts had special magnet programs and magnet schools that offered special opportunities for select students. These unique perks would be lost if the teacher left the district. Unique perks that were financial in nature, such as an international teacher being sponsored by the district, would no longer be guaranteed if the teacher left their current district and therefore was a factor teachers had to seriously consider while making a decision to stay or leave the district in which they were employed. In addition, many of these benefits were not available in other neighboring districts or were benefits they would no longer be guaranteed if they left. These benefits were meaningful to the participants and/or their families and were motivators for teachers to be retained. To validate the development of this theme, the following subsidiary themes are presented: Financial Benefits, Housing Benefits, and Opportunities for Teachers' Dependent Children.

Financial benefits.

The following subsidiary theme describes financial benefits teachers receive as a result of teaching in their particular district. For example, a salary bonus was one unique financial benefit described by participants from two separate districts. A signing bonus helped Heather to stay in her district long enough to get acclimated. She described her $4000 hard-to-staff school signing bonus as a factor in her retention:

> We received a $4000 bonus. It was broken up over two years, so we got $2,000
> the first year and $2,000 the second year. I definitely wanted the full $4,000.

A $5000 salary bonus is another unique financial benefit that several participants mentioned being a very important factor. Quanaya mentioned there was a lack of opportunities to grow in the district because it was so small. She thought about leaving her district to pursue opportunities elsewhere; however, a $5000 salary bonus was very helpful in keeping her in the district. According to Quanaya, "The recently approved $5,000 bonus helped retention rates significantly."

Nicole shared that the base salary in her district is "good" in comparison to base salaries in other districts, and base salary influences her retention. Her salary in her current district is substantially higher than her salary in her previous district, which was also a rural district. When asked about the influence of salary in her decision making, she shared:

> Wellby was like 28 something. And at that time, when I came here, it was almost
> 37, 36 something, I think. So yeah, it was a nice bump in my salary. I definitely
> couldn't leave and go back to Wellby.

Salary, signing bonuses and salary bonuses all impact the teacher's paycheck in a positive way and were described as motivators of retention. Financial benefits also came in the way of forgiving loans, covering the costs of professional training and covering the costs of visas. The next section describes additional unique financial benefits that teachers received and described as meaningful and important.

Teach for America (TFA) is an organization that helps to place several teachers into low-income communities where there is a clear achievement gap. As a result, many teachers are placed in rural districts in South Carolina through TFA. TFA teachers sign a two-year contract with TFA and are obligated to complete a minimum of two years of teaching. Though TFA itself is not a perk, the organization partners with AmeriCorps; and as a result, TFA teachers are able to receive financial incentives through funding from AmeriCorps known as "corp bucks." "Corp bucks" can be used to help pay off student loans and cover some of the costs incurred while earning a teaching certification. TFA teachers can choose to stay beyond two years; at that point, they are considered alumni and not a corps member. In this case, they qualify for alumni coaching; however, they do not receive "corp bucks" as alumni. The "corp bucks" incentive ends after the initial two-year commitment. After the third year, a TFA teacher in South Carolina has the option to pursue licensure. TFA is one pathway into rural school districts, especially since the mission of the organization is to enlist, develop, and mobilize as many as possible of the nation's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence. Teach for America teachers go into teaching with the understanding that they will be placed in a district that may be difficult for other people. TFA offers additional training free of cost, which would otherwise be

costly, to teachers to prepare them for the location they will serve. They provide

personalized coaching for each corps member during their two years. They also greatly

support the relocation process in terms of resources and connections.

Due to teacher shortages, especially in poor, predominantly minority rural school

districts, South Carolina took advantage of the federal J-1 visa policy allowing

international teachers to work in the U.S. up to 3 years, extendable for 1 year. These

teachers are required to have a sponsor. Private agencies recruit and sponsor

international teachers, generally charging teachers an annual fee (Brown & Stevick,

2014). Kashvi, an Indian teacher, came to her district through an agency sponsoring her

J-1 visa. She paid her agency roughly "$500 per month." According to Kashvi, her

husband, who was reluctant to leave his job in India and move, and her son are only able

to stay in the United States due to her visa. For this reason, she felt immense pressure to

be successful, even though paying the agency caused financial hardships. Kashvi's

district decided to sponsor her, which alleviated a major financial burden for her. She

credits the district's sponsorship as a major influencer of retention.

> My husband, he's dependent on me. My son is dependent on me. The agency,
>
> when I was with the agency, you know, I had to pay the agency. Right?
>
> What happened was the school district ... I still remember Henry, the
>
> superintendent. He's God for me, the superintendent. My principal, Mr. Douglas,
>
> he told him that I have seen this teacher and she's a great, and our students need
>
> this teacher and I don't know how, but you have to keep her. So, the district
>
> decided to sponsor me. Indian teachers stay because the district has sponsored
>
> them. So, my main reason [for staying in this district] is because [the] district has

sponsored me. I do not have to pay anyone anything. That's why I'm still working

[here].

Once her school district sponsored her, she no longer had to pay the agency

anything, which was a motivator for her retention. With the J-1 visa, a teacher can only

stay in the U.S. for a maximum of four years before having to return home and re-enroll

for the J-1 program (Brown & Stevick, 2014). Instead of returning home, her school

district paid for her to have an "H-1B" visa, which is a temporary visa issued to "non-

immigrants." The H visas are a select class of temporary visa that confer work

authorization, and skilled workers are admitted under an H-1 visa. In 1990, the "H-1B"

visa was introduced, which allows the worker to stay permanently while employed with

the authorizing company (Lowell, 2000). The H-1B visa was "roughly $1700" to include

$500 for the visa fee and $1200 for the attorney fee. She was very appreciative and

shared that being sponsored by her school district on an H-1B visa was a real benefit to

her. She felt very supported when her district took this step to assist her financially and

with career location stability.

Housing benefits.

The second subsidiary theme was the ability to find affordable and safe housing in

the area, whether facilitated by the individual teacher or by the district. Housing is more

cost-efficient in many rural districts in South Carolina. Many of the towns have high

poverty and the housing market is low due to high inventory; therefore, teachers who are

willing to live in these communities are able to get a good deal on a house. Bob shared

that his ability to buy a house for an "unbelievably low price" in the area was a major

factor in his retention:

111

The reason why is because the housing situation is so easy, not easy, there's a

better word for it. Let's just say it's a buyer's market, and oh boy, I took advantage

of that. As you noticed, the houses here, they're just sitting around. So, I tried to

find something good and I found a really good one. 18 grand-…1200 square feet.

His home is a quaint 2-bedroom, 1-bathroom single family home, built in the 1940s. This

participant felt as a single man, purchasing this home was a deal he just could not pass

up. Living in his home, which is close to his school, works for him and he has no

intention of changing schools or school districts.

Several other teachers mentioned economical housing as a motivator for retention.

Two participants shared that their district was in the process of building a *Teacher*

Village, which is a housing complex for teachers in the district. This housing complex is

a project led by the superintendent to help retain teachers in the area. He has partnered

with investors and is planning to build the *Teacher Village* in the next couple of years.

Many participants are considering living in this district-sponsored housing area in the

future. Veronica, a single, soon-to-be "empty nester," is looking forward to the

completion of the *Teacher Village*:

> The district is really working on creating pretty much a neighborhood. It's slated
>
> for the first 30 houses. The investor, if they see that they need to build more, their
>
> goal is to build up to 70 houses, if possible. From what I've seen how much it
>
> costs, it'd be perfect for my budget. Initially, they was supposed to be ready in
>
> August. I would've been all up in it.

Though the *Teacher Village* has not been completed yet, the excitement about the

progress made with planning and building the *Teacher Village* is retaining teachers who

are interested in the opportunity. Teachers are excited about the opportunity to rent budget-friendly housing near colleagues in an area where they feel it will be safe.

Rebecca shared that TFA helped with housing as well, which was very helpful in making her comfortable when she first moved to the area. She shared, "you have the option of renting a house or there's like one apartment complex that's really reputable that TFA people have a good relationship with." Being able to have a safe and affordable housing area near other educators was a motivator for retention.

Opportunities for teachers' dependent children.

The final subsidiary theme I observed, in relation to the unique perks provided by the district, was opportunities for teachers' dependent children. Some participants described special programs and/or activities their dependent children are able to participate in as a result of them working in or living in the area. Some of the participants live in the district where they work and so if they were to move to another district for employment, it would not overly impact opportunities for their dependent children; however, many participants do not live in the district where they work, and have used "employee choice" to bring their dependent children to schools in the district where they are employed. "Employee choice" or "choicing in" a student means a parent is able to enroll his or her child(ren) in the school district where they are employed, while they are employed in that district. In this instance, it becomes more difficult for a teacher whose child is "choiced in" to move to another district without uprooting their child from the school and activities in which they are involved. For example, Veronica does not live in the district she works in; however, her district allows her to "choice in" her son. Her son has been in the district for 12 years, and it is his school family, where all of his friends

113

attend and where he is comfortable. Veronica, though she would not otherwise qualify for free breakfast and lunch, benefits from her son attending a Title I school. This has a slightly positive impact; however, her son's school activities have a major influence on her retention. Veronica describes the benefits of her son attending a school in the district where she is currently employed:

> I am a mother of a 17-year-old. He's graduating this school year. When he started there, I still had to pay [for lunch]. Now because all students receive free breakfast and free lunch [so does he]. I went ahead and got him into the magnet school. He was at the Lochcrest Magnet School.

> When asked if she ever considered leaving the district, she shared her son's participation in the STEM program was a major factor in her retention:

> My son's in STEM program, and I didn't want to mess that up. With our STEM Early College Academy, they graduate with their associate's degree. In May, he'll have his associate's degree, but he doesn't graduate until June.

This particular district partnered with Midland's Tech and is able to allow students to earn an associate degree once they graduate from high school. Veronica shared that any time she considered moving to another district, she had to consider the impact that would have on her son. The fact that her son was in a special program in the district where she was employed was a strong motivator of retention. Other participants also shared that their dependent children were involved in sports within their district or involved in clubs within their district as well. Nicole, another teacher who does not live in the district where she is employed and who has "choiced" her children into her school district, shared:

114

There are a lot of opportunities for them in this district. Like I said, if they were in the home district, the only benefit is they could get the bus in the morning to school, but then they wouldn't have anything to do after school. Arica, is in the yearbook club and she participated in the Black History program. She's in chorus. So, it's always something for them to do down here. We have this after school program that they do all their homework, they do fun activities.

Participants shared a common feeling that their dependent children were important for their retention. Participants moving from their district to another district would disqualify their dependent children for "employee choice," and cause their children to be enrolled in their home school, the school they were zoned for in the district where they reside. Parents did not want to uproot their children from the special activities in which they participated in at their "choiced" school. Therefore, "employee choice" was a unique benefit that influenced teacher retention.

In the preceding section, the teachers' detailed accounts of experiences with unique perks were explained with a focus on the ways these experiences influenced their decision making regarding staying or leaving their current district. Overall, positive experiences with unique perks in which teachers received played an important role in their retention. Many teachers may not have been retained had they not been motivated by the unique perks described in the previous section. Some unique perks were financial in nature, some benefited their dependent children, some knocked down obstacles teachers faced, while others made teachers feel safe. The common thread among the unique perks is that they enhanced the life of the teachers and/or the life of the teachers' family in some way. Teachers described the decision-making process and the influence

that these unique perks had on their ultimate decision. If ever they thought about leaving, which they did, the unique perks they received was a constant "yellow light," causing them to slow down and carefully think about what all they would lose if they left, before deciding to leave the district. In every case, ultimately, the teacher participants decided to stay in their current district, and therefore, the unique perks are positive motivators for retention.

Culture and Climate

The second theme that emerged from the data explained how teachers perceived the culture and climate of the district. This theme specifically applies to the research question, *how do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?* Culture and climate are a major aspect of "human resources policy factors." Human resources policy factors consist of the way the district is organized structurally to provide support for faculty and staff as well as the feel, or climate, of the district due to the way it is organized, including, but not limited to, the selection of leaders and the behaviors these leaders display that impact the district. Culture and climate was a major theme throughout the responses of the participants and had two prongs. There was culture and climate in regard to the behaviors, qualities, and characteristics of selected leaders (principals and superintendents) and how they made people feel, and there was also organizational culture and climate in regard to how systems worked and operated to support teachers academically. The culture and climate of the district described as a motivator for retention was positive and supportive. Within this theme, the following four subsidiary

116

themes emerged: family-like feeling in the district, commitment to highly-respected leaders, administrator support and professional autonomy.

Family-like feeling in the district.

The first subsidiary theme discussed is the family-like feeling among colleagues often described by participants retained in their schools. Participants smiled and laughed as they described a positive school culture and climate where people enjoyed seeing each other and working together. Some participants shared that they had great relationships with their school's principal and other participants shared they built lasting relationships with their colleagues, where they would spend time together outside of the school day. These relationships encouraged retention as they increased satisfaction with the work environment and helped schools maintain a positive culture and climate. For example, Kashvi shared the relationships she has formed with her colleagues have a positive effect on her retention. Kashvi detailed her relationship with a colleague:

> I have Mr. Livingston who is just opposite to my class. I couldn't have imagined a
> school without him, trust me, trust me. Mr. Livingston, if I write a book or
> something, he'll be the one person in it. I have grown. I have grown as a teacher, I
> can say. I can give him the credit also. Like he has really supported [and] has
> really helped me. Because yeah, when I joined the school, he was there. I call him
> a mentor. I call him a friend. He's a really good person, I'm telling you. He helped
> me to stay.

Veronica also shared that the environment in her district and at her school was very positive. She shared that employees of the district were very close, "like family," and she

discussed an annual convocation held by the district that was described as a family reunion:

> Overall, I would say it's close to a family environment, regardless of the negatives. When we have our annual convocation, that's truly like a family reunion. We are back. We've been on our summer break. It's truly like a reunion when we come together in the high school auditorium.

When Quanaya, a participant who thought about leaving her district, was asked about factors that played a role in her eventual retention, she shared:

> There is a familial feeling among the staff that has played a positive role in my decision to stay another year at Lochcrest.

Rebecca talked in length about her principal and her grade-level team. Her relationships with her colleagues continue to play a major role in her retention. When asked what keeps her at her current school, which is so far away from her own family, which she is also very close with, she smiled and said "the people." Rebecca discussed her relationships with her teammates:

> I love my team. My math teacher, in particular. She's just an excellent role model to have on my team. We work super well together. But I've also had, there's a third-grade teacher who, I was on her team my first year there and she's still there, so she's always taken care of me. Yeah. From like the moment I got there. And she's still there, too. I've got a lot of good role models at school. We are like family. It's hard to let go of them now. So, yeah, it's the people.

A positive and family-like atmosphere was described as a motivator of retention by several participants.

Commitment to highly respected leaders.

