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African American Educators: Why They Teach in Rural Georgia School Districts and Why They Remain There

Sarah Louise Alonzo-Osborne

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AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS: WHY THEY TEACH IN RURAL GEORGIA
SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND WHY THEY REMAIN THERE

by

SARAH L. ALONZO-OSBORNE

(Under the Direction of Cherry C. Brewton)

ABSTRACT

The student population in the public school systems throughout the United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse, yet the minority teacher population has declined sharply. Currently, Caucasians comprise an overwhelming majority of the teacher population while African American teachers represent approximately only 8% of the field. This study explores the African American educators' experiences of teaching in rural Georgia school districts. This study is being conducted to identify what factors influence African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there.

In order to explore the experiences from the participants' perspective, a qualitative methodology was used to conduct this study. The researcher used semi-structured interviews which provided participants with the opportunity to fully express themselves without constraints. In order to ensure accuracy of the data, all interviews were audio-taped. Each participant was asked twelve open-ended questions developed from a brainstorming panel in an effort to identify what factors influence African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there.

Findings from the study concur with the literature on African Americans showing the importance of intrinsic rewards and the influence of a significant other or role model as factors influencing their decisions to become teachers. In addition, the findings suggest the importance of extrinsic rewards and having a positive perception of the profession as reasons African Americans become teachers. Findings from the study corroborate the literature showing the importance of the type of home community reared in, becoming acclimated to the rural lifestyle, the location of spousal employment, and having a supportive administration as factors influencing African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and to remain there as teachers.

INDEX WORDS: African American teachers, Minority teachers, Rural teachers, Recruitment, Retention

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, Tom, who has given me his unwavering support, love and encouragement throughout this entire process. You alone have seen first hand the long hours and hard work I have put into this dissertation. You sacrificed our time together so that I could immerse myself into completing this dissertation. You have been my rock and my anchor. You kept me centered and helped me maintain a sense of sanity. Thank you for your infinite patience, understanding, and encouragement. Thank you for beginning and ending this arduous journey with me. This dissertation is a testament of the support you have given me. I love you always.

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Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Josephine Mitchell. Although you are not here with me, I know that you are looking down from Heaven and smiling. I miss you more than words can express.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The student population in the public school systems throughout the United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse, yet the minority teacher population has declined sharply (Banks, 2000; Coeyman, 2000; Diller & Moule, 2005). While attracting a diverse teacher population is seen typically as a regional problem, many public schools are struggling with this problem (Gursky 2002; Piercynski, Matranga, & Peltier, 1997). Generally the term minority refers to African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders and will be used accordingly for the purpose of conducting this study. Although African Americans had previously made up 18% of the teaching profession, early research indicated this number would decline significantly over time (Newby, Smith, Newby, & Miller, 1995). While minority students currently make up about 40% of the nation's public school population, minority teachers comprise about 14% of the teaching force (Kochuk, 2005; Reid, 2001; Simon, 2005). Presently, African Americans represent approximately 8% of the teaching population (Holloway, 2002; Kusimo, 1999; Simon, 2005).

In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) began to use a new locale classification system which does not consider population size and county boundaries, but relies on proximity to an urbanized area (Provasnik et al., 2007). There are four areas of classification: city, suburban, town, and rural. This new classification system defines rural areas as those areas that are not located in an urban area. According to Provasnik et al., rural schools are defined according to their physical addresses and

their proximity to urban areas (2007). Likewise, this definition will be used for the purpose of conducting this study.

Caucasians comprise an overwhelming majority of the teacher population: 73% in the inner city; 81% in suburban schools; 91% in small towns; and 98% in rural areas (Brown & Butty, 1999). Approximately, 33% of America's public schools have no minority teachers (Kochuk, 2005). Forty-three percent of public schools, which serve approximately 33% of students, are located in rural areas or small towns with populations of less than 25,000 people (McClure, Redfield & Hammer, 2003; Todd & Angello, 2006). Consequently, many students will complete their public school education without being taught by a minority teacher (Duarte, 2000; Gursky, 2002). Lieberman and Miller (2000) emphasize, "While student populations are becoming more diverse, ethnically and linguistically, the teaching population remains the same and continues to disproportionately represent the white middle class" (p. 48). Because of the growing racial disparity between the demographics of a diverse student population and a largely Caucasian workforce, schools are searching for ways to close the gap by recruiting and retaining more minority teachers (Blair, 2002; Diller & Moule, 2005; Flippo & Canniff, 2003).

The research maintains there is a teacher shortage for many reasons: a growing student population, more teachers reaching retirement age, job dissatisfaction, and competition from other careers (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). Although there are approximately 3 million teachers employed in K-12 schools, public schools will need to hire more than 2 million elementary and secondary teachers over the next 10 years to meet the demand of an increasing student enrollment (Duarte, 2000; National Center for

Education Statistics [NCES], 2005; Recruiting New Teachers [RNT], 2000; Reid, 2001). Accordingly, poverty stricken urban and rural school districts will need to hire 33% of these teachers (RNT, 2000).

According to a study conducted by the National Commission on Teachers and America's Future in 2003, fewer college freshmen are majoring in education (Simon, 2005). Also, the study found that 14% of beginning teachers leave the profession during their first year. RNT (2000) found that over 20% of all beginning teachers employed in U. S. public schools left their positions within the first three years. Additionally, nearly 50% of teachers exit the field by their fifth year (RNT, 2000; Simon, 2005). RNT (2000) and Simon (2005) found that teachers abandoned the teaching profession for better job offers, personal reasons, or financial reasons. Some of the main reasons cited by teachers for their job dissatisfaction are a feeling of isolation and neglect and an inadequate support system (Mullinix, 2002; RNT, 2000). Consequently, nearly half the number of teachers leaves their jobs due to retirement or a change in career (Marshall & Marshall, 2003).

Furthermore, the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by Congress in 2001 requires schools to have staffs comprised of highly qualified teachers (Barlow, 2006; Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2005; Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). Highly qualified teachers have to prove competency in their subject area by passing standardized exams (Barlow, 2006; McClure et al., 2003; Prater, 2005). Current research shows that while Caucasians tend to perform well on these exams, minorities often struggle and have much lower passage rates (Clark & Flores, 2002; Flippo & Canniff, 2003; Keiler, 2004). Although NCLB includes many components, this mandate alone poses serious challenges

for administrators, especially those in rural school districts who strive to hire a more diversified teacher workforce (Keiler, 2004).

In order to alleviate the teacher shortage, the research suggests schools which are proactive in recruitment and retention have more success in maintaining a stable teacher workforce (Ingersoll, 2001). In an effort to compete with other districts for a shrinking minority teacher population, many schools have developed and implemented recruitment and retention plans designed to attract highly qualified teachers of color (Ingersoll, 2001). The success or failure of recruitment and retention programs depends heavily on administrators. The researcher thinks that in order to make teaching an attractive employment opportunity at their schools, administrators need to implement effective recruitment and retention plans. Furthermore, the researcher thinks that acquiring feedback from teachers based on their recruitment and retention experiences can assist administrators in making needed improvements to attract and maintain a diverse teacher workforce.

Conducting this study will allow the researcher to examine the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there. The researcher will explore the experiences of the participants to gain insight into how these experiences influence their employment decisions. After conducting this study, the researcher hopes to gain more understanding regarding factors that influence African Americans' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts. Additionally, the information gained from this study may be useful to rural Georgia administrators who desire to create a diverse teacher workforce.

Statement of the Problem

The student population in public elementary and high schools across the nation is becoming more racially diverse, yet the teaching field continues to be dominated by Caucasian teachers. It is important for all students to have diverse role models and authority figures. Accordingly, school districts are aggressively searching for ways to increase their African American teacher population, especially in hard-to-staff school districts located in rural areas.

Many studies on the factors influencing the recruitment and retention of African American teachers have been conducted. Even though rural teacher recruitment and retention have drawn recent attention from government agencies, more research is needed to examine the factors that affect African American educators' decisions to teach in rural school districts and why they remain there. Unless special attention is given to this topic, rural school districts will continue to use ineffective plans and be unsuccessful in attracting and maintaining a diversified teaching workforce, especially at a time when schools are competing for an ever declining African American teacher population. Without more current research, districts may continue to be ineffective in their African American teacher recruitment and retention efforts.

Although recent studies show Caucasians continue to dominate the teaching profession, the minority student enrollment across America's public schools is increasing. Recruiting and retaining a qualified teaching workforce are challenges schools are addressing. African American teachers play a critical role in educating our youth, and it is crucial that schools hire a more diverse teacher workforce. Therefore, the purpose of this

study is to examine the factors that influence African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there.

Significance of the Study

Although factors influencing African American teacher recruitment and retention have been addressed, few studies have been conducted regarding the reasons African Americans teach in rural school districts and why they remain there. The literature regarding rural education is fairly new; however, many studies on rural teacher employment have been conducted in foreign countries (Collins, 1999).

While the number of African American teachers continues to decline, the research stresses the importance of students having role models and authority figures from different racial and cultural backgrounds (Futrell, 1999; King, 1993; Newby et al., 1995; Shipp, 1999). Research must be conducted to identify factors that influence African American educators' decisions to seek or not to seek employment in rural school districts and why they continue to remain in or leave these districts. Ultimately, results from this study will add to the growing body of knowledge regarding African American teacher recruitment and retention. Findings from this study can be instrumental in designing recruitment and retention plans to attract and maintain a stable African American teacher population in rural school districts that find it increasingly difficult to attract a diverse workforce.

Autobiographical Roots of the Study

I grew up in rural southeast Georgia and could always find books in my home. My parents strongly emphasized the importance of obtaining a good education. I could hear my parents say religiously, "Education is the key, and it will open doors for you."

As I look back at those moments in my life, I am amazed at how my parents planted the seeds of learning.

Not surprisingly, my parents, particularly my mother, emphasized reading and learning for the sake of obtaining knowledge and not just because of having to study for scheduled tests at school. When looking back at my K-12 education, I realize that where my mother fostered my desire for learning, my teachers, especially the few African American teachers whom I had, cultivated my desire for learning. They were my role models and authority figures outside my home. I was surrounded by people who preached and practiced learning as a way to obtain not just professional but personal goals as well.

If you ask me who encouraged me to take the more challenging courses in school, it was indeed my parents and the few African American teachers I had. I can remember the names of these teachers, each and every one of them; many of them not only taught me during my K-12 public school academic career, but also at church in my Sunday school classes. I felt a special connection with these teachers, and it was easier to relate to them because they were familiar with my roots and understood my cultural background. I felt as if they took a special interest in me, a quiet and extremely shy African American girl, who visibly stood out among a class of Caucasian students. They provided me with guidance and motivated me to take the more challenging classes. If I had any problems, they provided me with advice and any other assistance I needed. When I ventured off to college unsure of what career path I would pursue, it seemed logical that I would choose a career in teaching because of the profound impact these African American teachers had on my life.

I am currently employed in a rural school district in southeast Georgia and I can only imagine the obstacles that my predecessors had to overcome and the challenges they faced as being the only, or possibly one of two African American teachers on a predominantly Caucasian staff in a rural school district. Now that I am a teacher, I find myself in the same situation as my predecessors. I began my teaching career in a high school in rural southeast Georgia. During that time, I was one of two African American teachers on staff. After three years of employment, I longed for a more urban environment where I would be exposed to a more diverse faculty, staff and student body. After teaching in an urban setting, I returned to the rural school where I began my teaching career and instantly noticed that I was the only African American teacher on staff. I began to explore my own personal and professional reasons for leaving my first teaching job, and I began to examine my experiences and explore my reasons for returning.

This study is of personal significance because of the important role African American teachers had on my life. Now that I am a teacher, I am interested in examining the factors that influence African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there. After conducting this study, I hope to add to the body of research on this topic and gain a better understanding of the experiences of African Americans teachers and how their experiences influence their decisions to seek employment in rural school districts. Furthermore, I hope this information will be used to enhance teacher diversity by developing and implementing successful recruitment and retention plans specifically targeting African American teachers.

Research Questions

This study has two research questions. They are:

1. What brings African American educators to rural Georgia school districts to teach?
2. What experiences cause African American educators to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts?

Methodology

Research Design

This research study was a qualitative design employing the use of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research allows the researcher to gather data about people based on their real life experiences and helps the researcher to understand behavior within its wider context (de Vaus, 2002). Qualitative researchers employ various methods such as observation, semi-structured interviewing, case studies, and focus groups in their investigations (de Vaus, 2002; Glesne, 2006). Because qualitative research relies on fewer participants, the researcher was able to conduct an in-depth investigation of each participant's experiences (Glesne, 2006).

According to Glesne (2006), using open-ended interview questions does not bind the researcher or respondents to parameters such as those established in questionnaires. Reliance on open-ended interview questions will allow the researcher to explore the attitudes, experiences and opinions of participants by giving them the opportunity to fully express themselves without constraints (Glesne, 2006). Glesne (2006) maintains that a qualitative research design allows the researcher to ask probing questions to participants in order to fully understand how their experiences color their perceptions. Qualitative

researchers do not try to generalize but through deliberate and purposeful exploration attempt to find patterns based on participants' responses (Glesne, 2006).