The second subsidiary theme discussed is the culture created by the supportive behaviors of leaders such as the principal and superintendents. The leaders that motivated retention were able to build relationships with faculty and staff members that were much stronger than any negative experiences teachers dealt with. Teachers felt a sense of loyalty to the leaders and thus, to their school or district. Some teachers shared that they had some negative experiences that made them think about leaving, but they were worried that leadership in other districts would not be as good as the leadership they currently experience. Some participants even shared that negative experiences with past leadership or instability with past leadership were a cause for them considering moving to another district. But ultimately, the leadership they currently have is strong and positive. Some participants described instances of their superintendent knowing them (and even students) by name, as he would visit the schools in his district daily. Leaders such as this one had a great rapport with teachers, which was a motivator for their retention. For example, Rebecca shared that her principal was amazing and she was worried that he would be promoted and move from her school, or that he may possibly open his own school one day. She had a very serious face and passionately proclaimed if her principal ever moved to another district or school, she would try to go there as well:

> I am following my principal. If he opens a charter in Highgold County, I will
> 100% be there. Anywhere in South Carolina, I'd probably be there. He's been
> huge. Because I always think about if he left how tied would I be to still be here?

119

That's why I'm still there. My principal was a huge one. He's great. He's definitely

a role model to me for teaching and for what I want to be as an administrator and

just like as a community leader. I've learned so much from him and he makes it

super personalized. I know we have a really close relationship, not just like

professionally but personally. He knows my family; he knows what I do and has

been important to me and he always highlights that to my kids. She's from

Chicago. She's not from here. This is really cool.

John shared that a principal's relationship with staff is important for retention. With the

right relationship, teachers felt a sense of loyalty to certain leaders. This excerpt from

John's interview paints a picture of the extreme commitment some teachers have to their

principal:

The staff would take a bullet for [him], because he supports them, he's positive, he

shields his staff, he protects his staff. He's always happy, always bouncy.

Kashvi shared that her superintendent's vision and goals motivate her whole district, to

include her principal. Kashvi communicates regularly with both her superintendent and

her principal. She shared that her retention is connected to her principal and his

leadership:

Administrator, Mr. Douglas, I'm telling you, he is a good person. Because of him,

I continued there.

Veronica, who was honored as her school's Teacher of the Year, was able to work

directly with the superintendent often as an extension of her role as Teacher of the Year.

She described his relationship with teachers as a positive. He would often visit school

and classrooms, checking on students and teachers. Veronica believes his relationship with staff members encourages retention. She describes her interactions with him:

> We had meetings every other month, all the Teachers of the Year in the district. Dr. Butler updates us on things. What it is, he'll update us on things going on in the district. We'll come to him with good things that are going on in our school, and some issues that we need him to address.

Administrator support.

The next subsidiary theme I observed, in relation to culture and climate, is administrator support. Administrators supported teachers in a variety of ways to include, among other things, providing instructional coaches in academic areas of need, which helped build teacher efficacy; providing student discipline support, leading to the perception of a safer school and more positive experiences with behavior management; securing resources teachers needed to be successful whether through curriculum or financial means to fund activities; and also helping to mediate issues with parents that could be difficult for teachers.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Chapman's Model of the Influences on Teacher Retention (1983), the conceptual framework used in this study, asserts the importance of administrative support. Specifically, he discussed that a teacher's first employment experience is a powerful indicator of future retention. That is, if it is positive, a teacher is likely to be retained. Participants described receiving support from leaders from the beginning of their career in the district and years after. Many participants began their career teaching in their current district and never left. Leaders provided support for these teachers since they started employment with the district, which teachers greatly

appreciated. Some teachers credit the support they received early on as a motivator of

retention. Morgan shared the experiences she had as an induction teacher, where she was

provided the support she needed to be successful, which really motivated her retention.

She detailed her experiences:

> There were two people who did my induction courses; they were very good. They
>
> gave us resources, the books, they gave us strategies that we can use and then we
>
> were putting those strategies in place. We practiced the strategies in our own
>
> classroom or in the induction class when we met. I also had an ELA instructional
>
> coach, who helped me tremendously because I felt I wasn't prepared, but when
>
> she came in and showed me strategies and things I can do at the reading circles
>
> and things like that, that helped me. So, I implemented that in the classroom. She
>
> would come in and model one class and then the next class, we co-taught and then
>
> the last class, she observed me doing it by myself. So that helped me
>
> tremendously. I had a lot of resources and people to help. I wouldn't leave an
>
> environment like that.

Bob shared that he appreciated support with behavior management. He felt that

administrators had control over students, which made this particular school "appealing"

to him. Another participant, Heather, shared the importance of administrator support.

When she first arrived in her district, the leadership was not stable, and she was led by

four different principals, with four different personalities, goals and means to achieve the

goals. She did not feel supported and felt that the administrators led in a way to protect

their jobs. "They were CYA-ing." She shared that she would have left her district years

ago if it weren't for her current administration team coming on board. Heather shared:

My [current] principal is what made me stay. I wouldn't leave her for anything.

She is one of the best principals I have ever experienced, and it's not because she

doesn't hold us to a standard, but she backs up what she says and she supports us,

and she supports us to the point where there are things that happened that we don't

even know it's happening because she has already blocked it and stopped it, like

parents coming in wanting to curse the teachers out…you have that irate parent

that wants to come in and that type thing, and she will take care of that. And I've

seen it personally happen.

Similarly, Nicole shared she feels supported when it comes to parents. According to

Nicole, rural districts can be difficult to navigate because parents often are friends or

relatives of teachers, leaders and even board members. This adds pressure to teachers

and school leaders when it comes to addressing issues. Nicole shared that she appreciates

the support she receives from her administration when it comes to parents. She shared:

And with the administration we've had here, they really back you up with the

parents and not trying to just make them happy by saying nice words or what they

want to hear.

When Heather was asked about resources in the district, she shared that she felt fully

supported in that area as well. She stated:

And that is really awesome and a good thing about our district is we go to the

school board and we present something for the kids that we think is going to

benefit them, and we can back it up with research and data, they support us most

of the time.

Veronica shared that she really feels supported in the area of professional growth. She described professional development as a top priority of the district:

> Within the years I've been here, there have been so many professional development opportunities. That's something I've definitely seen within recent years. They spare no expenses concerning that. If the courses are there, or somebody can come in, or they can send us someplace, they're doing it.
>
> In addition, participants describe continued support from the district.

Veronica's experience with substantial professional development is significant, as the literature often points to a lack of professional development in rural areas. Veronica was influenced to remain employed in her district because she was able to receive professional development and experience professional growth.

Rebecca also discussed the importance of administrators supporting her professional growth. She shared her aspirations to become an administrator one day. In addition to teaching full-time, Rebecca also works for a company where she receives training and also provides training to other teachers throughout the school year. This work requires her to miss some school days, which she does not take lightly. Rebecca smiled as she shared how understanding her principal is when she has other professional engagements and how he is very supportive in her professional growth. Her principal actually secures substitute teachers for his teachers when they have to be out so that they have one less thing to worry about.

Professional autonomy.

The final subsidiary theme I observed, in relation to culture and climate, was professional autonomy. Providing "faculty authority" or professional autonomy makes

teachers feel valued, supported and respected (Ingersoll et al., 2014) and leads to retention. Many retained teachers described professional autonomy and a culture of trust as a motivator for their retention. There was a culture of trust in the schools and districts, and teachers felt that they were able to do what they felt was best for student success without being micromanaged by leaders. Heather excitedly shared that she went to a "Ron Clark" conference where all the classrooms were vibrantly painted to match the content teachers taught. Her experience at this conference moved her to make major changes to her own classroom, and she was able to do this with the support of her principal, and without direct guidance from her principal.

> I painted my room. I went to the Ron Clark Academy. My principal sent me to the Ron Clark Academy for the Ron Clark Experience. And I came back and I told her, 'I just want you to know whatever I ask for is your fault because you sent me there, and you know me.' I'm like, 'Wooh.' So, I said, 'Ms. Smith, I want to paint my room,' and she didn't even question me. She didn't ask me what I was going to do. She said, 'Okay, Heather.'

John also talked about the professional autonomy he is afforded at his school. One reason he feels he has professional autonomy is because he works at a small school and due to the subject he teaches, which is physical education, he is the sole teacher and he is able to make a lot of decisions on his own. He shared:

> I like the fact that really, I'm in charge of myself. I'm the only P.E. teacher so I run the program exactly how I think it needs to be run.

Similarly, Kashvi appreciates the professional autonomy she has at her school. She is a

teacher with a lot of experience and takes pride in being an effective teacher. When

asked about the leadership at her school, she shared:

> We have a principal, Ms. Parker. She believes what teachers are doing is right and
>
> she will never interfere. She sees that you know what you're doing and your
>
> students are doing well and she does not interfere.

Veronica shared that she appreciates the flexibility teachers in her district have with

creating and teaching lessons. She listens to teacher podcasts and has heard the

complaints from others regarding their administrators expecting them to be on the same

page as their fellow teachers. Veronica is happy to be at a school where she is not

expected to have "cookie cutter" lessons and that she is not "placed in a box." When

asked about her teaching style and collaboration with her grade-level team, she shared:

> At some schools, you must be on the same thing at the same time, cookie cutter
>
> type deal. I don't like that. After attending different professional developments
>
> and activities, we're allowed to apply what we learn however we want. Of course,
>
> as long as we still have the classroom management going on, and there's structure,
>
> it doesn't have to be a quiet building. As long as there's structure, for them to be in
>
> groups and all of that, small groups and things of that nature, that's fine. We can
>
> do that.

Quanaya shared that she has professional autonomy in her position, which is important to

her. When asked about her administrators, she shared:

> As long as I do my job and every year my scores seem to improve, they kind of
>
> let me do what I need to do instructionally. No one's really bothering me.

Similarly, Nicole shared she is able to meet the needs of her students in the way she feels is best. When asked about her administrators, she shared:

> Nobody [is] really slave driving you. Basically, if you're getting your work done and your numbers look right, nobody's on your back, nitpicking, which I appreciate. Lesson plans don't have to be word for word.

Half of the participants shared experiences of feeling trusted and being provided professional autonomy by school leaders. All participants spoke candidly about their appreciation for being able to teach without feeling micromanaged. Participants shared they feel respected when they are able to do what they are trained to do without being guided every step of the way. They feel supported when they are able to be creative and teach students in a way they professionally think is best.

This theme was by far the most predominant among participants that were interviewed. It has a high level of interconnectedness with the other three themes due to a positive culture and climate being a result of satisfaction with the work environment. This theme describes a positive work environment, with a culture of collaboration, happiness, support, trust, and professional growth. It highlights the importance of building relationships and fostering respect among colleagues in a school district. In addition, it points to the effect that a high level of administrator support has on teacher retention. According to Chapman (1983), positive professional and social integration into teaching is a significant motivator for retention. The more social ties a teacher has to others in the school, the more likely the teacher will be retained (Chapman, 1983). The responses from participants validate the importance of social ties. Teachers described their districts as "feeling like family." School and district leaders were described as supportive and

teachers felt loyalty to them due to the relationships that were built as well as the respect and trust teachers felt from their leaders. Overall, a positive culture and climate were found to be a positive motivator of retention.

Complacency and Comfort

The third theme that emerged from my thematic analysis centered on complacency and comfort. Descriptions of complacency and comfort by participants occurred repeatedly during analysis. Within this theme, the following two subsidiary themes emerged: rejection or fear of rejection and personal choice to avoid change. There were participants who were retained as a result of complacency due to past rejection or fear they would not be hired in another district due to past experiences. These participants may or may not feel satisfaction in their current positions; however, they are determined to stay where they are because they are not sure they would be successful in gaining or maintaining employment elsewhere. There were also participants that described complacency as a result of participants that were comfortable with their career as it is and therefore, did not seek or consider leaving. These participants described either becoming complacent with the routine of their work and actually feel they are not reaching their highest potential or they described a level of comfort in their current school district, which could also be described as career satisfaction. When a teacher is satisfied with their career, it is likely that the teacher will stay (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Either way, these teachers are not actively looking to leave their current school districts. Both complacency and comfort led to teachers being retained.

Rejection or fear of rejection.

The first subsidiary theme was rejection or fear of rejection. Some participants described a sense of complacency due to rejection in a past district or fear of rejection in a future district. These participants had issues or perceived issues in previous districts, and as a result felt additional pressure to stay in their current school, where they feel they are successful and can continue to be successful. For example, one participant, Bob, apprehensively shared that his current district was his third district, as he left other districts due to termination or other reasons that were not his choice. Bob was happy to share that he was employed in his current district and things were going well so far. Due to his previous experiences, he felt it was best to stay put while things were going well, adding he hoped he could just make it to retirement in his current district. He felt lucky to have gotten a position with this district because many schools did not interview him.

> I was heading to Florida but all my resumes weren't picking up anything because it was already July first when I sent them out. South Carolina, they're hard up on teachers, so they obviously took me in. I don't know how I was, like, listed. If I was listed as, you know, 'he was under evaluation before.' I don't know if that's on my, you know, the-the record.

Bob shared that his current district was filled with teachers that had issues in their previous districts, comparing his district to "the island of misfit toys" from the movie *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and the Island of Misfit Toys*:

> All the teachers I meet have, let's just say, this wasn't their first school.
> [They have] some sort of issue. Yeah, something. I guess I'm just sharing that with you because that's what I feel, but after talking to people, yeah, that's not

129

their first school. And in fact, talking to other people there's, we got one who's

actually a doctorate, she even said that she was fired from a school.

He seemed to have a mistrust for administrators, sharing that every time he worked with a

new principal in the past, it was a problem. The problems he described were subjective

in nature, stemming from a clash of personalities. In his current district, he felt that

administrators were less "arrogant" and more appreciative of teachers. When Bob was

asked to elaborate on his success in his current district, he shared:

> To share something personal, everyone has a problem, not a problem but
>
> something that they're weak in. I don't know how to say this without being
>
> deprecating to myself but—I am staying put because it's something that I can
>
> handle.

He reflected on his experiences in past districts and compared them to his current district.

He summarized his thoughts by saying:

> When you have 150 kids and administrators telling me that the pencil sharpener
>
> should be in the front, and not in the back, I start losing sleep. In this district, I
>
> have seven or eight students per class. This is a less stressful district.

> Another participant, John, shared that he did apply for a position in another

neighboring rural district years ago; however, he did not get accepted at the other district.

Had he been offered the position in the other district, which he described as a "better"

district, he would "have moved without a doubt." He also shared that he had some

situations in a prior district that may cause him trouble trying to relocate or get a position

elsewhere; therefore, he is choosing to stay at his current district. John shared:

One thing that keeps me there, is because there may be certain places where I don't get the chance to work because of what people perceive as my past. It's not like I molested kids, it was just like, I've got a past.

The examples John described as his "past" were subjective in nature, stemming from a clash in personalities. Bob and John's experiences were similar and were both descriptions of complacency due to rejection or fear of rejection.

Personal choice to avoid change.

The second subsidiary theme I observed was personal choice to avoid change. Personal choice to avoid change describes participants who did not choose to look for employment elsewhere. These participants were becoming stagnant or they were comfortable and experiencing satisfaction in their career. Some participants described being comfortable with stability in their career and providing stability for their families. For example, Morgan shared that her daughter was raised in the district and desired to graduate with her peers that she started school with. This was a motivator of retention for Morgan. Some participants enjoyed stability and preferred to stay in their current district unless there was a pressing reason for them to leave. There may have been a few issues, but nothing that was serious enough to warrant moving to another district or uprooting what they had going on at the time. Heather shared that she has not looked for another job in nine years because she is happy with her current employment and has no reason to leave. John shared that he is so far invested that he needs to "ride it out." Though he previously had dreams of becoming a surgeon or physician, he shared that he got "stuck" in his position and has come to enjoy it:

It's like a spider's web. You get in it and then, ten years later, you're still in it, and

it's like you can't get out of it. I always have one eye out for going elsewhere, but

here I am, years later, I'm still here. Chances are, if you and I sit here in four

years' time, I'll probably still be there. Time just passes and you get in this little,

'well this is just where I am. This is where I work. This is just it.' There are a lot

of little things that keep me here. Plus, change is hard. I understand that place. I

understand how it works, the good things, the bad things, the indifferent things.

But still, I understand it and I'm comfortable in it, whereas the grass isn't always

greener. The more you spend time in an environment, the more affinity you get

with that environment and those kids in it. You do develop that camaraderie with

the kids and with the teachers that are there.

Kashvi shared that she is comfortable in her district and with her life the way it is

currently. If Kashvi leaves the district, that may have implications on her and her

family's ability to stay in the United States. Being Indian also makes Kashvi feel like she

will be perceived as an outsider if she moves. It took her time to develop relationships

with colleagues, students, families, and the community. She is not willing to give that up.

She shared:

If I go to a new school, I have to build up the relationship again with my students;

they don't know me. It will take me time, and now when they come, I do not have

to bother about the building the relationship, already it is there. If I go anywhere,

see, because of my look, I look Indian. They will be reluctant [because] I'm from

a different culture. They will not open up. So, it takes time to build up that

relationship. And now in this school, I have built up the relationship with my

132

colleagues and with my students. And if I go to the new environment again, I'll

start over the same thing. So, I feel that that's why that is putting me here.

Veronica had some issues at her school, that caused her to consider changing schools, but

ultimately, she stayed at her school. When asked to elaborate, she shared:

At that time, it was just some things I was dealing with concerning the principal.

What helped me to change my mind is, obviously being there 12 years, I'm not the

type of person to jump around to different places. I just had to take some different

things into consideration. No place is perfect. I've grown a lot there. It is my only

place. Because I'm not in other districts, I don't know how the districts run or what

they provide. So, I decided to stay at my school.

Some participants had been in a previous district before, and shared that the "grass isn't

always greener," and for those reasons, they were comfortable and not looking to make

changes in their school or district. For example, Ashley shared that her current situation is

much better than the situation she came from. Her previous school in a neighboring rural

district lacked basic necessities for children, in her opinion. She described the

playground at her previous school as a major problem for her:

 They had sandboxes that needed to be covered, and they weren't covered.

Animals would come in and, you know, handle their business in the sand. Then

the kids would go out and play into the sand. Then they started to get these big

ring-worms into their hair. It was affecting only African American students,

mostly the girls. I had a huge problem with that.

Her current district has issues as well, but she feels that the issues are addressed and

corrected when brought to an administrator's attention. The budget in her current district

was still less than that of the non-rural district she lived in, where her child attended, but she felt the district leaders did all they could to do things larger districts were able to do.

Complacency in work ethic came up as a theme. Some participants shared that they were stagnant and felt they could continue the routine of teaching the same way without professional growth and there were no issues from administrators, which they admitted influences their complacency. These teachers described a lack of desire to grow or to change. Linda shared that she realized she was just going through the motions and had become complacent. She did not attempt to move to another district for many years, and instead just continued to do the *status quo*. Bob shared that he was not evaluated in his current district, which was described as positive in his retention. He was pleased with the ability to work without any issues from administrators. Bob shared that he has no plans to move from this district, which he finds to be comfortable. He teaches seven to eight students per class and loves it. He is looking forward to retirement. When Bob was asked about the possibility of moving to another district, he shared:

> I want to take advantage of these 'less stressful' years. In one word, the reason
>
> why I'm here, pension. I have 10 more years.

Complacency for a variety of reasons and comfort led some participants to remain retained in their current districts. Complacency and Comfort describe teachers not actively seeking positions in other districts. Developed through the subsidiary themes, teachers described not seeking other positions because of past rejection or future rejection, that is, feeling a high likelihood of not being able to be hired or successful elsewhere or teachers described a level of comfort with their current setting. Comfort was described in two ways as either complacency or true comfort. Complacency was a

result of teachers following the daily routine of their job with no professional growth. Complacency could also be described as stagnant. Comfort, on the other hand, was described by participants as a level of job satisfaction that was so high, these teachers did not want to leave. It was apparent by the descriptions and detailed accounts of participant experiences that complacency and comfort was a factor for teacher retention.

Commitment to Community

The final theme that emerged explains a strong commitment to the community, a theme that was common among participants. Several of the participants had opportunities to move to other states or school districts, which included other rural and non-rural school districts; however, they were ultimately retained at their school and school district due to stated commitments to the community. Teachers felt a commitment to serving the community and helping people many times they felt were disadvantaged. Many participants described feelings of wanting to leave, but feeling pulled to stay due to the knowledge of students and their particular situations. Some teachers wanted to help students who came from small towns and wanted to encourage these students to grow and become greater. Working with high-need populations made some teachers feel committed to the community in which they were employed. Beyond demographics, many teachers expressed feeling "needed" or like they were able to help. The feel-good emotions kept teachers retained. Many teachers were committed due to the additional roles they took on with teams and clubs that students participated in. A commitment to these additional activities increased the level of commitment teachers had to the community. To validate the development of this commitment to community theme, the following subsidiary themes are presented: relationships with students and families,

135

holding leadership roles in extra-curricular activities and a sense of helping and/or giving back to the community.

Relationships with students and families.

The following subsidiary theme describes relationships with students and families participants experienced. Participants shared strong relationships with both students and their families, which were motivators for retention. Several teachers described instances when they were prepared to leave the district until they thought about their students, which changed their minds about leaving. Many felt needed by students and struggled with leaving them. Relationships teachers built with students and families were important to them. John shared that as a male teacher, he felt like he was a positive male role model, which many students needed. His goal is to make a positive impact on students so when they appreciate him as a teacher, it really motivates him to continue to work with them. John shared:

> I've got an opportunity to influence kids who may not have the best circumstances, to make them something that they can be. I like that. I like the fact that the kids like me and value me and enjoy spending time around me. I would say the kids have been very, very welcoming to me, which is probably a big part of the reason why I'm still there.

Kashvi shared that she experienced a major culture shock when moving from India to the United States. She shared that education is viewed very differently in the two countries and teachers are much more respected in India. In India, all students do not attend school. The students who attend school must pay for their education; and therefore, education is taken very seriously by parents and students. When she began in the U.S.,

she did not understand the poor behaviors of students. She originally felt great regret and wanted to leave and return to India. Since she came on a contract, she was determined to stay for two years, as she agreed. She was very concerned, but then, as time passed, something clicked for her. Kashvi looked in the air as she remembered and shared her experience:

> After four, five months when I taught them there, I started forming the relationship and I started coming to know what background my students are coming from. I really started feeling for them, that they really need that push. As a teacher, my job is to really teach them and push them. And so, I continued. I saw that these students, when they come to know you care for them, they can do anything for you. I have developed a relationship with my students for so many years now. I cannot leave them.

Quanaya thought about leaving her school district. She really wants to become an administrator and feels that in her small district, the likelihood that she would ever get the opportunity is slim because there are not many available. As a high school teacher, she built strong relationships with her students and talks to them often about her goals. Any time she mentioned goals that include relocating, the students would beg her to stay until they graduate. As she continues to gain new students and build relationships with them, the cycle continues. She continues to stay to see students graduate. Wanting to see students she taught succeed and graduate is a motivator for her retention. Similarly, Ashley shared that relationships with students and the community played a role in her retention. Ashley shared:

I actively participated with parents, students, and teammates in school functions

during and after school hours. I felt obligated to stay because of the relationships I

had made with students, parents, colleagues and the community. I wanted to see

the district grow and be a part of their change. I also wanted to be able to witness

my students' accomplishments and celebrate in their successes with them.

Holding leadership roles in extra-curricular activities.

The second subsidiary theme was holding leadership roles in extra-curricular

activities. Extracurricular activities such as coaching teams, serving as department chair,

leading clubs and other activities were described as motivators for retention. Teachers

who led clubs and teams built an additional level of commitment due to these additional

responsibilities, which they happily took on. The additional commitment served as a

major motivator for retained teachers.

Three participants have had the honor of being selected as their school's Teacher

of the Year in the past three years. Quanaya, Veronica and Nicole have all been named

Teacher of the Year, an honor they are proud of and one that comes with additional

responsibilities. As Teacher of the Year, these teachers are seen as leaders in their

schools and they will attend additional meetings and represent their schools. Being

named Teacher of the Year boosts their morale, self-efficacy, and confidence and has

been described as a motivator of retention.

Heather is in charge of the Beta Club, which is a responsibility she loves. She

smiles and gets very excited when she talks about the Beta Club and refers to it as "her

baby." The Beta Club is a major factor in her retention. She has been over the Beta Club

for seven years and is very proud of what she and students have been able to accomplish.

They are nationally recognized for their work and she describes her school's Beta Club as "a force to be reckoned with in South Carolina." She shared:

> [The Beta Club] is good for my kids because it's about community service, and so throughout the year, we're doing community service, and it's giving the kids an opportunity to give back to their community in different ways, which I also love. I love being able to go into the community and help.

The Beta Club receives a lot of support from the district. They are able to travel and represent their school in competitions and conventions. The school and district make sure there is funding to support her club, which means a lot to her. Linda's role as the reading coach helped retain her. She was looking for professional growth and, in her role, though she is still a "teacher," she is able to help coach teachers as they help to improve students' reading achievement. Nicole leads many activities in her school. In fact, when I came to meet her for the interview, Nicole was able to give a tour of the school and introduce me to students, teachers, and other staff at the school. It was clear that Nicole was a part of the school's daily fabric. Nicole leads the Black History Program each year, she works in the after-school program, which she loves, coaches the basketball team and started a yearbook club, which she currently leads. Nicole shared that she loves to be busy. She enjoys her school and all of the activities it offers students. Nicole "choiced" her dependent children into this school, so they participate in all of the activities she heads as well as other activities. These extra-curricular activities play a major role in her retention, as she feels very much committed to the school.

Altruistic Motivations.

The final subsidiary theme I observed, in relation to commitment to the community was Altruistic Motivations, or a sense of helping and/or giving back to the community. Several participants shared that as teachers, they enjoy helping people and providing a service that gives back to or helps the community. Whether they felt like they were employed in a district serving a community that was given a disservice when it came to education, or that they wanted to work with high populations of minorities or high populations of students who were economically disadvantaged, many teachers described feeling like they were serving a bigger purpose working in their current rural districts. They described feeling needed, respected, and like they were really making a difference. These feelings gave them an additional sense of commitment to the community that they were serving.

Heather shared that she loved her students and the community where she is employed, though she is from a totally different state. She believes students, especially those "of color" from small towns, are not given equal opportunities to succeed. She is passionate about serving the community and helping students achieve. Heather shared:

> I just think because we're a predominantly black district, I feel like I am helping
> my people push themselves to greatness and to show them, even if you come from
> a small town that you can be whatever you want to be. Let me show you some
> stuff because I'm not from here. So, let's talk about the world and not just South
> Carolina. Let's talk about opportunities outside of South Carolina. I'm not saying
> you can't come back to your city and give back because you definitely could. You

definitely should if you have the ability to and you want to, but you need to have

that option and you need to explore first to see who you are and then come back.

Ashley also shared that student demographics played a role in her retention. Working

with low-income minority students gave her a sense of purpose. Though she was not

from the community where she was employed, she felt that she was able to give back to a

community in need by being there and making sure students got the best that education

had to offer. She made it clear that she was in the district "for the children." She shared:

> I have to have that kind of mindset; these kids need this. If nobody else will speak
>
> for them, I will speak for them. If I see something out of order or something that
>
> the students needed, I always speak up.

John, who is from a different country, feels that many of the students in the community

he serves are given a disservice due to family structure. As a male, he described feeling

that he is a much-needed male role model for many students and he is needed in the

community. He has a hard time thinking about leaving the students that look up to him.

John described why he felt he needed to stay in his current school:

> A lot of our kids have so much turn-over in their lives, so much instability, the
>
> professional part of me feels I need to be there to provide some stability. Because
>
> I think some of our kids get the impression that people are constantly leaving
>
> them, walking out on them, for other things. I don't want them to think I walk out
>
> on them, you know, I feel like I'm needed there, they need the security and
>
> stability that I bring, when everyone else is kind of leaving and moving. So, I
>
> stay. I take that responsibility seriously. You know, these kids need an awful lot

and sometimes, the tougher the situation you're in, the harder it is to actually walk

away.

Teachers felt good about giving back to the community of feeling like they were helping.

This feeling was strong enough to retain teachers who may otherwise be tempted to

move. Feeling a sense of responsibility for the communities and students they served

was a strong motivator for retention.

The theme, Commitment to Community, was a powerful theme that emerged.

This theme is a description of true commitment to the mission of education. Teachers

described feeling as if they have a purpose, which is to help their students succeed

academically and socially. Teachers described a commitment and strong sense of

attachment to their students. This commitment is so deep, it overpowers negative

experiences teachers described facing that caused them to consider leaving the district.

Some teachers described feeling a commitment to serve underprivileged communities and

populations, while other teachers really get to know the lives of students they serve.

Participants described a feeling of responsibility to protect their students and the

community in which they are employed. In an effort to provide the best experience for

students, teachers take on additional responsibilities, such as coaching or leading a club,

to name a few. These additional responsibilities build deeper involvement in the

communities they serve and strengthen their commitment. The greater a teacher's

involvement in his or her professional career, the more likely they will be retained

(Chapman, 1983). In addition, accolades such as Teacher of the Year enhance the

teacher's sense of success and value, deepening their professional integration and

therefore, increasing the likelihood they will be retained. Commitment to the Community

is a theme that was described as a factor teachers consider when making decisions about continued employment.

Interpretation

The following is an interpretation of the study's findings after taking a step back and looking at the themes as a whole rather than independent parts. It is important to note that looking at the findings from one theme independently may not truly describe the conditions necessary for continued employment in a high-turnover rural district. Each of the four themes can stand alone as an independent theme with similar experiences specific to that individual theme. However, like the strands of a thick rope, the themes woven together are much stronger and make a bolder statement. In addition, the removal of any strand of the rope, similarly to the removal of any of the four themes, may decrease its influence and strength. Together and interdependent, the four themes describe participants' experiences and perceptions of motivators for retention. No theme alone was responsible for teachers' overall experience, and therefore, no theme alone was described as a motivator for retention.