This study consisted of interviewing eight African American teachers who volunteered to participate. The qualitative design of this research study was in the form of open-ended interview questions and based on the assumption that participants gave trustworthy responses. Using the interview method to conduct a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of each participant (Glesne, 2006). Also, these interviews allowed the researcher to explore how these experiences affected participants' decisions to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts. Furthermore, using the interview method allowed the researcher the flexibility of modifying interview questions as it related to the study (de Vaus, 2002; Glesne, 2006).

The researcher attempted to understand and identify the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and the reasons they remain in rural Georgia school districts as teachers. One motivation for this study was the lack of research on this subject. Also, the findings from this study can be considered in developing recruitment and retention plans specifically aimed at attracting African American educators to rural Georgia school districts. The purpose of this study, the research questions, and the limited amount of literature on this topic called for a thorough in-depth investigation. A qualitative research design provided an appropriate methodology for conducting this study.

Delimitations

1. The research study is limited to rural southeast Georgia school districts.

2. The research study is limited to African American teachers with at least three years of teaching experience.

Limitations

1. Because the study includes information from rural Georgia African American educators, the findings may not be applied to African American educators in larger districts or elsewhere in the state or nation.

Participants

Due to the in-depth investigation of this study, eight participants were selected. After meeting and discussing the purpose of this research study with school administrators in two school districts, each principal granted permission to conduct this study by signing a permission letter. The researcher compiled a list of potential participants based on administrators' recommendations. Participants were African American teachers who volunteered to participate in this study. The participants in this study were African American educators with at least three years of teaching experience who were teaching in rural Georgia school districts.

Process

This study included interviewing eight African American teachers who were teaching in a rural Georgia school district. The researcher, along with the help of a brainstorming panel, developed interview questions designed to find the factors contributing to African Americans' decisions to teach and the factors contributing to the recruitment and retention of African American teachers to rural Georgia school districts. This was a qualitative study because it was an attempt to understand the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and reasons they remain as

teachers in rural Georgia school districts. This particular research technique provided the best approach to answer the research questions posed in this study because it involved conducting a thorough investigation of the topic.

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed interview questions using interview guidelines suggested by Glesne (2006) and DeVaus (2002). Interview questions were designed from a brainstorming panel. The purpose of the interview questions was to answer the two research questions. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once participants gave informed consent, the researcher scheduled interviews at times and places which were convenient for each participant.

The researcher used a tape recorder to record the responses of each participant during interviews. Utilization of a tape recorder to record all interviews alleviated the need to take extensive notes during the interviews. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. All interviews were conducted in person. The first interview allowed the researcher to elicit responses from each participant based on his or her teaching experiences in a rural Georgia school district. The first interview session lasted no more than one hour in length and was conducted during the spring of 2008. The researcher asked probing questions as the opportunity arose and as it related to participants' responses. If necessary, a second interview was used as a follow up to further clarify participants' responses. Each participant volunteering for the study was interviewed at a time and location that was convenient for him or her. Tapes of all interviews were locked away and stored until they were transcribed. All recordings of the interviews were destroyed following the completion of this study.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the data. The researcher conducted a content analysis of each interview looking for recurring patterns and themes developed from the literature and the research questions. The information was grouped based on themes and patterns found in the literature.

Summary

Although the minority student enrollment across the U.S. has increased, the minority teaching population has declined. There has been a steady decline in the number of African Americans entering the teacher workforce. Public school students will complete their K-12 education without having role models and authority figures which are representative of an increasingly diverse society. Although the literature addresses factors that influence African Americans' decisions to teach, more investigation needs to be conducted on the experiences and perceptions of African American teachers regarding their recruitment and retention plans in rural districts. In this study, the researcher examined the experiences of African American teachers in rural Georgia school districts. After conducting this study, the researcher hopes to discover why African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there. The results of this study can help rural Georgia administrators develop and implement recruitment and retention plans that successfully attract and maintain highly qualified African American teachers.

Chapter two will be a review of the literature regarding the factors contributing to African Americans' decisions to enter the teaching profession. Chapter two will also examine the factors contributing to rural teacher recruitment and retention. Additionally,

this chapter will address the administrative role in teacher recruitment and retention. The remainder of chapter two will focus on current state, local, and district teacher recruitment and retention policies.

In Chapter three, the researcher will give an overview of how this research will be conducted. The researcher will provide a justification for using a qualitative research design relying on the interview process. Also, chapter three will address all areas of research methodology.

In Chapter four, the researcher will present the findings of the study. Each research question will be addressed. The data will be gathered from participants' semi-structured interviews and will be reported in narrative and tabular form. Chapter four will also include a demographic profile of the participants.

Chapter five will give an overview of the study. The researcher will discuss the findings of the study as they relate to the literature review presented in chapter two. The researcher will compare the data to the literature review to find similarities, gaps, or contradictions. Additionally, the researcher will discuss the implications of the study in the area of educational leadership and present recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

From the moment our children step into a classroom, new evidence shows that the single most important factor in determining their achievement today is not the color of their skin or where they came from; it's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is. It's the person who will brave some of the most difficult schools, the most challenging children, and accept the most meager compensation simply to give someone else the chance to succeed. (Obama, 2005, p. 5)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are approximately 48.4 million students attending public elementary and secondary school across the nation (2005). Students of color comprise approximately 40% of the student enrollment (Coeyman, 2000; Duarte, 2000). By 2020, minorities are expected to comprise approximately 50% of the student enrollment (Banks, 2000; Coeyman, 2000). By 2040, this number is projected to increase to 54% (Coeyman, 2000). Today there are approximately 3 million teachers employed in K-12 schools (NCES, 2005). Public schools will need to hire more than 2 million elementary and secondary teachers over the next 10 years to meet the demand of an increasing student enrollment (Duarte, 2000; RNT, 2000; Reid, 2001).

The increasing student enrollment coupled with a high teacher attrition rate and an aging teacher workforce headed toward retirement causes great concern for our nation's public school systems which are coping with a teacher shortage (Marshall & Marshall, 2003; RNT, 1998). Also, there has been a steady decline of minorities in the teacher workforce (Banks, 2000; Futrell, 1999; Holloway, 2002; Newby et al., 1995). While public schools are struggling to attract highly qualified teachers, this task is proving to be

even more difficult when recruiting and retaining African American teachers (Gursky, 2002; Piercynski et al., 1997). Typically, it is up to administrators to ensure these programs are effective in producing desired results. Administrators are coping with this problem by putting into place recruitment and retention plans to make their schools more appealing to potential employees.