For example, a sole unique perk may not be a strong enough motivator to retain a teacher if the teacher experiences low levels of positive experiences. A unique benefit, such as a district sponsoring a teacher, saving her $500 a month and in addition paying for her $1500 visa, was not described as the sole reason the teacher was retained. In fact, it was not even described as the greatest motivating factor. Instead, in that scenario, the teacher also felt a close connection to her colleagues who often assisted and mentored her. On the other hand, a close connection to her colleagues was not strong enough to retain the teacher. She considered leaving until the district also sponsored her. These

acts of support from her school community allowed her to feel comfortable enough to stay longer. Once she stayed longer, she was able to make close connections with students and their families, which enhanced her commitment to the community. Once she was comfortable with the community and committed to it, she could not see herself leaving. This is just one example illustrating the interconnectedness of the themes.

There is interconnectedness between all four of the themes presented in this chapter, with each theme supporting the others. There are multiple conditions and a combination of positive experiences described in the four themes that work in tandem to retain teachers. For example, commitment to the community was found to be significant; however, there also needed to be a level of comfort and satisfaction with the community, which encouraged teachers to be able to feel such a commitment to the community. Teachers with high commitment to the community described opportunities to lead activities beyond their assigned teacher roles; opportunities afforded to them by and supported by school and district leaders. Teachers that were committed to the community also described a high level of administrative support and a sense of professional autonomy. Some support included administrators taking care of behavior or irate parents, other support included providing academic or pedagogical support, and finally, some support came in the way of unique perks, such as districts helping to create affordable housing or districts supplementing salaries. Together these experiences worked collectively to retain teachers.

Professional Autonomy was found to be important and teachers often described positive experiences where they were able to be creative and work professionally without feeling micromanaged. Professional Autonomy enhanced the culture and climate and

144

also levels of comfort and satisfaction in the schools. Teachers described professional autonomy as a motivator to take on new responsibilities, which increased commitment to the community. Though teachers enjoyed professional authority, they did not want to be abandoned to complete responsibilities without support. There was a "fine line" school leaders had to walk in order to provide a high level of support to teachers without the perception of taking away a teachers' authority. When this occurred, the climate was positive, teachers became comfortable and did not look to move elsewhere and their commitment to the community deepened.

Complacency and comfort had many connections to other themes. Comfort is the part of the theme that is positive and worth a district trying to understand. Teachers that are retained because they are comfortable in the district due to job satisfaction is the ultimate goal. Having affordable and safe housing, a salary that allows one to live comfortably and also the ability to work in a district that provides special opportunities for their dependent children can cause a level of comfort teachers would not want to disturb. This level of comfort leads to retention. In addition, working in a district where colleagues are like family, administrators are supportive and teachers are provided professional autonomy may create a level of comfort and satisfaction within an environment. Comfort along with positive experiences from the other three themes led to true job satisfaction which positively influenced retention. Though complacency has a negative stigma when discussing work performance, when discussing stability and retention, complacency may positively influence retention. If a teacher is retained due to complacency, school leaders may have challenges retaining the teacher if demands are increased in order to increase student achievement. School leaders should constantly

145

work to have the most effective work force. Complacency is a mindset, and school leaders should continue to grow all teachers, to include complacent teachers. As a district builds their work force and eliminates shortages, teachers retained due to complacency may leave the district. Complacent teachers are likely not the most effective; however, the question remains, is it better to have a complacent teacher or no teacher? This is a question that is worth considering when analyzing this theme.

Culture and Climate has a connection to all other themes. Culture and climate describe the family-like feeling among colleagues, which was found to be a strong indicator for retention. It is important to note administrative support helped to facilitate the family-like feeling in the district. There were structural factors led by school leaders such as placing teachers on teams, assigning mentors and providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate as well as behaviors by school leaders such as visiting classrooms, building appropriate personal relationships with teachers and having a positive personality that contributed to the family-like feeling. Unique financial benefits improve the climate. Increased salary had been found to increase teacher satisfaction and the overall school climate. School culture and climate have connections to teacher comfort, which affects teachers' retention. Together, the four themes work to create overall job satisfaction for teachers, making them less likely to leave the district where they are currently employed.

It is important to note that this study highlights non-rural teachers' experiences in rural school districts. People's experiences are individual and specific to their interpretation. This study did not seek to make generalizations; however, it is interesting to analyze the findings looking at specific sub-groups. This sub-analysis does not seek to

generalize, but instead discuss some interesting similarities when comparing the responses of sub-groups.

This study included two male participants and nine female participants. The two male participants described experiences slightly different than female participants. According to Chapman (1983), gender can influence retention. Both male teachers described a high level of complacency as a motivator for retention. They both described negative experiences in past districts where they were not successful. When comparing past districts to their current districts, they described a "less-stressful" situation, where they perceived they had more professional control over what and how they were teaching. The male teachers both had issues with people in leadership roles and seemed to enjoy teaching in schools where they felt control or dominance.

The majority of the participants in this study were people of color. Seven participants were black, three were white and one was Indian. The seven black participants and one Indian participant are classified as people of color. In this study, all of the people of color directly or indirectly described giving back to the community as a factor for their retention. The two white males did not discuss giving back to the community at all. The one white female indirectly discussed having influence over students' lives. She also discussed TFA's mission, which was providing an appropriate education to all students. Her primary influencer of retention was her relationship with her principal. This observation was interesting as all of the communities studied included large populations of black people, with demographics ranging from 51% at the district with the lowest percentage of black people to 86% at the district with the highest percentage of black people.

Eight participants have been employed by more than one district. Three participants have only been employed at their current district, with both PACE teachers being in this category. Participants who have been employed at more than one district had another district to compare to their current district. These participants discussed autonomy and comfort more often than participants who only had an experience in their current district. Two of these teachers used the term "the grass is not always greener." Teachers with experiences only in their current district described administrative support and close relationships with leaders in the district. They described support they received through induction programs, from professional development, and from colleagues. These participants were all very satisfied with their current district and each made strong statements about not wanting to leave their current principals.

Summary

Presented in this chapter were the findings of the phenomenological study designed to investigate the perception of teachers in high-turnover rural school districts regarding conditions necessary for their continued employment. Also discussed in this chapter were: 1) the study sites where the data was collected was first described, 2) the eleven specific interview participants in this study using information provided by the teachers themselves during interviews, and other conversations (via email, text and phone calls) as well as my personal observations during the interactions, 3) the study's results and the four themes that were developed through the thematic analysis, and 4) a personal interpretation of the study's results.

Each of the sections within this chapter builds upon one another to illustrate the teachers' experiences in rural high-turnover districts. The first sections provided context

district and teacher descriptions. Once these were established, the overall purpose of this chapter was presented through the section titled Results. The following four themes were discussed: 1) Unique Perks, 2) Culture and Climate, 3) Complacency and Comfort, and 4) Commitment to Community. Each of these themes connects to the study's research questions, and these specific connections are discussed in Chapter Five, "Discussion and Implications."

As presented throughout the themes and discussion, there are many experiences that motivate teacher retention. Teachers are retained in districts where they feel respected, valued, trusted and supported. In addition, they are retained in districts that provide a positive work environment both professionally and personally. Districts that provide opportunities for teachers to become invested in the success of the district are able to retain teachers. Though some teachers were retained due to a lack of motivation to move, the overwhelming majority describe options outside of their current district but were retained because of the experiences detailed in this chapter. The study's findings illustrate conditions that lead to teacher satisfaction and retention. The high-turnover rural study sites were far from perfect environments, but there were conditions and positive experiences within the districts that ultimately retained teacher participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The preceding chapters have laid the foundation for the final chapter, "Discussion and Implications." Chapter One, Introduction, explained the purpose of the study and provided the background and significance of the study. Chapter Two, Literature Review, presented a breadth of existing knowledge that pertains to the study's research questions. Chapter Three, Methodology, described the methods by which the study was developed and executed. Chapter Four, Findings, is a detailed account of my interpretations from the thematic analysis, as well as information about the study site and participants. Building upon these foundations, Chapter Five, Discussion and Implications, will first present how the study's findings specifically connect to each of the four guiding research questions. Then a description of the implications to both practice and future research will be presented. A summary of the connections between the study's findings and existing literature is then presented. Finally, Chapter Five will close with a discussion of final thoughts and a brief summary.

This phenomenological study describes how eleven teachers retained in high-turnover rural districts in South Carolina perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment. The research questions specifically address the teacher participants' description of human resources policy factors, economic incentive factors, personal factors, and community factors. The aims of this research were to develop a rich description of how non-rural teacher participants experienced teaching in high-

turnover rural districts as well as to develop an understanding of how rural teachers, in general, can be retained.

This previously undiscovered story is significant because the literature often points out the difficulties of recruiting teachers to rural districts, especially non-rural teachers. Teachers generally look for employment within just thirteen miles of their hometown when seeking employment (Reininger, 2012). Small numbers of rural college graduates become teachers, which greatly diminishes the pool of applicants for rural school districts (Lavalley, 2018). In addition, research shows challenges retaining teachers from both rural and non-rural backgrounds in rural districts (Showalter et al., 2017). Teachers with non-rural backgrounds have higher turnover rates in rural districts (Reininger, 2012). Rural leaders depend on teachers recruited from outside of the local rural community to staff schools so it is important to understand what can be done to retain these teachers (Brown & Stevick, 2014). My study has provided insight regarding conditions necessary to retain non-rural teachers in rural school districts.

Research Questions

This section will address each research question individually, drawing on the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. Each of the following research questions will be connected to the study's findings:

1. How do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

2. How do teacher participants describe the influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

3. How do teacher participants describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

4. How do teacher participants describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

Subsidiary Research Question One: How do teacher participants describe the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

The teachers interviewed for this study described the influence of human resources policy factors in many different ways. As described in Chapter Two, human resources policy factors include administrator support and working conditions. These two major factors encompass many other factors to include principal support, principal leadership style, mentoring, professional development, limited resources, and limited staff members. These factors can act as a support or deterrent for teacher retention.

Ingersoll et al. (2014) found that administrative support is an important factor in retaining teachers. My study supports this literature. Administrator support was discussed often in interviews as an influencer of retention. Either teachers explicitly stated that administrator support was important or they described specific administrators who supported them, crediting the supportive administrator for their retention. My study found a wide range of support teachers received from principals and superintendents as very influential when teachers were deciding if they would continue employment in their current district. Teachers who began their career in their current district described the support they received early on as a motivator for retention. The support they received made them feel confident in their ability to teach, and in addition, the support made them

have a positive rapport with the school administration. Some teachers shared that they felt supported by administrators with student behavior. This support made teachers feel safe at school and able to fulfill their duties without major interruptions. Teachers described administrator support with irate parents. They described their administrators shielding them from angry parents and dealing with situations so that teachers could continue to teach. Providing meaningful professional development opportunities and pairing teachers with effective mentors were described as positive motivators for retention. School leaders providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate and bond was discussed often by participants. This time afforded teachers to build relationships with each other, which led to a positive climate, which in turn positively influenced teacher retention. Principals providing professional autonomy and allowing teachers to be professionals were described as motivators for retention. Professional Autonomy allowed teachers to feel trusted and respected. Professional Autonomy was described most often by teacher participants as a motivator for retention. School leaders building relationships with teachers was a motivator for retention. Teachers began to feel loyalty to leaders as their relationships with leaders grew.

Participants described the working conditions of the school that affected retention. Many participants described schools that lacked resources (financial and academic), up-to-date technology or facilities; however, teachers that described positive experiences with work conditions were more focused on the school's leaders' efforts to ensure students in the district received the best. Though these schools served high populations of low-income students, teachers described activities, clubs and field studies students were able to participate in due to the high level of support they received from

153

administrators, the superintendent, and the school board. Teachers interviewed did not

complain about supervising extra-curricular activities, but instead described these

additional responsibilities as motivators for retention. Many teachers interviewed were

had "bought in" to the mission of the district and were highly committed to serving the

community and students. These teachers happily took on challenges commonly

described in research as deterrents to retention, such as extra-curricular activities. In the

case of these participants, work conditions as a result of a lack of resources were bearable

as long as they received support from leaders and efforts were made to improve

conditions.

Subsidiary Research Question Two: How do teacher participants describe the

influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at

their school?

The teachers interviewed for this study described a variety of economic incentive

factors that influenced their retention. Economic incentive factors include benefits

provided by the human resources department or they are benefits provided to the teacher

as a result of their contract. Loan forgiveness provided by the federal or state

government as well as loan forgiveness provided by other agencies contingent on

teachers working in their current district are considered economic incentive factors.

Participants described their salary in a variety of ways. Base pay was discussed

and no participant complained about their base salary. A few participants described their

base salary as "good" or compared their current salary to past salaries they received in

other districts, sharing their current salary was higher. Salary did influence the retention

of participants as participants perceived their salary to be fair and therefore, they were not

as focused on salary as a motivator to leave. Participants described signing bonuses that were multi-year, which required them to continue employment at their current district in order to receive the full bonus. Participants did stay the duration of the time required to receive the full signing bonus. Loan forgiveness was provided in a variety of ways, to include funding from the state and the federal government after meeting requirements. Teachers that were members of TFA also received loan forgiveness through TFA's partnership with AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps provided "corp bucks" to teachers who fulfilled requirements with TFA. These "corp bucks" are used to pay off student loans or to fund additional degrees.

Retirement packages were found to motivate teachers who were vested. Retirement financially supports one for the rest of their lives and was perceived as an important goal to reach in one's career. Once one is retained in a retirement system long enough, they are able to retire and reap financial benefits. All careers do not include this option and therefore, are not able to compete with fields that do. Although a rural public school teacher's salary may be lower than a truck driver's salary, public school teaching has the benefit of retirement. Teachers that felt they were nearing retirement were motivated to stay due to the goal of retirement. Leaving a job with the perception of being close to retirement was unthinkable to some.

One district opted to create a *Teacher Village* after getting feedback from teachers regarding retention. The *Teacher Village* is a housing complex for teachers working in the district that opt to live in the area. Finding safe and affordable housing is a challenge for many rural teachers. Some leave the rural area to find suitable housing, so providing housing in the area was described as a positive motivator for teacher retention. The

Teacher Village will provide housing for 30 families. Teachers described the *Teacher Village* as a motivator for retention. In addition, teachers who received assistance finding housing through the district or through an agency, like TFA found this support as a motivator for retention. Quality, affordable and safe places to live were very important to teacher participants.

Subsidiary Research Question Three: How do teacher participants describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

Participants described personal factors that influenced their retention. Personal factors include those that are specific to an individual as well as their perception of their own self. Self-described preferences and personality types also are included as personal factors. Self-efficacy, preparation, commitment to the field, job satisfaction and personal characteristics are all encompassed within personal factors.