Preliminary Literature Review

According to the literature, there are many reasons African Americans choose teaching as a career. King (1993), Brown and Butty (1999), and Shipp (1999) suggest African Americans are attracted to teaching because of the intrinsic value it offers such as the belief that teaching contributes to the betterment of society. Also, some studies show that African Americans are influenced by a family member or a former teacher to enter this profession (King, 1993; Piercynski et al., 1997). Although salary and prestige have little influence on African Americans' decisions to teach, these factors could be considered unattractive aspects of the profession (King, 1993; Shipp, 1999).

There are many factors affecting minority educators' decisions to remain in the teaching field. In their study, Piercynski et al. (1997) found three factors that affect rural minority teachers' decisions to remain in their jobs: the ability to obtain graduate degrees during vacation; gaining support from administration; and working in a supportive environment. Furthermore, the results of their study concluded that teacher salaries had virtually no impact on African American teachers' decisions to remain in their jobs. According to King, once African Americans begin their teaching careers, a large percentage plan to remain in the profession but may leave the classroom to become administrators (1993).

Additionally, the literature reports there are many reasons African Americans do not enter the teaching profession. African Americans encounter many obstacles which may make it difficult for them to become teachers. The literature suggests that African Americans may not be academically prepared for college (Futrell, 1999; Garibaldi, 1997). Many studies point to lower African American achievement on standardized test scores as evidence to support this claim (Futrell, 1999; Garibaldi, 1997; Irvine, 1988). Tougher college admission exams affect the number of African Americans attending college (Newby et al., 1995). Since fewer African Americans are obtaining four year college degrees, fewer are entering the teaching profession (Futrell, 1999; Garibaldi, 1997; Newby et al., 1995).

Furthermore, some African Americans who enter college seeking teaching degrees find passing mandatory teacher certification tests a difficult process. Consequently, many African Americans have higher failure rates than Caucasians on these exams hindering the number of them entering the profession (Dometrius & Sigelman, 1988; Murnane & Schwinden, 1989; Gitomer, Latham & Ziomek, 1999). However, Hanushek and Pace (1995) found that state certification mandates requiring the passage of competency tests reduces the overall number of prospective teachers, not just minorities.

Additionally, there are other reasons African Americans do not enter the teaching profession. African Americans have more career options, many of which pay higher salaries and require similar educational backgrounds as teaching (Clark & Flores, 2002; Gallegos, 2000; Shure, 2001). African Americans choose lucrative careers in law, business, or science (Gallegos, 2000; Coeyman, 2000; King, 1993). Also, the research

concludes that negative perceptions of teaching, poor working conditions, and low salaries as reasons fewer African Americans enter the profession (Gordon, 2002; King, 1993; Shipp, 1999).

There are many factors contributing to rural teacher recruitment and retention. Although the National Association of State Boards of Education states that enough teachers are trained annually, rural districts struggle to staff their schools (Bradley, 1988). One factor affecting rural teacher recruitment and retention is that low salaries make it difficult for rural administrators to compete with wealthier districts (Barlow, 2006; Collins, 1999; Jehlen, 2001; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). Rural teachers typically make lower salaries than those employed in urban and suburban schools (McClure et al., 2003; Reeves, 2003). If teachers are recruited to rural communities, there are no financial incentives to keep them there (Barlow, 2006; Collins, 1999; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997).

Another factor affecting rural administrators' efforts to recruit and retain educators is because teachers have feelings of isolation (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Ingersoll, 2003; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). According to the research, rural teachers cite isolation as a reason they leave their jobs (Ingersoll, 2003). College graduates may be reluctant to teach in rural communities because they tend to offer fewer opportunities for socialization because of their geographic locations (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; McClure et al., 2003). Attracting young college graduates may be a cumbersome task because rural communities do not provide the same amenities that urban or suburban areas offer (McClure et al., 2003).

A third factor which makes it difficult to attract and retain teachers to rural communities is many administrators tend to pressure teachers to obtain multiple certifications (Hill & Barth, 2004; McClure et al., 2003). Since rural school systems tend to have smaller student enrollments than urban or suburban districts, principals expect their teachers to be able to teach multiple subjects (Barlow, 2006; Hill & Barth, 2004; McClure et al., 2003). Rather than take on the additional stress and financial strain of obtaining multiple certification, some teachers seek employment in urban or suburban school systems (Barlow, 2006; McClure et al., 2003).

As the attrition rate for teachers increase, schools are searching for more ways to enhance and maintain their current teacher workforce. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified African American teachers are crucial and continue to be a challenge for administrators in public schools, especially for those in rural areas. Once African Americans enter the teaching field, steps should be taken to retain them. By developing and implementing effective recruitment and retention plans, administrators will be able to maintain diversified teaching staffs.

Factors Contributing to African Americans' Decisions to Teach

Influence of Significant Others/Role Model

According to the research some prospective African American educators are attracted to the teaching profession because of influence by a significant other or a role model (King, 1993; Newby et al., 1995; Piercynski et al., 1997; Shipp, 1999). A role model or significant other could be a family member, friend, K-12 teacher, college professor, or a college peer (King, 1993). Because of the close nature of the relationship,

a significant other or a role model has an impact on African American career decisions (King, 1993).

In 1991, the Nevada state department of education conducted a qualitative study designed to help school systems recruit minority teachers (Piercynski et al., 1997). Nineteen minority teachers who taught in rural Nevada from 1991 to 1993 were interviewed to find successful aspects of minority teacher recruitment practices in order to share this information with policymakers and administrators. The researchers wanted to discover what factors encouraged minorities to consider teaching and why they chose to teach in a rural school. They found that most respondents entered teaching because of influence of a former teacher or a family member. In fact, some respondents cited that they had parents who were employed in the education field.

After interviewing 60 people of color in various professions to determine why fewer minorities enter teaching, Gordon (2002) found that teachers have a profound impact on students' perceptions of teaching as a career choice and in their decisions to become teachers. Similarly, many participants of the King (1993) study revealed that they had family members or significant others that had a profound impact in their decisions to pursue teaching. In their study, Newby et al. (1995) found that fewer than 33% of the participants were influenced by family or a teacher of color to consider teaching.

Intrinsic Rewards

According to the research, African Americans educators are attracted to teaching because of the intrinsic rewards teaching offers (Gordon, 2002; King, 1993; Shipp, 1999). Intrinsic rewards, such as a sense of accomplishment, refer to the internal satisfaction one receives while performing the duties of his or her job (Ellis, 1984). Although intrinsic

rewards do not yield the same benefits as extrinsic rewards, research indicates that intrinsic rewards can be more motivating and satisfying (Ellis, 1984).

King conducted a study of 41 African Americans to examine background characteristics and reasons for entering teaching (1993). Members of the group included 14 teacher candidates, 26 beginning teachers, and one former teacher attending law school. King found that there were seven main reasons African Americans became teachers, six of which represent intrinsic rewards: (1) opportunity to work with young people; (2) feeling their abilities were suited to teaching; (3) belief that teaching contributed to the betterment of society; (4) feeling that teaching offered the opportunity to be creative; (5) belief that teaching provides the opportunity to work with diverse student populations with various needs; and (6) intellectual challenge (1993).

Similarly, a study conducted by Brown and Butty (1999) of 140 African American males to examine their decisions to teach revealed comparable results. One result of the study revealed the desire to impart knowledge was the most important determinant of African American males' decision to teach. In her study, Gordon (2002) found that minorities entered teaching because of a love for a particular subject and a love of learning. Shipp (1999) conducted a comparative study of 263 African American education and non-education majors to discover the factors influencing career choice. The education majors were clearly attracted to the intrinsic rewards that teaching offers while the non-education majors found the extrinsic rewards such as a better salary and job security that is associated with careers other than teaching more appealing (Shipp, 1999).

From these results, Shipp (1999) concluded that non-education majors based their career choices on extrinsic rewards while education majors were drawn to the intrinsic rewards offered by a career such as teaching. While both groups cited teaching to have certain attractive aspects such as making a contribution to society, providing intellectual stimulation and encouraging others, education majors placed more weight on these factors when considering career choice. Furthermore, the researcher concluded the main difference between the two groups is that education majors rated teaching as being a favorable career choice because teaching was alignment with the factors they considered most important when choosing a career.

King (1993) noted distinct differences between prospective teachers and beginning teachers' motivational factors for choosing a career in teaching. There were discrepancies between prospective teachers and beginning teachers' perceptions of teaching. Prospective teachers had a more idealistic view of teaching while beginning teachers were more realistic. King attributed this distinct difference because prospective teachers on inexperience while beginning teachers based their perception on real-life teaching experiences (1993).

Factors Contributing to African Americans' Decisions Not to Teach

Negative Perceptions of Teaching

Negative perceptions of teaching refer to any aspect of the profession that is depicted or portrayed in an unflattering manner which may deter prospective teachers from entering the profession (Burant, Quiocho, & Rios, 2002; Gordon, 2000). Negative perceptions of teaching may influence the number of minorities that choose teaching as a career (Burant et al. 2002; Gordon, 2000; Newby et al., 1995). According to the

literature, students develop perceptions of teaching long before they enter college (Hutchinson & Johnson, 1993; King, 1993; Newby et al., 1995). Teaching is not seen as a viable occupation, but simply as a job where teachers are treated as employees rather than as professionals (Futrell, 1999).

Newby et al. (1995) conducted a study of 863 high school students, most of whom were African American, to examine their perceptions of teaching as a career choice. The researchers found that there were no significant differences among the other represented ethnic groups (Caucasians, Native Americans, and Hispanics) in the following categories: valuing teaching as a career, the importance of teaching in relation to other careers, and influence on choosing teaching as a career. Although the researchers found that 96% of the students believed that teaching was an important profession, students across all grade levels thought that there were other careers which were more important than teaching. Also, students in the lower grade levels appeared to have more negative perceptions of teaching and less than 50% of the participants cited that it was important for a minority to consider teaching as a possible career choice. To further determine career aspirations, participants were asked to choose a potential career choice from the following professions: teacher; attorney; physician; business person or; other (cosmetology, law enforcement, construction, and restaurant services). Approximately 5% of the participants choose teaching. The researchers concluded teaching was seen as the least appealing career choice.

Gordon (2002) conducted a two year qualitative study of 160 teachers of color (African American, Native American, Asian American and Latino) to find out why they became teachers. She also wanted to gain insight on their thoughts regarding minority

students entering the teaching profession. Regardless of academic or socioeconomic background, students of color were not encouraged to become teachers by their families, communities or teachers. Gordon discovered that some minorities have had negative schooling experiences and did not want to return to the site which forces them to relive painful memories for employment opportunities (2000). Gordon further noted that after enduring these painful experiences, minority parents may discourage their children from entering teaching and persuade them to pursue other career paths (2000). Gordon concluded teachers of color project the image of the way they view themselves as professionals to students. Over 50% of the participants stated the negative perception and low status of teachers were reasons students of color did not enter the profession. The researcher stressed, “The perception of teachers and the teaching profession within communities of color and, in particular, the perception that teachers of color have of their profession and their status within professional circles, profoundly affects the image transmitted to young people about teaching as a career choice” (p. 4).

Moreover, Gordon (2002) found an important link: respect for teachers and for the profession dwindled among communities of color as they assimilated into mainstream American culture. Gordon (2002) stated the following:

The role of educator in traditional communities rests with its value for the survival of the community and with the prestige associated with obtaining the highest levels of expertise within that cultural context. Those expectations constitute tough demands for teacher education programs attempting to prepare new teachers who face the attitudes and values of mainstream culture that fall

short of granting prestige and respect for those who choose teaching as a career.

(p. 4)

Gordon's (2002) findings revealed the negative image of teaching and the lack of respect for the profession is not readily apparent in minority communities. It is only when these communities accept and enter mainstream American society that they take on the negative attitudes and views of the dominant (Caucasian) culture of teaching. Burant et al. (2002) postulated, "As members of minority communities come into greater contact with White mainstream values of individual progress and acquisition of wealth, and as their children assimilate, it's no wonder they adopt attitudes perpetuated by the dominant culture, resulting in less respect for teaching and little desire to enter the profession" (p. 12). Unfortunately, this situation lends itself to the idea that teaching is not worthy nor deserving of respect and therefore should not be considered as a feasible professional career choice (Gordon, 2002). Furthermore, this negative perception has permeated into the attitudes of the current minority teaching population (Gordon, 2002).

Poor Working Conditions

Forty-nine percent of the King (1993) study stated that poor working conditions keeps African Americans from pursuing teaching careers. Participants cited overcrowded classrooms, fear of student violence, disciplinary problems, bureaucratic red tape, lack of materials, not being able to participate in the decision-making process, and insufficient planning time contribute to poor working conditions (King, 1993). Futrell (1999) noted teachers do not have as much autonomy because of strict reforms and a hierarchal bureaucracy. Futrell further asserted that teachers lack more decision-making power, especially since they are being held responsible for many things beyond their control

(1999). Teachers are not adequately trained with the needed skills to implement mandatory education reforms and work in conditions that are not conducive to high quality teaching (Futrell, 1999).

Lack of Academic Preparation/Failure to Pass Admission or Teacher Entrance Exams

Lack of academic preparation refers to students not “acquiring the academic background, skills, and knowledge that are prerequisites to succeeding in college” (Futrell, 1999, p. 31). Garibaldi (1997) and Futrell (1999) suggest minorities are not academically prepared during their K-12 academic education which makes it difficult for them before entering college. Traditionally, minorities are not encouraged to take challenging classes and are instead overrepresented in large numbers in technical or special education programs (Futrell, 1999). The research shows African American students are more likely to be taught by substandard teachers who are poorly trained (Futrell, 1999). Inevitably, this lack of educational preparation creates an atmosphere of academic failure.