Participants described positive self-efficacy as a motivator of retention. Teachers that felt confident in their ability to teach and make a difference described a sense of satisfaction and happiness with their role. Participation in "Grow Your Own" programs in South Carolina was described by participants and were actually strategies that were successful in attracting and preparing teachers early on in their lives. Once these teacher participants were hired in rural schools and felt successful, they were retained. Many teacher participants described training and early experiences as positive motivators for retention. These experiences gave teachers the skill and immersion into the community they needed to feel successful. A feeling of success led teachers to feel more deeply committed. Teachers who had felt committed to the students, the mission of education or

the population they served described commitment as an influence on their decision to stay or leave from their current district. Districts were able to encourage a deepened level of commitment by increasing preferred responsibilities (ie: allow teachers to coach teams or lead clubs) and providing accolades (such as Teacher of the Year), among other things.

Many participants described a level of job satisfaction they reached that influenced their retention. Teachers simply did not go out looking for new positions because their needs were met at their current school districts, and therefore, they did not feel a need to move. Job satisfaction is often cited in the literature as one of the main predictors of retention and teachers in this study described a variety of variables that led to their satisfaction. Teachers were satisfied with their salary, workloads, the support they received from administrators, resources they were provided and the environment in which they worked. Overall satisfaction with the community and with the role they were in was a major motivator for retention.

Personal characteristics such as personality types affected retention. Many participants had "laid back" or "go-with-the-flow" personalities and were not quick to change. They described situations that upset them enough for them to consider moving but in the end, they described a sense of comfort they felt from the stability of staying employed in the same district. Some participants have never worked in other environments and were not interested in trying new environments as they understood "the grass is not always greener on the other side." Personalities of teachers played a role in the retention of teachers as many were not quick to change. Some participants suffered from a fear of rejection, which made them unlikely to attempt to move. Personal factors

such as low self-esteem did influence some participants' retention as they felt their current district was the only district where they could be successful.

Families and dependent children affected the teachers' decision making regarding employment. Participants including single men and women, single fathers, single mothers and full families with a mother, father and at least one child all described the influence of family on their decision to be retained. Teachers who had families in the district where they worked described their family being near as a positive influence on retention, especially if their spouse worked near the district. Teachers who were single parents and whose child(ren) were in the district or attending neighboring districts felt it was important to stay where they were in order to be near their child(ren). Parents who "choiced" their dependent child(ren) into schools or programs have to think about the impact a job relocation would have on of their child(ren). In most cases, the child(ren) would no longer be able to participate in the special program or on teams if parents opted to leave the school or district. In situations where full families moved to support the teacher's career, the teacher felt pressure to be retained and to be successful. Teacher participants described many personal factors that were taken into account when making decisions regarding continued employment.

Subsidiary Research Question Four: How do teacher participants describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school?

Teacher participants described community factors and their influence on teacher retention. Community factors include the small size of the rural town or district, the isolated geographical location, the professional and social isolation of rural districts and

158

the quality of life in the rural community. The community factors listed above define the rural towns and school district sites studied. These factors are often cited in research as the main culprits of teacher attrition.

Small size is one of the most common descriptors of a rural district. Participants describe the small size of the district; however, the small size was not described as a major factor in decision making. Participants described the pros and cons of small districts. In one instance, a teacher cited the very small class size as a bonus and motivator of retention. He averaged eight high school students per class, which he enjoyed. Due to small districts located in small communities or towns, there was a lot of nepotism, favoritism, and politics described by participants. In small districts, participants shared that many people are often related and therefore, it can negatively impact the environment. However, participants described school leaders as having outstanding character and high moral compasses, which positively influenced retention. Administrators addressed community factors related to the small size of the district that could have been perceived as major issues and teachers described feeling a high level of support and respect.

Participants, especially those who were the sole provider for a subject, described a feeling of professional isolation (ie: one elementary PE teacher in the full district). Due to the small size of rural districts, professional isolation was common and teachers often described instances where they were far from other people in similar roles. Although teacher participants did describe challenges with collaborating with others in similar roles, the participants also described many efforts administrators made to overcome boundaries. Participants described instances when guest speakers were brought in to the

district to help provide professional development in areas needing improvement; teacher leaders were identified and were paired with novice teachers, and in addition, mentors and instructional coaches visited schools and provided support to teachers needing assistance.

Working in an isolated location was often described by participants, but not as a major factor in decision making. Many participants described their long commute to work as a necessary hassle they dealt with in order to enjoy the social life in the city or suburban community in which they resided while still being able to work in and serve the rural community. These teachers did describe concerns with the community lacking activities, shops, and restaurants; however, these concerns were not described as major deterrents for retention. Teachers who lived in the rural communities where they worked described activities outside of the rural community in which they participated in regularly of trips they took in larger cities when they wanted to enjoy a faster-paced lifestyle. The overall quality of life for teacher participants was described in a positive light. Teachers shared in great detail all of the activities they participated in as a result of working in a rural school, which brought them great joy and satisfaction. Teacher participants described enjoyment in working with and building relationships with students and their families. In addition, they described positive experiences while in the communities where they were employed and therefore, many community factors were perceived as motivators for retention. Overall, participants described experiences with common community factors often labeled in research as motivators for attrition; however, participants did not perceive or describe these experiences as major factors in their decision making regarding continued employment.

Summary

The aim of this study was to answer the overarching research question: how do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment? Four subsidiary research questions were discussed in the previous section to fully develop an answer to this overarching research question. The first of the research questions addressed how teachers described the influence of human resources policy factors on their decision to continue employment at their school. In summary, the teachers described human resources policy factors in their schools favorably and considered them positive motivators for retention. Administrator support and satisfaction with working conditions were powerful experiences teachers described as positively influencing their retention. Along with these findings, the theme "culture and climate" that described the influence of the social mood of the district on teacher retention was also used to answer the research question. The second research question asks how teachers describe the influence of economic incentive factors on their decision to continue employment at their school. Economic incentive factors such as financial benefits, loan forgiveness, retirement packages, and affordable and safe housing were found to influence retention in a positive way. In addition to these findings, the theme Unique Perks, described the impact of the benefits teachers received on retention was also used to answer the research question. The third research question asks how teachers describe the influence of personal factors on their decision to continue employment at their school. Personal factors were unique and individualized and therefore were described very differently by teacher participants. Personal feelings of success, satisfaction, and commitment were very diverse across participants. Family

161

structure and the influence of family was also very diverse across participants. Overall, personal factors did influence decisions regarding retention. All four themes address personal factors and help to answer the research question. Finally, the fourth research question seeks to understand how the teachers describe the influence of community factors on their decision to continue employment at their school. Participants did not always describe the community factors such as the small size and isolated location of the district in a positive way; however, although not always favorable, these factors were not described by participants as major factors in decision making regarding continued employment.

Discussion

Chapter Four presented the four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis developed using coded data from 11 teacher participant interviews. The final interpretation of the study's findings was presented in the themes and subsidiary themes illustrated in Figure 5.1 and was discussed in Chapter Four. The connections to the overarching and subsidiary research questions are synthesized and presented in the preceding section. The final portions of Chapter Five provide recommendations to practice and research, relevance to the literature, and a synthesis of my final thoughts.

The themes that developed from my research stacked on top of each other like building blocks to collectively describe the perceptions of teacher participants. In Figure 5.1, each of the four themes represented one building block and altogether the blocks helped me understand the teachers' descriptions and perceptions of conditions necessary for continued employment. It is important to note, that for each individual teacher, the order of the blocks is different. Teachers have diverse experiences and circumstances

and therefore, the stack of building blocks is very individualized. What is most important to each individual teacher is going to vary. The findings of this research do not claim to have a prescription or recipe to fix the teacher retention problem.
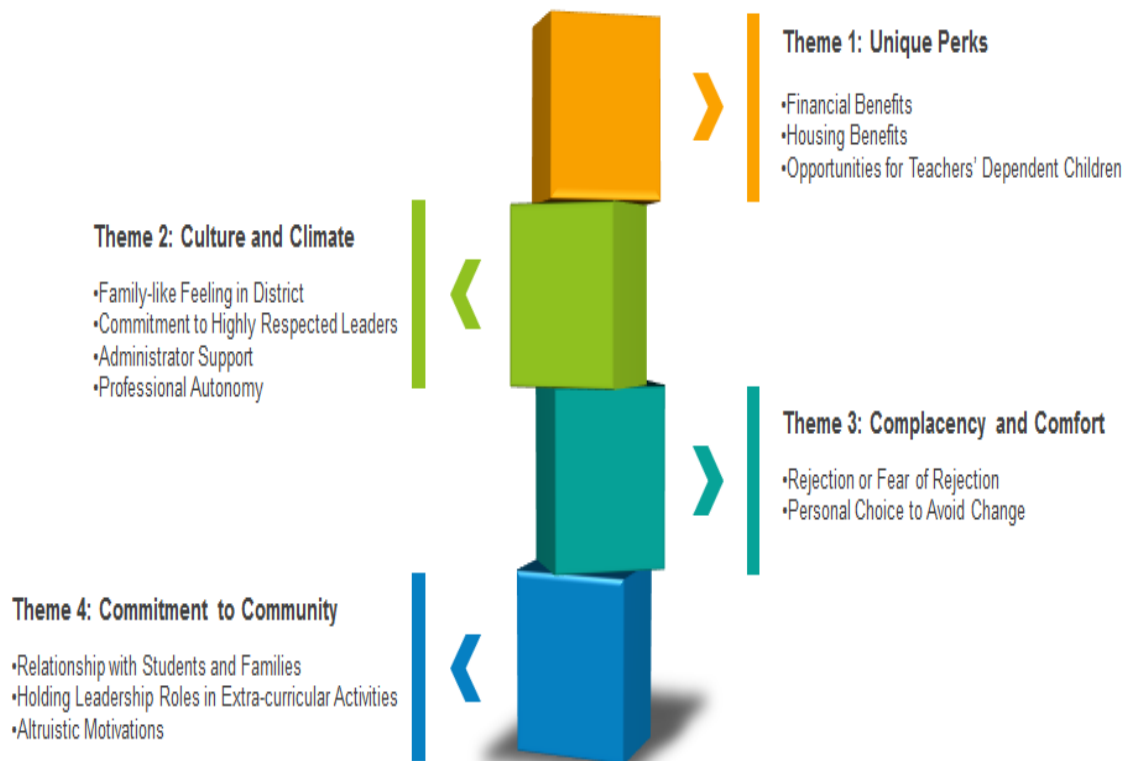

Theme 1: Unique Perks

•Financial Benefits
•Housing Benefits
•Opportunities for Teachers' Dependent Children

Theme 2: Culture and Climate

•Family-like Feeling in District
•Commitment to Highly Respected Leaders
•Administrator Support
•Professional Autonomy

Theme 3: Complacency and Comfort

•Rejection or Fear of Rejection
•Personal Choice to Avoid Change

Theme 4: Commitment to Community

•Relationship with Students and Families
•Holding Leadership Roles in Extra-curricular Activities
•Altruistic Motivations

Figure 5.1: Themes. Answering the overarching question: How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?

Figure 5.1 is not intending to imply any particular order to the building blocks. While Commitment to the Community may be the most important theme to one teacher, Unique Perks may be most important theme to another teacher. Figure 5.1 illustrates blocks stacked together to symbolize the significance of all individual pieces working together in tandem to motivate retention. The order of the blocks would vary for each teacher. Figure 5.1 illustrates my understanding; however, this is not the full picture,

there are additional "blocks" that can be stacked to strengthen teacher retention. Therefore, in this chapter, I provide recommendations for both practice and research that may continue to help build knowledge that will strengthen teacher retention in rural school districts.

The first of the four themes was Unique Perks. The subsidiary themes within this area were 1) financial benefits 2) housing benefits and 3) opportunities for teachers' dependent children. The faculty reported a wide variety of benefits that influenced their decision to remain employed in their current school district. The benefits had varying degrees of influence on teachers' decisions. Most of these benefits worked in tandem with other experiences in the district and collectively created conditions necessary for continued employment. It is important to note that the theme Unique Perks was one building block to the overall picture. Individual benefits alone were not strong enough to retain teachers; however, they were necessary in enhancing the experiences of teachers that led to a level of satisfaction necessary for continued employment.

Culture and Climate was the second theme developed from the thematic analysis, with the following four subsidiary themes: 1) a family-like feeling in the district 2) commitment to highly respected leaders 3) administrative support and 4) professional autonomy. The perception of the teachers is a positive culture and climate is a condition necessary for continued employment in a school district. Culture and Climate was one building block that connected to other themes to enhance the teachers' experience in the district and increase their likelihood of retention. The culture and climate stemmed from school leaders and was very influential in teachers' decision-making process.

The third of the four themes was Complacency and Comfort. Rejection or fear of rejection and making a personal choice to avoid change were the two subsidiary themes that were developed to further describe feelings of comfort and/or complacency and also to describe experiences that led teachers to these feelings. This theme presents a complicated perspective of teachers. Some level of satisfaction was a necessary condition for teacher retention. Satisfaction came as a result of complacency due to rejection or fear of rejection or comfort from true satisfaction in the district. Regardless of how the level of satisfaction was gained, it impacted teacher retention. Those who felt they could continue to work in the district and enjoy a level of satisfaction often continued. This theme was connected to other themes and together created conditions necessary for continued employment.

The final theme that emerged was Commitment to Community. There were three subsidiary themes within this theme: 1) relationships with students and families, 2) holding leadership roles in extra-curricular activities and 3) a sense of helping and/or giving back to the community. What is interesting about this theme in particular is most districts do not market the realistic experiences of rural teaching, such as teachers serving in additional roles or serving underprivileged communities. Many of the experiences in this theme are described as motivators for attrition in relevant literature; however, in this study these areas were motivators for retention. Teachers who enjoyed extra responsibilities and were able to serve an underprivileged community felt great pride and commitment, leading to retention. Of course, this theme was only one building block. Teachers received support and professional autonomy, which enhanced their experiences overcoming the challenges in the communities they served. The other three themes

worked collectively with Commitment to the Community to create conditions necessary for continued employment.

Together, these themes describe conditions necessary for continued employment in a rural school district from the lens of a teacher. As the researcher, I found some of the overarching concepts surprising and critical for understanding rural teacher retention. Specifically, I was surprised that base salary, older buildings and facilities and the long distance from larger cities were not mentioned nearly as often as administrative support, professional autonomy, and relationships with students and families. More than half of the teachers interviewed discussed professional autonomy and administrative support as strong motivators for retention. In addition, relationships with students, positive work environment and a true love for the community in which teachers served were described as strong motivators for retention. Though negative experiences were described, teachers were able to share experiences that mattered most to them when they ultimately made decisions regarding employment. The experiences that mattered most to teacher participants are detailed in the description of themes.