A lack of academic preparation causes African Americans to have difficulty passing admission or teacher entrance exams (Futrell, 1999). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress under the U.S. Department of Education, Caucasian students fare better than African American students on standardized tests (Garibaldi, 1997). Minorities, particularly African Americans, tend to have lower scores on standardized tests and college admission exams which may indicate their lack of academic preparation (Futrell, 1999; Garibaldi, 1997; Irvine, 1988). Consequently, African American students are receiving a poor education and are not acquiring the

necessary skills which are needed to perform well on college entrance exams and to be successful in college (Futrell, 1999).

Although more minorities are taking college entrance exams, poor academic training follows them in their educational pursuits as they apply for admission to colleges and universities because they tend to score lower on standardized college admission tests (Futrell, 1999; Garibaldi, 1997; Irvine, 1988). Consequently, tougher screening requirements for entrance into college decreases the number of African American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Newby et al. 1995). Similarly, tougher teacher training programs significantly reduce the number of African Americans seeking teaching degrees (Futrell & Robinson, 1986; Newby et al., 1995).

Case, Shive, Ingebretson, and Spiegel (1988) conducted a simple descriptive study based on 1986 survey data of 73 member institutions of the Association of Colleges and Schools of Education in State Universities and Land Grant Colleges and Affiliated Private Universities. The results of the study revealed that while 38% of the institutions believed that tougher college admission requirements impeded minority admission, the same percentage did not view it as a problem. Case et al. (1988) concluded that many of these institutions identified entrance into student teaching as a major point of attrition for minority students.

Decline in African Americans Obtaining Baccalaureate Degrees

The research shows that more African Americans are enrolled in postsecondary institutions; however, there has been a decline in the number of African Americans obtaining four year college degrees (Garibaldi, 1997). Although more minorities are attending college, this number has not kept pace with the number of Caucasians obtaining

college degrees (Gallegos, 2000; Garibaldi, 1997). Between 1976 and 1985, the number of students entering their first year of college who declared education as a major decreased by 50% when compared to previous data (Newby et al., 1995). Gursky (2002) maintains historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are instrumental in graduating minorities and issue almost 50% of the four year college degrees to African Americans. While HBCUs account for only three percent of all American postsecondary institutions, they enrolled, educated and awarded approximately 28% of all bachelor's degrees to African Americans between 1985 and 1994 (Garibaldi, 1997).

Since college is expensive, some minorities opt to attend junior colleges or technical institutions that do not offer teacher preparation programs (Futrell, 1999). Nevertheless, of the 1.5 million African Americans attending college in 1995, 59% were enrolled in four year colleges and 41% were enrolled in two year colleges (Garibaldi, 1997). However, this is not an improvement because there has not been a significant increase in the number of African Americans pursuing bachelor's degrees which are needed to gain teacher certification.

There has been a considerable decline in the number of minority students enrolled in teacher preparation programs in HBCUs (Futrell, 1999). Although HBCUs have a significant role in graduating African Americans, the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, after meeting in September 2000, concluded that federal funding for these institutions was not enough to keep up with the growing demand for minority teachers (Coeyman, 2000; Gursky, 2002). HBCUs had a 40% decrease in their teacher preparation program enrollment from 1977 to 1986 (Education Commission of the States, 1990). Yet, these institutions graduate 50% of African Americans in teacher education programs

(Futrell, 1999). Fewer African Americans completing four year degrees, coupled with the fact that there is less interest in teaching as a career choice, will continue to exacerbate the problem of the declining number of minority teachers (Futrell, 1999; Gallegos, 2000, Newby et al., 1995; Shipp, 1999).

Difficulty Passing Teacher Competency Exams

As one component of NCLB, aspiring teachers have to pass teacher competency exams (Coeyman, 2002; Keiler, 2004). Teacher competency exams test how well potential teacher candidates have mastered their subject area (Coeyman, 2002; Keiler, 2004). According to NCLB, passing teacher competency tests is one way to ensure teachers are highly qualified in the subjects they teach (Keiler, 2004).

The research shows overwhelming evidence that African Americans struggle to pass teacher competency tests (Clark & Flores, 2002; Flippo & Canniff, 2003; Keiler, 2004). The National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, a coalition of six educational organizations, states that NCLB places more obstacles in the way of minority teacher candidates by mandating states require the passage of high-stakes tests (Keiler, 2004). Walter Haney, a professor of Boston College's Center for the Study of Testing, examined Massachusetts' teacher certification passage rates for 1998 and found that African Americans and Hispanics had a passage rate that fluctuated between 20% and 56% (Flippo & Canniff, 2003). Haney concluded, "A test that systematically fails more than half of them [minorities] is clearly having a profound impact on recruiting and retaining a diverse teaching force" (Flippo & Canniff, 2003, p. 43).

Current research shows mandating prospective teacher candidates pass certification tests adversely affects African Americans and may decrease the number

choosing to teach (Clark & Flores, 2002; Futrell, 1999). The Educational Testing Service reported that while 69% of African Americans passed their competency tests, Caucasians had a passage rate of 91% (Coeyman, 2002). Dometrius and Sigelman (1988) carried out a study that examined the results of hypothetical projected scenarios of a new testing program put into practice in Texas from 1987 to 1996. Under the new testing plan, the researchers found the number of African American teachers would have declined by almost nine percent because they have higher failure rates than Caucasians on competency tests.

Murnane and Schwinden (1989) examined the National Teachers Examination passage rates of African American and Caucasian teachers in North Carolina. The researchers found that reinstating the test had an adverse affect on the number of African American teachers. Gitomer, Latham, and Ziomek (1999) examined over 360,000 records from test takers of the SAT from 1977 to 1995. The researchers also observed the PRAXIS I and II test scores. They found that the passage rate for Caucasians was 87% and 55% for African Americans on the PRAXIS I. The PRAXIS II passage rates for Caucasians were 92% and 65% for African Americans. The researchers concluded an achievement gap between prospective African American and Caucasian teachers continues to be problematic.

According to Keiler (2004), NCLB neglects to address cultural diversity issues which could impact teacher quality, thereby impeding efforts to bring minority candidates to a predominantly Caucasian field. Coeyman (2002) suggests the lower percentage of minorities passing certification tests may indicate that they are culturally biased. Some educators advocate modifying certification tests using alternative assessments such as

portfolios or developing other means to assess teacher competency (Burant et al., 2002; Clark & Flores, 2002).

Thus, mandatory passage of teacher certification tests is seen as a barrier and may cause minorities to consider entering other careers (Burant et al., 2002; Futrell, 1999). Burant et al. (2002) suggest, “In this climate, we should not be surprised if ethnic minority students seek other professional alternatives, when they struggle to enter and complete teacher education programs, and ultimately become demoralized about teaching” (p. 10). Due to the difficulty in passing competency tests, it is not surprising that minorities may find other careers as attractive alternatives.

Other Career Options

Before the 1960s, African Americans were limited in their career choice and teaching was one of the few professional occupations accessible to them (Futrell, 1999; Gordon, 2002). Gordon’s study revealed that African American participants 45 years or older believed that young people could not handle the demands of teaching or would find little or no satisfaction with the profession. Many participants asserted that young people would make other career choices, particularly since African Americans have more career choices available to them (Gordon, 2002).

Some minorities do not view teaching as a viable occupation when other careers in business, law and medicine offer significant financial incentives (Coeyman, 2000; Gallegos, 2000; King, 1993). Some question the financial cost of becoming a teacher (Futrell, 1999). Fifty-one percent of the King study believed low teacher salaries and a lack of prestige would have an adverse affect on the number of African Americans

choosing teaching as a career. As one of the participants stated, “Teaching is rewarding, but garbage men/women start at \$31,000” (King, 1993, p. 22).

Factors Contributing to Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Low Salaries

Attracting teachers to rural school districts is difficult because they typically pay lower salaries than urban or suburban school systems (Barlow, 2006; Jehlen, 2001; McClure, 2006; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducted a national survey of 896 rural school superintendents who attributed low salaries as one of the top three reasons impacting teacher recruitment and retention (McClure et al., 2003). Salaries remain low in rural areas because of the way states compute education funding. Rural communities tend to have a low tax base and little business and industry. Many state funding formulas to determine teacher salaries is affected by housing costs (McClure et al., 2003). In rural areas where the population is relatively low and housing is cheaper, state funding formulas predicts teachers in rural communities do not need larger salaries (McClure et al., 2003). According to McClure et al. (2003), rural teachers incur extra expenses such as those associated with owning a vehicle; they may have greater distances to travel which means increased operational costs.

The Rural School and Community Trust (RSCT) maintains that rural teaching salaries are significantly lower when compared to those of urban and suburban schools (McClure et al., 2003; Reeves, 2003). According to the RSCT, new teacher recruits in rural areas earn approximately 13.3% less than those in other areas which give suburban and urban districts a competitive edge when hiring new recruits (McClure et al., 2003). In

addition when examining teacher salaries among the states, the RSCT declared the average rural teacher salary could differ anywhere from \$250 to as much as \$10,400 when compared to non-rural teacher salaries (Reeves, 2003). Furthermore, 43 states have rural teacher salaries that are less than those in non-rural districts with rural teachers in Nebraska earning only 79 cents on the dollar (McClure et al., 2003).

Low salaries in rural school districts make it easier for wealthier systems to offer more incentives to beginning teachers (Barlow, 2006). After ranking teacher salaries, the National Education Association found that Mississippi, North Dakota and South Dakota rank at the bottom with all three paying less than 75% of the national average (Jehlen, 2001). Moreover, rural teachers earn roughly 3% less than those in non-rural areas. A teacher with a master's degree and at least 20 years of experience would earn approximately 17.2% less than their non-rural counterparts (McClure et al., 2003). If beginning teachers take jobs in rural communities, there is no economic incentive for them to remain. Currently, only 34 states including the District of Columbia provide retention bonuses to teachers with only five states offering bonuses in hard to staff schools (McClure et al., 2003).

Isolation

Isolation is another factor affecting rural teacher recruitment and retention (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; McClure et al., 2003; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997; Ingersoll, 2003). An AASA national survey of rural school superintendents revealed that administrators attributed isolation as a major factor impacting teacher recruitment and retention (McClure et al., 2003). Murphy and Angelski (1996/1997) conducted a survey of 94 past and current teachers in rural British Columbia and found that isolation was the

dominant factor affecting teacher retention. Ingersoll conducted a retention study of urban, suburban and rural teachers and found that rural teachers were the only group to cite isolation as a reason for leaving (2003).

Boylan and McSwan (1998) conducted a study of 427 long-staying rural teachers (those who have remained in these jobs for six years or more and were not planning on leaving for at least one year) and found that isolation was the main factor causing teacher turnover. The researchers noted teachers experienced isolation in many forms. Physical isolation refers to geographic location. Rural communities do not provide social amenities and outlets to attract recent college graduates who tend to be young and single (McClure et al., 2003). Also, these areas do not provide adequate shopping centers and offer little opportunities to socialize with others. Urban and suburban areas provide an abundance of entertainment, access to better housing and other services (McClure et al., 2003). Interpersonal isolation means having little contact with family members and cultural isolation refers to having differences in culture and values from the community (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). While intellectual isolation means having restricted access to professional development and lacking good leadership, personal isolation refers to limited contact with others from similar backgrounds and who share similar interests (Boylan & McSwan, 1998).

Multiple Certification Requirements

The reforms outlined in NCLB create many challenges for rural school systems. According to NCLB mandates, public schools must guarantee that 100% of their teaching staff meets the criteria for being highly qualified by 2006 (Barlow, 2006; Brownell et al., 2005; Hill & Barth, 2004). Under federal legislation, teachers are deemed highly

qualified when they obtain a bachelor's degree, achieve full state certification, and demonstrate competency in their subject area (Barlow, 2006; McClure et al., 2003; Prater, 2005). As a policy perspective, a highly qualified teacher could become unqualified if they were forced to teach a subject for which they lacked training and education (Ingersoll, 2006). Since rural school districts tend to hire more teachers on a provisional basis, they expressed concern about meeting the requirements mandated by NCLB (Brownell et al., 2005). In October 2005, the U. S. Department of Education, after numerous objections from states, granted a one year extension to states on an individual basis to achieve the 100% highly qualified teacher status, but only if they were making progress in this direction (Barlow, 2006; Hill & Barth, 2004).

Rural schools have smaller student populations and teachers are pressured to gain certification in multiple areas which may require they take additional course work and pass more certification exams (Hill & Barth, 2004; McClure et al., 2003). Consequently, many rural districts expect their teachers to teach several core academic subjects in which they may have little or no experience in teaching (Barlow, 2006). Ingersoll's study shows that teachers who are forced to teach out of their field have higher turnover rates (2006). A 2003 survey of administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the effect NCLB would have on rural schools revealed that 75% of secondary teachers and 33% of elementary teachers believed that the highly qualified requirement would impact retention (Hill & Barth, 2004). Also, principals expressed concern about the need for teachers to obtain more education and training in order to become highly qualified (Hill & Barth, 2004).