Each of these themes built on each other. Theme Two, which discusses Culture and Climate, is extremely significant and deeply connected to the other three themes. For example, having special opportunities for teachers' dependent children, as described in theme one, affected the culture and climate. When a teacher's dependent children participated in activities, it often caused the teacher to become more involved in the school and school district. The more time the teacher spent in the school district, the more connections they made with colleagues and the more the district began feeling like an extended family. Feeling more comfortable in the district and satisfied, as described

in theme three, made participants feel happy, which added to the positive atmosphere in the district. Having strong relationships with students and families in the district, as described in theme four also positively affects the culture and climate of the district. Not only did teachers enjoy the people they worked with, but they also enjoyed the community they served. A strong positive culture and climate then influenced how teachers described their districts. Experiences are based on people's perception, and when the perception is viewed through rose-colored shades, they likely are interpreted as positive experiences. Positive experiences, in turn, lead to teacher satisfaction, which leads to teacher retention. All themes were important and added additional layers of conditions and factors described by teachers as motivators for retention when they were making decisions about their employment. The discussion of each of the themes in Chapter Four further outlined the connections between the four themes.

What I found particularly inspiring about my findings is that there is hope for rural school districts. Many of the experiences that were most commonly discussed and described as factors that motivated teachers to stay were experiences that were controlled by school leaders. School leaders greatly influenced unique perks provided to teachers, the culture and climate of the school and district, teacher satisfaction and teacher relationships with the community. With the right school leader, a district could build a positive school environment and despite the many obstacles rural districts face, they could still retain teachers. Teachers are looking for an environment where they are respected, supported and appreciated. Now that we better understand conditions that lead to retention, school leaders in rural districts can address strategies to improve teacher experiences in order to increase teacher satisfaction and retention. These descriptions of

the teachers in high-turnover rural South Carolina public school districts can inform how others might address similar concerns. This study also opens the door for new research. The next section is a discussion of my recommendations for practice and research and how more building blocks can be added to our consciousness on the topic.

Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to add to an existing body of literature on the topic of rural teacher retention through the lens of the non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts. In addition, this study was intended to inform school leaders in rural school districts in South Carolina how teachers perceive their experiences and how their experiences ultimately influence their decision-making process. This study's findings are important for rural school districts because they can help school leaders in these districts have knowledgeable discussions regarding strategies to use to increase teacher retention. While it is one thing to have experts in the area share findings, it is a whole other one to get feedback from teachers experiencing the phenomenon. The study's implications to practice and research will be presented in the following section. Specifically, three implications are discussed. First, the findings from this study present a focus for school leaders and lawmakers in South Carolina to help improve teacher retention in high-turnover districts in the state. Second, the study's findings provide insight for all rural school leaders and lawmaker making decisions about rural school districts that impact retention. The third and final implication presented is how this study's findings have developed areas for future research on rural teacher retention.

Recommendations for Practice

Due to the study site, one of the greatest implications to the study's findings is the importance and application to school leaders and lawmakers at the study site. These findings are also valuable for school leaders in sites similar to the study site. The following are ways the study's findings can be applied by school leaders at the study site, as well as by school leaders at other similar sites.

1. *Districts should strategically provide more financial benefits, housing benefits and opportunities for teachers' dependent children to improve teacher retention.* This is recommended because in this study many participants interviewed described these unique perks and meaningful to them when making decisions regarding continued employment in their district. Unique perks can increase a district's value to an employee and can cause them to have greater reliance on the district. The influence of the unique perks a district uses to aid in teacher retention should be continuously evaluated and those perks shown to increase retention should be continued, while those making little or no difference could be improved or discontinued. It is also recommended that a team approach is used when developing ideas for unique perks in a given district. The team should include district level and school level administrators and teachers, brainstorming ideas and making decisions together. This is recommended because in this study, I found there were a variety of needs and interests discussed by teachers. It would be helpful for a district to receive feedback from the targeted population.

2. *Districts should continuously review and improve school climate and culture to ensure all teachers receive adequate support in order to feel comfortable and*

successful. District level surveys should be administered in order to gather data regarding the climate and culture of the schools and the district. This feedback should be reviewed and used to make improvements to the school climate and culture. Theme Two of this study suggested a positive school culture and climate will increase teacher retention. Based on my research, some examples of activities led by school leaders that improved the school climate and culture were: 1) implementing school activities that promote collegiality such as an annual "welcome back" or "orientation" event, 2) providing a high level of support to teachers, to include both novice and veteran, 3) building a positive rapport with teachers and learning about teachers on a professional and personal level and 4) providing professional autonomy, which allowed teachers to feel respected as professionals. School leaders need to receive training and support to better understand strategies to use to improve the culture and climate of the school. Tracking teacher retention in connection with surveys will give districts a sense of areas needing improvement. This should only be the first step. If data suggests that a school's climate and culture is lacking and leading to teachers leaving, it would be important to address school leaders individually. School leaders should receive training in improving climate and culture in targeted areas.

3. *Districts should strategically develop and support wellness programs inside the district and also connect teachers with available community resources focused on wellness and aiding with self-care.* This is recommended because in this study many teachers described high levels of stress that resulted from teaching, knowledge of unfortunate circumstances of students, as well as personal stress

from living far away from family and friends. Many teachers described a variety of outlets they had to help manage or overcome stressors. Some teachers described connections with grade-level teams, some had connections with mentors or administrators while some leaned on other colleagues for support, both professional and personal. Opportunities for teachers to interact with each other in a relaxed manner were described as meaningful. One participant discussed the importance of professional therapy on her ability to practice self-care. Through counseling, she was able to cope with stress using strategies she learned in sessions. As her stress decreased, her satisfaction increased. Comfort as described in Theme Three connects with job satisfaction. Teacher self-care, happiness, and satisfaction work in tandem and lead to increased levels of teacher retention. In order to increase happiness and comfort, districts should develop and support wellness programs that are designed to provide support to teachers that may feel a high level or stress or who may be overwhelmed. In addition, districts should connect teachers with available community resources dedicated to assisting with wellness and self-care.

4. *Districts should focus on administrative retention parallel to teacher retention.* This is recommended because in this study I found that administrative retention impacts teacher retention. Teachers prefer stability with their leadership. Administrative stability was described as beneficial in the full development of the direction and vision of a district. Teacher participants shared that with stability in leadership to include both the superintendent and the school principal, teachers were able to have a more clear understanding of expectations, which helped create

171

a positive culture and climate. Many teachers shared experiences where they became frustrated with instability of school leaders which caused dissatisfactions and increased their motivation to find employment elsewhere. Administrative stability is important when building culture and climate. Theme Two described a family-like feeling in the district, which takes time, stability and consistency to build. Theme Two also described a strong commitment to highly-respected leaders. School leaders that are successful in retaining teachers should be provided incentives to stay. Teachers expressed feelings of commitment to supportive school leaders. In this case, if these leaders leave, teachers lose some of their motivation to stay. Providing incentives for administrators to be retained is an important step in teacher retention.

5. *Districts should focus on funding and supporting instructional coaches, mentors and quality professional development targeting the needs of rural teachers.* This is recommended because in this study several teachers shared positive experiences in their districts as a result of support from instructional coaches, mentors administrators and other school leaders who provided support and guidance. Theme Two addressed the positive impact that administrative support has on teacher retention. Administrative support was described as providing quality mentoring programs for new teacher, providing time to collaborate with instructional coaches and providing meaningful professional development, especially opportunities to learn about rural specific needs. Teachers described these experiences as positive and as motivators for continued employment. In South Carolina, specifically, many districts receive funding from the Rural

172

Retention Initiative. Many districts use these funds to support salary bonuses and base salary increases. The findings of my study, similar to the findings of other studies, show that salary matters in retention, but other factors matter too. Therefore, in addition to using funds to increase salaries, districts should use funding to provide additional support such as instructional coaches, mentors and professional development opportunities.

6. *School districts should realistically market the highlights and challenges of rural teaching.* This is recommended because in this study I found that teachers who had opportunities to visit their district before accepting their position knew what to expect and had time to prepare for challenges they would face. Marketing realistic challenges will help recruit teachers that are committed to the community as described in Theme Four. Teachers who are committed to the community are more likely to be retained. Many teacher participants shared altruistic motivations for their retention; specifically describing the enjoyment they get from giving back to and helping disadvantaged communities. As a consumer, shopping for a job, it is important for teachers to know exactly what to expect. It is important to set realistic expectations for teachers as they need to be prepared for the environment where they are going to work. This recommendation could be difficult to implement as districts would need to think carefully about how they describe and market their district highlighting the perfect combination of both the advantages and challenges of their district.

Recommendations for Research

The following section provides researchers implications for how the study's findings have developed areas for future research on rural teacher retention. Studies, such as those described would further the knowledge of school leaders and lawmakers regarding best practices for talent management and could assist districts in their efforts to improve retention and attrition for rural teachers. Although there is a healthy body of research on teacher retention, this literature is lacking in both depth and breadth regarding experiences as described by faculty members working in high-turnover rural districts. For this reason, the following recommendations suggest new possibilities for research, as well as a focus on rural educators' perception of their experiences:

1. *Qualitative studies are recommended to further develop the teacher perception of rural teacher experiences that lead to continued employment in high-turnover rural school districts.* The understanding of the teacher perception of rural retention in South Carolina is limited to the results of this study; therefore, further investigating teacher perception of rural retention is recommended. My limited sample study provided some insight; however, continued research in this area is recommended. Using this study's findings to guide a framework, additional rural teachers from different districts in South Carolina could be interviewed using questions guided by the four themes that emerged through this study's analysis. The outcomes of such study would offer another perspective and add to the scholarly understanding of rural teacher retention and further inform school leaders regarding motivations of rural teacher retention.

174

2. *Quantitative research using survey data is recommended to investigate leader qualities that increase teacher retention.* This study's findings describe the importance of the role of the school leader in connection to unique perks provided, culture and climate created, comfort as a result of job satisfaction and a commitment to the community. Each theme has a connection to the leadership at the school. Teachers described experiences with leaders that led to their retention. It is currently unknown if similar experiences exist among a greater sample. It is recommended that survey data be collected from a large sample of rural teachers to investigate leader qualities (personality types, leadership styles, support, etc.) that influence decisions regarding retention. An example of how this could be conducted would be sending an electronic survey to as many retained rural teachers as possible to report leader qualities that led to their job satisfaction and ultimate decision to continue employment in their district. Extending the study to a greater number of participants, or respondents would add breadth to the scholarly body of knowledge on the topic.

3. *Studies using qualitative design are recommended to understand the rural administrators' perception of rural administrator retention.* This study investigated teacher perception of teacher retention; however, the perception of administrator retention based on administrators' experiences in rural districts is unknown. This study found that administrator retention and stability affects teacher retention. Though rural administrator retention is discussed and researched less than rural teacher retention, rural administrator retention is important as well and has many implications for teacher retention and student

success. Administrators affect many aspects of the teachers' experience, so a greater understanding of administrator retention from the administrators' lens is recommended. Using this framework as a guide, a phenomenological study design could be developed to investigate motivators of rural administrator retention. This study would deepen our understanding of administrator retention, which impacts teacher retention. School leaders could use this insight to develop necessary steps to retain effective administrators, which in turn would positively impact teacher retention.

4. *Mixed methods studies are recommended to develop a better understanding of the utility of the range of unique perks (e.g. financial benefits, housing benefits, and opportunities for teachers' dependent children) that rural districts offer.* This study found that across rural districts, there are a variety of unique perks provided to teachers, which are motivators for retention. A better understanding of the unique perks that are offered across rural districts in recommended. In addition, a better understanding of which unique perks are most effective in retaining teachers needs to be investigated. There are a wide range of benefits provided to rural teachers; however, it is not well-know which unique perks are the best investment for rural districts. An example of how this could be conducted would be sending an electronic survey to as many retained rural teachers as possible to report unique perks that have led to their continued employment in their district. Once a list of unique perks was created from respondents, the researcher could select a smaller sample of respondents to interview further and dig deeper regarding the impact of the perks on retention. Such a study would add to the

depth and breadth of scholarly understanding of rural retention. As a result, school leaders would have insight into which perks are most impactful, providing the best "bang for their bucks".

Relevance to the Literature

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, there has been little research on teacher perception of their experiences in high-turnover rural schools that impact their decision-making process in regards to continued employment in their current district. The findings of my study have developed new information with interesting parallels to existing literature. This section is a presentation of these parallels and the study's relevance to existing research. The following areas of research will be discussed: 1) the impact of financial benefits, 2) the rural work conditions 3) self-efficacy and job satisfaction, 4) commitment to the community, and 5) the impact of culture and climate.

Overall, the findings of my study are validated by the existing literature on rural teacher retention. The teachers interviewed described their experiences and shared their perception of conditions necessary for continued employment. The teachers shared experiences related to being rural teachers and many of their experiences are commonly found in research. However, some experiences, though commonly found in relevant literature were perceived in different ways by teacher participants. In this section, I will discuss my findings' relevance to literature.

The impact of financial benefits was described by teacher participants. My study, similar to the studies of Tran and Smith (2018a) and Allegretto et al. (2018) found that financial compensation, to include salaries and bonuses were important to teachers, but these factors are not as significant in isolation. Work conditions and the culture and

climate of the district are also very important in addition to salary. Base salary is important for teachers to consider teaching as a career; however, when looking at retention, financial benefits must be accompanied by other factors to positively impact retention.

Futernick (2007) found that work conditions had a greater impact on teachers' decision-making in regard to retention than salary. Work conditions were described by teacher participants in this study as important factors in the decision-making process. Similar to the findings of Zost (2010), teachers described enjoyment in having greater professional autonomy, more opportunities for decision-making and greater participation with students as motivators for retention. Some teachers in this study did express disappointment in lack of opportunities for growth in small rural districts. Though they were able to participate in leadership activities, actual career advancement positions were not always available. Monk (2007) and Davis (2002) described supervising extra-curricular activities as additional demands reported as factors for attrition. Supervising extra-curricular activities with high levels of professional autonomy and support were found to be motivators for retention in this study. These additional responsibilities helped further engage teachers in the community and strengthened their commitment to the community and district.

Adams and Woods (2015) described high self-efficacy as a motivator for retention. Self-efficacy was a feeling described by participants in this study as a motivator for retention. Adams and Woods (2015) similar to this study found schools were more likely to retain teachers who successful and efficient. Some participants in this study experienced lower levels of self-efficacy in past districts and appreciated their

current district for providing support and boosting their confidence, a process that ultimately motivated their retention. Self-efficacy was built through administrative support as well as building relationships with students, colleagues and the community. Teachers are able to better cope with stressors in this type of environment, which positively impacts retention.