Rural school systems are finding it difficult to compete with wealthier districts that are aggressively recruiting highly qualified teachers to leave poorer rural districts

(Hill & Barth, 2004). In a survey conducted by AASA, superintendents revealed it would be a challenge for teachers to complete certification in multiple areas (McClure et al., 2003). Also, schools reported having fewer highly qualified teachers as the number of teachers with multiple-subject teaching assignments increased. Districts with fewer than 250 students reported having the most difficulty with recruitment and retention (McClure et al., 2003). Furthermore, the smaller the district, the more schools rely on those teaching multiple subjects (McClure et al., 2003)

Other

When asked how minority teachers became aware of teaching opportunities available in rural communities, Piercynski et al. (1997) found almost 50% of the participants chose to teach in a rural school because they had previously lived there and had maintained contact with school officials about job openings. Piercynski et al. (1997) and Murphy and Angelski (1996/1997) found that some teachers remain in rural districts because a spouse obtained employment there or they became satisfied with the rural lifestyle. When participants were asked to give specific reasons for their remaining in their current rural teaching positions, most cited opportunities to obtain graduate degrees during summer vacation or through distance learning classes and almost 50% cited having a supportive administration and teaching in a stimulating professional environment (Piercynski et al., 1997). Interestingly, Piercynski et al. found that money did not play a significant role in recruiting minorities to teach in rural school districts in Nevada (1997).

Administrative Role in Recruitment and Retention

Administrative leadership plays a crucial role in the recruitment and retention of teachers. A review of the literature demonstrates rural school administrators have a difficult time attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers (McClure et al., 2003; Ingersoll, 2003; Townsell, 2007). Schools with poor leadership tend to have more difficulty in recruitment and retention. The literature suggests schools that are effective in recruitment and retention in hard-to-staff schools can attribute their success to strong administrative instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

Even though many factors are determinants of teacher turnover, many studies conclude it is also important for a teacher to have a supportive environment (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Certo & Fox, 2002). In fact, many of these studies suggest teachers cite administrative support as the most important variable impacting their decisions to remain in their jobs (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Certo & Fox, 2002). Darling-Hammond and Berry propose the degree to which principals offer decision-making participation, collaboration with colleagues, and offer professional development opportunities affects beginning teachers' attrition (1999).

Certo and Fox (2002) conducted a study on teacher retention and found that teachers will leave if they perceive their building level administration demonstrates poor leadership. Conversely, more teachers commented they remained because of the administrative support they received in their school. Participants of the study remarked that they wanted a district level administration that was more visible and provided them with more decision-making power. Ingersoll (2001) examined data from the NCES to explore factors affecting teacher attrition rates. He found the annual turnover rate for

rural teachers in public schools is 11.2%. Although teachers left for various reasons, 25% left because of low job satisfaction. While 45% cited low job satisfaction because of poor salaries, 30% linked it to inadequate administrative support. From the results, Ingersoll concluded while retirement accounted for 27% of teacher departures, job satisfaction and reasons for job dissatisfaction account for a large percentage of attrition (2001). The analysis of the data indicated recruitment programs will not eradicate school staffing problems if retention is not addressed subsequently. According to Ingersoll the teacher shortage problem can not be solved simply by increasing the supply of teachers if they exit the field later because of unsupportive administration (2001).

Current Recruitment Policies

During the past decade, there has been an increase in the amount of literature regarding teacher recruitment programs because of the teacher shortage. The effects of the teacher shortage is evident in many areas of education: critical fields such as math and science; high need schools in urban and rural communities; lack of ethnic and gender diversity; and high attrition rates of new teachers (Clewell, Darke, Davis-Googe, Forcier, & Manes, 2000). Education policy officials suggest the best way to combat the teacher shortage is to attract specific groups at different times throughout the teacher recruitment pipeline with programs designed to simultaneously provide support to prospective teachers and meet the state's education needs (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fideler, 1999).

In 1998 the U.S. Department of Education created the Teacher Recruitment Grant Program to assist states and local districts in eliminating teacher shortages (Clewell et al., 2000). According to Clewell et al. (2000), the recruitment process includes the

“identification, recruitment, selection, training, and certification of teachers” (p. 16).

Many groups targeted in the recruitment process encompasses a diversified group: middle and high school students, undergraduate and graduate students, education and non-education majors, minorities, paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, mid-career professionals, transferring teachers, and reentrants to the profession (Clewell et al., 2000).

State Policies

There are many similarities in the strategies used by state and local programs in recruiting teachers. The amount of funding and kind of resources play a major role in the development of state recruitment strategies. Most of the current state recruitment strategies can be categorized into five programs: programs targeting middle school and high school students to begin early recruitment; minority recruitment programs to create a more diverse teaching population; alternative certification programs rather than the traditional teacher preparation program; programs targeting mid-career professionals who want a career change or paraprofessionals who are employed in schools as teacher’s aides; and reentry programs to attract those who have left the teaching profession (Clewell et al., 2000).

Some states may have a mixture of formal and informal recruitment and retention plans. One strategy is to offer college loan forgiveness to those who teach in public schools after graduating from college. Also, some states have increased salaries and address retention by adjusting salary schedules for veteran teachers. Some states have passed legislation allowing retired teachers to continue receiving pensions if they teach again (Clewell et al., 2000). However, states require different licensure requirements and some do not allow for reciprocity in licensing or allow for the transfer of teacher

retirement benefits (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). Evaluation methods to check the efficiency of the strategies are conducted in various ways; quantitative assessments are measured through the use of surveys while qualitative assessments are gathered through focus group interviews, field visits and individual interviews (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

State recruitment programs are much broader than local or district programs because they have access to more resources and attract more participants. Also, state plans have complex partnerships embedded in a large bureaucracy while local plans create partnerships on a smaller scale. States have the ability to carry out policy changes such as creating portable licensure and certification. Additionally, state programs are better equipped to disseminate and replicate successful recruitment models to fill needs throughout the entire state while local recruitment efforts specialize in targeting specific population groups relevant to local need (Clewell et al., 2000).

Local/District Policies

More literature exists about local recruitment programs than state programs. Many recruitment strategies are developed at the federal level but implemented at the local level. The overall goal is to meet the needs of a particular school or a local district. Some of the more popular plans include the Ford Foundation Minority Teacher Education Project, Teach for America, and the DeWitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fund Pathways to Teaching Careers Program (Clewell et al., 2000). Also, local districts create individual programs that consist of forming partnerships with teacher education programs with colleges and universities (Clewell et al., 2000). In order to eliminate teacher shortages,

some