Shuls and Maranto (2014) found that appeals to mission work may impact teacher retention better than appeals to financial benefits. This study found that appeals to mission work, as described in Theme Four, Commitment to the Community is a motivator for retention. Though most rural districts do not market their district in this way, instead often opting to market an unrealistic experience, the findings of this study suggest that marketing the mission work of serving an underprivileged rural community will help recruit teachers who are interested in and committed to serving this specific type of community. Teachers that are committed to the community and enjoy giving back and helping are more likely to be retained in the rural environment.

Ingersoll et al. (2014) described the importance of a positive culture and climate as a strategy for teacher retention. This study had similar findings. A positive culture and climate are created through a high level of administrative support (Burke et al., 2013). The impact of the school's culture and climate was described by teacher participants, and administrators play a critical role in creating and maintaining a positive environment. Harris (2015) similar to this study found that a clear direction provided by administrators was vital in maintaining a positive school culture. In addition, this study found that administrator stability is important in establishing a clear direction and vision, which is necessary for a positive school culture and climate. Keiser (2011) found that

geographic and social isolation was a major caused for rural teacher retention; however, this study found a positive culture and climate may diminish the impact of isolation. Teachers described positive relationships among the district where colleagues "felt like family" as a motivator for retention. Though teachers were physically isolated, they also felt connected to people they worked with, which gave them relief from what may otherwise have felt lonely. Culture and climate and its impact on teacher retention is heavily researched and this study's finding were validated by relevant literature on the topic.

Summary and Final Thoughts

This phenomenological study illustrates how non-rural teachers perceive and describe conditions necessary for continued employment in high-turnover rural school districts. Teachers generally opt to teach in an area similar to where they were raised (Reininger, 2012). With rural areas experiencing such a large teacher shortage, it has become important for rural leaders to recruit teachers beyond their own rural communities (Brown & Stevick, 2014). In order for districts to reach high levels of student achievement, they need stability within their work force. It is crucial for rural districts to work beyond recruiting non-rural teachers, but also work to retain them (Ingersoll et al., 2014). In this study, I specifically investigated non-rural teachers' perception of organizational, human resources, personal and community factors that influence their decision to continue employment in a rural area. Four themes were developed: 1) Unique Perks, 2) Culture and Climate, 3) Complacency and Comfort, and 4) Commitment to the Community.

As synthesized in the preceding chapter, these four themes illustrate how 11 non-rural teachers in high-turnover school districts in South Carolina described their experiences and perceptions of rural teaching in regard to motivators for retention. Chapman's (1983) Model of the Influences of Teacher Retention, as well as more recent studies on teacher retention supporting his model framed the significance of this study.

The findings of this study show that there are obstacles for school leaders in rural districts in regard to rural teacher retention; however, there are strategies that could be used to improve teacher retention in rural areas. These non-rural teachers describe challenges working in rural districts, but they also describe many positive factors and conditions they experience, which ultimately has led to their retention. Additional experiences and conditions of teachers and administrators that motivate retention are areas that warrant further study as described in the earlier section as recommendations for future research.

The study's findings are limited as they are built upon a small body of knowledge from teacher perception and the themes emerged have not been thoroughly investigated. This area of research has implications the retention of non-rural teachers working in rural areas. The overarching message is conditions, not location heavily influences rural teacher retention. This finding provides hope and gives direction for next steps in improving education for rural districts; however, it needs to be examined further. The findings are specific to the limited sample of teachers interviewed; however, its potential implications to improve rural teacher retention warrant both discussion and further research within other areas.

The generalization of this study's findings is limited, and therefore, the results cannot be applied to other states or districts not represented; however, this study illustrates the significance of aforementioned conditions necessary for continued employment of non-rural teachers in rural school districts as reported by self-described non-rural teacher participants. Although the perceptions and descriptions presented here are only those of 11 non-rural teachers representing six high-turnover rural school districts in South Carolina, their descriptions of personal experiences have highlighted topics that can have a major impact on the future success of rural school districts in South Carolina in regard to rural teacher retention, as well as provide information for other school leaders, policymakers, researchers and practitioners to use to benefit and advance the knowledge of rural teacher retention.

The findings of this study provide direction and hope for rural districts. While rural school districts continually face teacher shortages, to include both teacher recruitment and teacher retention challenges, the findings of this study show some optimism. There are many non-rural teachers who experience a high level of job satisfaction in high-turnover rural districts in South Carolina. Many studies highlight the rural environment as a deterrent for rural retention, especially for teachers with non-rural backgrounds, but these non-rural teachers described positive experiences teaching in rural environments. They candidly shared conditions necessary for their continued employment, and as a result, we now have a better understanding of where we can invest our resources, both financial and human. Future studies digging deeper into rural teacher retention can help us have a greater understanding regarding how we can better invest resources to continue to improve teacher retention and the related issues that are so

necessary in helping build South Carolina's K-12 education system. This study highlights the stories of people from all over the world, who have career and location options, and they choose and continually choose to teach in a rural district in South Carolina. Their stories and experiences are encouraging and remind me that rural schools in South Carolina have a lot to offer. We just have to take time and make sound decisions to retain and capitalize on the great talent we have in these settings.

REFERENCES

Adams, B. L., & Woods, A. (2015). A model for recruiting and retaining teachers in Alaska's rural K–12 schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *90*(*2*), 250–262.

Aguenza, B. B., & Som, A. P. M. (2012). A conceptual analysis of social networking and its impact on employee productivity. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, *1*(2), 48-52.

Allegretto, S., & Mishel, L. (2018). The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high. *Economic Policy Institute*.

Aragon, S. (2016). Teacher shortages: what we know. Teacher Shortage Series. *Education Commission of the States*.

Azano, A. P., & Stewart, T. T. (2015). Exploring place and practicing justice: Preparing pre-service teachers for success in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 30*(9), 1-12.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, *84*(*2*), 191.

Barnes, G., Crowe, E., & Schaeffer, E. (2008). What keeps good teachers in the classroom? Understanding and reducing teacher turnover. *Alliance for Excellent Education*.

Beesley, A., Atwill, K., Blair, P., & Barley, Z. (2010). Strategies for recruitment and retention of secondary teachers in central U.S. rural schools. *The Rural Educator*, 31(2), 1-9

Berry, A. B., Petrin, R. A., Gravelle, M. L., & Farmer, T. W. (2011). Issues in special

    education teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development:

    Considerations in supporting rural teachers. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*,

    30(4), 3-11.

Birkeland, S. E., & Johnson, S. (2003). The schools that teachers choose. *Educational*

    Leadership, 60(8), 20-24.

Bishay, A. (1996). Teacher motivation and job satisfaction: A study employing the

    experience sampling method. *Journal of Undergraduate Sciences*, 3, 147-154.

Bloland, P, & Selby, T (1980). Factors associated with career change among secondary

    school teachers: A review of the literature. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 5*(3)*,

    13-24.

Bolin, F. (2007). A study of teacher job satisfaction and factors that influence it. *Chinese*

    Education and Society, 40(5), 47-64.

Borman, G., & Dowling, N. (2008). Teacher Attrition and Retention: A meta-analytic

    and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(*3*), 367-

    409. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/stable/40071133

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2009). The

    influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions. Washington, DC:

    Calder Urban Institute.

Bridge, J., Cunningham, C., & Forsbach, J. (1978). Faculty stability and effective

    schools. *NASSPPA Bulletin*, 62, 36-41.

Brown, K. D., & Stevick, D. (2014). The globalizing labor market in education:
Teachers as cultural ambassadors or agents of institutional isomorphism?. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *89*(1), 4-16.

Brownell, M. T., Bishop, A. M., & Sindelar, P. T. (2018). Republication of "NCLB and the demand for highly qualified teachers: Challenges and solutions for rural schools". *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 37(1), 4-11.

Buckley, J., Schneider, M., & Shang, Y. (2004). The Effects of School Facility Quality on Teacher Retention in Urban School Districts. *National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities*.

Burke, P., Schuck, S., Aubusson, P., Buchanan, J., Louviere, J., & Prescott, A. (2013). Why do early career teachers choose to remain in the profession? The use of best-worst scaling to quantify key factors. *International Journal of Education*, 62, 1- 10.

Butler, T. (2013). Review of the book Rainbow pie: A redneck memoir, by J. Bageant, and Those who work, those who don't: Poverty, morality, and family in rural America, by J. Sherman. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 2*8(5), 1-4. Retrieved from http://jrre. vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/28-5.pdf

Caulder, R. (2017). I am the teacher South Carolina wants to retain, and I am barely hanging on. *The State Newspaper*.

Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (2018), South Carolina annual educator supply and demand report. Retrieved from https://www.cerra.org/uploads/1/7/6/8/17684955/2017-18_supply_demand_report.pdf

Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, & Advancement (2017). A report on the fall

2016 supply and demand survey. Retrieved from

https://www.cerra.org/uploads/1/7/6/8/17684955/2016_supply_demand_report.pdf

Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, & Advancement (2018). Key teacher data

from CERRA's South Carolina annual educator supply & demand reports 2014-15

to 2017-18

Retrieved from https://www.cerra.org/uploads/1/7/6/8/17684955/4-

year_sd_data_17-18_updated.pdf

Chapman, D. W. (1983). A model of the influences on teacher retention. *Journal of

teacher education*, *34*(5), 43-49.

Chapman, D. W. (1984). Teacher retention: the test of a model. *American Educational

Research Journal*, *21*645-658.

Chapman, D., & Hutcheson, S. (1982). Attrition from teaching careers: A discriminant

analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 1, 93-105.

Charters, W, Jr. (1970). Some factors affecting teacher survival in school districts.

American Educational Research Journal, 7, 1-27.

Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., & Rockoff, J. E. (2014). Measuring the impacts of teachers

I: Evaluating bias in teacher value-added estimates. *American Economic

Review*, *104*(9), 2593-2632.

Cochran-Smith, M., Cannady, M., McEachern, K., Piazza, P., Power, C., & Ryan, A.

(2011). Teachers' education, teaching practice, and retention: A cross-genre review

of recent research. *Journal of Education*, 191(2), 19-31.

Collins, T. (1999). Attracting and retaining teachers in rural areas. *ERIC Digest*.

Corwin, R. (1965). A sociology of education: Emerging patterns of class, status, and

 power in the public schools. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing*

 among five approaches (4th ed.)*.* Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating

 quantitative and qualitative research. (4th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method

 approaches.

Cui-Callahan, N. A. (2012). *An examination of job satisfaction among urban high school*

 teachers. University of Nevada, Reno.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keeping good teachers: Why it matters, what leaders can

 do. *Educational leadership*, *60*(8), 6-13.

Davis, M. S. (2002). Teacher retention and small rural school districts in Montana. *Rural*

 Educator, *24*(2), 45-52.

Dee, T. S., & Goldhaber, D. (2017). Understanding and addressing teacher shortages in

 the United States. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute. Retrieved from

 https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2017/04/es_20170426_understandin

 g_and_addressing_teacher_shortage s_in_us_pp_dee_goldhaber.pdf

DeMarrais, K. (2004). Qualitative interview studies: Learning through

 experience. *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the*

 social sciences, *1*(1), 51-68.

Dupriez, V., Delvaux, B., & Lothaire, S. (2016). Teacher shortage and attrition: Why do

 they leave?. British Educational Research Journal, 42(1), 21-39.

Dwyer, C. A. (2007). America's challenge: Effective teachers for at-risk schools and students. *National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality*. Retrieved from http://www.tqsource.org/publications/NCCTQBiennialReport.pdf

Eddins, G. (2012). *The influence of principal gender, teachers' years of experience and retention on teacher perceptions of principal leadership style, qualities, and job satisfaction.* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri).

Eppley, K. (2009). Rural schools and the highly qualified teacher provision of No Child Left Behind: A critical policy analysis. *Journal of Research in Rural Education 24*(4), 1-11.

Falk, W, Falkowski, C., & Lyson, T. (1981). Some plan to become teachers: Further elaboration and specification. Sociology of Education, 54, 64-69.

Ferillo, B., Rainey, J. S., Wehunt, L., Sibert, B., & Conroy, P. (2006). Corridor of shame: The neglect of South Carolina's rural schools.

Fiedler, F. (1972). The Effects of Leadership Training and Experience: A Contingency Model Interpretation. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 17*(4), 453-470. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/stable/pdf/2393826.pdf

Fishman, D. (2015). School reform for rural America. *Education Next*, *15*(3), 9–15.

Futernick, K. (2007). A possible dream: Retaining California teachers so all students learn. (Vol. 2, No. 10). Sacramento: California State University.

Geverdt, D. (2018). *Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates Program (EDGE): Locale Boundaries File Documentation, 2017 (NCES 2018-115).* U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education

Statistics. Retrieved from

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/docs/EDGE_NCES_LOCALE_2017.pdf

Geverdt, D., (2018). *Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE)
Geocodes: Public Schools and Local Education Agencies, 2016-2017 (NCES 2018-
080).* U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for
Education Statistics.

Goldhaber, D. (2015). Teachers clearly matter, but finding effective teacher policies has
proven challenging. *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*, 157-
173.

Goldring, R., Taie, S., & Riddles, M. (2014). Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results
from the 2012-13 Teacher Follow-Up Survey. First Look. NCES 2014-
077. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Gonzalez, L., Brown, M., & Slate, J. (2008). Teachers who left the teaching profession:
A qualitative understanding. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(1), 1-11.

Goodpaster, K., Abedokun, O., & Weaver, G. (2012). Teacher's perceptions of rural
STEM teaching: Implications for rural teacher retention. *Rural Educator*, 33(3), 9-
22.

Guarino, C. M., Santibañez, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and
retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational
Research*, *76*(2), 173–208.

Hammer, P. C., Hughes, G., McClure, C., Reeves, C., & Salgado, D. (2005). Rural
teacher recruitment and retention practices: a review of the research literature,

national survey of rural superintendents, and case studies of programs in Virginia. *Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia (NJ1)*.

Hanushek, E. A. (1992). The trade-off between child quantity and quality. *Journal of political economy*, *100*(1), 84-117.

Harmon, H. L. (2001). Attracting and retaining teachers in rural areas.

Harris, B. (2015). Retaining new teachers: How do I support and develop novice teachers? Alexandria, VA: *ASCD*.

Hays, D. G., & Wood, C. (2011). Infusing qualitative traditions in counseling research designs. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *89*(3), 288-295.

Hudson, P., & Hudson, S. (2008). Changing preservice teachers' attitudes for teaching in rural schools. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 33*(4), 67-77. doi:10.14221/ajte.2008v33n4.6Hyatt, S. E. (2017).

The private university faculty perspective of community college transfer students: an ethnographic interview study. (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina).

Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational leadership*, *60*(8), 30-33.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American educational research journal*, *38*(3), 499-534.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2002). The teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription. *NASSP Bulletin*, *86*(631), 16–31.

Ingersoll, R. (2003). Is there really a teacher shortage? *CPRE Research Reports*. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/37

Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2012). Retaining teachers: How preparation

 matters. *Educational Leadership*, *69*(8), 30-34.

Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & Stuckey, D. (2014). *Seven trends: The transformation of the*

 teaching force. Updated April 2014. CPRE Report # RR-80. Philadelphia, PA:

 Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

Jimerson, L. (2003). The competitive disadvantage: teacher compensation in rural

 America. *Policy Brief.*

Johnson, S. M., & Birkeland, S. E. (2003). Pursuing a "sense of success": New teachers

 explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, *40*(3), 581-

 617.

Johnson, S. M., Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2012). How context matters in high-need

 schools: The effects of teachers' working conditions on their professional

 satisfaction and their students' achievement. *Teachers College Record*, *114*(10), 1-

 39.

Keiser, D. R. (2011). *Teacher retention in a rural school district* (Doctoral dissertation,

 University of Virginia).

Kersaint, G., Lewis, J., Potter, R., & Meisels, G. (2007). Why teachers leave: Factors

 that influence retention and resignation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6),

 775- 794.

Krumboltz, J. (1979). A social learning theory of career decision making. In A. M.

 Mitchell, G. B. Jones, & J. D. Krumboltz (Eds.), Social Learning and Career

 Decision Making, (pp. 19-49).

Lauglo, J. (1975). Teachers' social origins, career commitments during university, and occupational attitudes. *Sociology of Education*, 48, 287-307.

Lavalley, M. (2018). "Out of the Loop" *Rural schools are largely left out of research and policy discussions, exacerbating poverty, inequity, and isolation.* National School Boards Assoc. Center for Public Education.

Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2010). Practical research: Planning and design (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Lemke, J. C. (1994). Teacher induction in rural and small school districts.

Liu, E., Johnson, S. M., & Peske, H. G. (2004). New teachers and the Massachusetts signing bonus: The limits of inducements. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *26*(3), 217–236.

Loeb, S., Darling-Hammond, L., & Luczak, J. (2005). Teacher turnover: The role of working conditions and salaries in recruiting and retaining teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *80*(3), 44-70.

Lortie, D. (1975). Schoolteacher: A sociological study. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lowe, J. M. (2006). Rural education: Attracting and retaining teachers in small schools. *Rural Educator*, *27*(2), 28–32.

Lowell, B. L. (2000). H-1B temporary workers: Estimating the population.

Lowery, R. M., & Pace, B. G. (2001). Preparing suburban preservice teachers for rural schools. *Rural Educator*, *23*(2), 32-36.

Ma, X., & MacMillan, R. (1999). Influences of workplace conditions on teacher's job satisfaction. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(1), 39-47

Maranto, R., & Shuls, J. V. (2012). How do we get them on the farm? Efforts to improve rural teacher recruitment and retention in Arkansas. *Rural Educator*, *34*(1).

Marinell, W. H., & Coca, V. M. (2013). " Who Stays and Who Leaves?" Findings from a Three-Part Study of Teacher Turnover in NYC Middle Schools. *Online Submission*.

McClure, C., & Reeves, C. (2004). Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention Review of the Research and Practice Literature. *AEL*.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. (2016). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. San Francisco.

Microsoft Corporation (2017). A rural broadband strategy: connecting rural America to new opportunities. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Milanowski, A. (2003). An exploration of the pay levels needed to attract students with mathematics, science and technology skills to a career in K-12 teaching. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(50).

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller, L. C. (2012). Situating the rural teacher labor market in the broader context: A descriptive analysis of the market dynamics in New York state. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 27*(13), 1-31. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/ uploads/2014/02/27-13.pdf

Monk, D. H. (2007). Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in rural areas. *The Future of Children*, 155-174.

Murphy, P. J., & Angelski, K. (1997). Rural teacher mobility: A Report from British Columbia. *Rural Educator*, *18*(2), 5-11.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018). Overall starting salary for class

of 2017 remains flat. Retrieved from

http://www.naceweb.org/aboutus/press/2018/overall-starting-salary-for-class-of-

2017-remains-flat/

National Center for Education Statistics (2016) Selected statistics from the public

elementary and secondary education universe: School year 2014-15. Table 4.

Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics

National Center for Education Statistics, U. S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Locale*

classifications and criteria. Retrieved from

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/docs/LOCALE_DEFINITIONS.pdf -

National Center for Education Statistics (2015) Public school teacher attrition and

mobility in the first five years: results from the first through fifth waves of the

2007–08 beginning teacher longitudinal study.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and

practice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Perrachione, B. A., Johnsen, G. J., & Rosser, V. J. (2008). Why do they stay?

Elementary teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction and retention. *The Professional*

Educator, *32*(2), 1.

Prasad, P. (2015). *Crafting qualitative research: working in the postpositivist traditions.*

Reference & Research Book News, (3). 86.

Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the

First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study.

(2015). NCES.

Reeves, C. (2003). Implementing the no child left behind act: Implications for rural schools and districts. *Educational Policy Publications.*

Reininger, M. (2012). "Hometown disadvantage? It depends on where you're from: Teachers' location preferences and the implications for staffing schools." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 34*(2).

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, J. C. (1996). Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement.

Schaefer, A., Mattingly, M., & Johnson, K. 2016. Child poverty higher and more persistent in rural America. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy. http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1265&context=carsey

Schram, T. H. (2003). *Conceptualizing qualitative inquiry: Mindwork for fieldwork in education and the social sciences*. Prentice Hall.

Shead, L. M. (2010). *An investigation of the relationship between teachers' rating of their principals' leadership style and teachers' job satisfaction in public education* (Doctoral dissertation, Western Kentucky University).

Showalter, D., Klein, R. Johnson, J. & Hartman, S.. 2017. Why Rural Matters 2015-2016: *Understanding the Changing Landscape.* Washington, DC: Rural School and Community Trust.

Shuls, J., & Maranto, R. (2014). Show them the mission: A comparison of teacher recruitment incentives in high need communities. *Social Science Quarterly*, *95*(1), 239-252.

South Carolina Center for Teacher Recruitment. (1998). Strengthening the profession
  that shapes South Carolina's future-teaching. Rock Hill, SC: The Center.
  <http://www.scctr.org/governorsreport.htm>.

South Carolina Department of Education (2017). *South Carolina school report cards.*
  Retrieved from https://ed.sc.gov/data/report-cards/historic-school-report-
  cards/2017/

Steele, J. L., Murnane, R. J., & Willett, J. B. (2010). Do financial incentives help low
  performing schools attract and keep academically talented teachers? Evidence from
  California. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *29*(3), 451-478.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). A coming crisis in
  teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the US. *Learning Policy
  Institute*.

Taylor, L. U. (2012). *Recruiting and retaining teachers in a rural school district: A
  phenomenological study of rural teachers* (Doctoral dissertation, University of
  Phoenix).

Tran, H. (2018). Taking the mystery out of South Carolina school finance. 2nd Edition.
  ICPEL Publications. Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Tran, H. & Smith, D. (2018a). Diminishing respect hurts teaching interest in hard-to-
  staff schools. Working Paper.

Tran, H., Gause, S., Ylimaki, R., & Hardie, S. (2018). Leveraging rural place-based
  advantages for teacher recruitment from the perspectives of current rural educators.
  Working Paper.

Tran, H., Hogue, A.M, & Moon, A.M. (2015). Attracting early childhood teachers to

    South Carolina's high needs rural districts: loan Repayment vs. tuition Subsidy.

    Teacher Education Journal of South Carolina, 8. Can be accessed at

    http://www.scateonline.org/pdfs/Journal.Final.2015.pdf

Tran, H. & Smith, D. (2018b). Utility of recruitment factors for South Carolina's rural

    districts with high teacher turnover. Working Paper.

UCEA (2018). UCEA's Comments and Recommendations about U.S. Department of

    Education Report on Rural Education, Section 5005 of P.L. 114-95. ED-2017-

    OCO-0139. Retrieved from http://3fl71l2qoj4l3y6ep2tqpwra.wpengine.netdna-

    cdn.com/wpcontent/uploads/2018/03/UCEAcomments-Sect5005Report-on-Rural-

    Education.pdf

Ulferts, J. (2016). A brief summary of teacher recruitment and retention in the smallest

    Illinois rural schools. *The Rural Educator, 37*(1). Retrieved from

    http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraleducator/article/view/356

U.S. Census Bureau (2012). *South Carolina: 2010 population and housing unit

    counts.* Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-42.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest

    of education statistics, 2016* (NCES 2017-094). Retrieved

    from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017094.pdf

Watson, E. (2017). Unexpected questions: Reflecting on the teacher's experience of

    responding in class. *High School Journal*, *101*(1), 49-61.

Watt, H. M., Richardson, P. W., & Wilkins, K. (2014). Profiles of professional

engagement and career development aspirations among USA preservice teachers.

International Journal of Educational Research, *65*, 23-40.

Watts, J. (2016). An exploration of teacher retention in rural school districts in Eastern

Kentucky. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky).

White, S., & Reid, J. (2008). Placing teachers? Sustaining rural schooling through place-

consciousness in teacher education. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 23*(7).

Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2014/02/23-7.pdf

Winter, P. A., & Melloy, S. H. (2005). Teacher recruitment in a school reform state:

factors that influence applicant attraction to teaching vacancies. *Educational

Administration Quarterly*, *41*(2), 349–372.

Yager, S., Pederson, J., Yager, R., & Noppe, R. (2011). Impact of school leadership on

teacher's professional growth: Teacher perception of administrative support.

National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal, 25, 12-21.

Zost, G. C. (2010). An examination of resiliency in rural special educators. *Rural

Educator*, 31(2), 10-14.

APPENDIX A – REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE

Rural Teacher Retention in South Carolina School Districts

Dear ___,

My name is Whitney Prowell, and I am an Assistant Principal in Richland School District Two and a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policies Department at the University of South Carolina. I would like to invite you to participate in a study involving your experiences as a teacher in a rural school district in South Carolina.

I am studying rural teacher retention in South Carolina specifically, teachers' perceptions of experiences that motivated their decision to remain in the same rural district. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an in-person interview about your experiences as a teacher in a rural district. There will be an opportunity for follow-up. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 45 minutes. Interviews will be audiotaped so I can accurately reflect on the discussion. The tapes will only be reviewed by me and a trained third party so that they can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will be kept confidential and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's work office. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but participant identities will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be provided for all participants, counties, school districts and schools to ensure participant confidentiality.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 864-360-5596 or wprowell@richland2.org or my faculty advisor, Dr. Douglas Smith, 803-777-4269, smithdo@mailbox.sc.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number or email listed below to discuss participating.
With kind regards,

Whitney Prowell
864-360-5596
wprowell@richland2.org

APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT

I. Title: Understanding the Experiences of Teachers Retained in High Turnover School Districts in Rural South Carolina

II. Purpose: The aim of this study is to explore conditions that support retention in rural school districts, specifically, the teacher's perceptions of experiences that motivated their decision to remain in the same rural district. There is a lack of literature on experiences of teachers who have lived in non-rural areas but choose to teach in rural areas and are also retained in rural school districts. Rural districts are plagued with poor retention rates. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences that motivate teachers to continue employment as rural school teachers in high-turnover rural districts.

III. Investigator: The primary investigator for this study is Whitney Prowell, an Assistant Principal in Richland School District Two and a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policies Department at the University of South Carolina.

IV. Interviews: The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place and last about 45 minutes each. There will be an opportunity for follow-up interviews. The interviews will be audiotaped so the researcher can accurately reflect on the discussion. After completion of the study, the recordings will be destroyed. The transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected device in a locked cabinet.

There is no known risk involved in participating in this study; however, the participant may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not wish to.

V. Confidentiality: Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's work office. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but participant identities will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be provided for all participants, counties, school districts and schools to ensure participant confidentiality.

VI. Voluntary Participation: Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal are options.

VII. Informed Consent: By signing below I verify the following to be true:
1. I am over the age of 18 years of age;
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction;
3. I agree to participate in this research study;
4. I agree to be audio recorded during interviews.

_____ _____ _____
Participant Name   Participant Signature   DATE

APPENDIX C – DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name

2. Pseudonym/Name for Research

3. Age, Ethnicity and Sex

4. What college did you graduate from?

   What is your highest qualification earned; Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral

   degree?

5. Hometown

   Do you identify as a teacher from a non-rural or rural background?

6. High school and district you graduated from

7. County, District, and school where you currently teach

8. What grade do you teach? Or what is your role at the school?

9. How far do you live from the school where you are currently employed?

10. How many years of experience do you have in education?   in your current

    district?

11. What would you say is your average salary per year?

12. What is the average number of students in your classroom per year?

13. Why did you agree to participate in this research study?

APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview protocol is based on the following research question:

How do non-rural teachers in high-turnover rural school districts perceive and describe the conditions necessary for continued employment?

Introduction: "Thank you for agreeing to help me with my research. As part of my study, I am interviewing rural teachers who have remained in the same district a minimum of 5 years about their experiences. Specifically, I'm interested in better understanding your decision-making process as it relates to your retention in your current district. I have planned for this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to complete the questions."

The participant will be provided the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix A) to complete. After completion of the questionnaire, the participant will then be given the Informed Consent form (Appendix B). If the participant agrees and signs the consent form the researcher will state: "Thank you for agreeing to participate. I will now turn on the audio recorder. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential." The researcher will have a back-up recorder as well as paper and pen at the interview location in case any issues arise with the audio recording technology or in the event that a participant refuses to be recorded.

Start the interview:

Pseudonym: Date/Time of Interview: Place:

The following open-ended questions will be asked. When appropriate, additional follow up questions may be asked in the event the participant says something relevant that needs to further be investigated.

The researcher will say, "You have been selected to speak with me as you have been identified as someone who has a great deal of experience teaching in a rural district. Please feel free to speak candidly with me about your thoughts, opinions, and experiences."

Interview Content Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. *Tell me about your background and describe the area where you grew up.*

2. Tell me about your decision to become a teacher. What did that process look like?

3. Why did you select the position in your current district?

4. Describe your current district.

5. Tell me about your experiences while teaching there.

6. Did you experience a time in your career that made you think you would leave your current school or district? If so, describe your experience. What made you change your mind?

7. What personal traits or characteristics have helped you to be a successful teacher?

8. What is the most important element of your job?

9. What do you like most about your job?

10. What do you like least about your job?

11. Tell me what is really keeping you at your current district.

12. What advice would you give other teachers from non-rural backgrounds who are considering teaching in rural districts?

13. Is there anything that you expected me to ask that I did not ask you? Or anything else you think might be helpful for me to know about our topic today?

14. Snowball Sampling: Do you know of any other teachers in your district that have worked in the district for at least 5 years?

End the interview:

Thank the participant for his or her participation. Provide the participant with a business card in the event they need to reach out with questions or further information.

APPENDIX E: IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW**

Whitney Prowell
127 Lee Ridge Drive
Columbia, SC 29229 USA

Re: **Pro00084675**

Dear Mrs. Whitney Prowell:

This is to certify that the research study *Understanding the* **Experiences of Teachers Retained in High Turnover School Districts in Rural South Carolina** was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), the study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **12/14/2018**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

All research related records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager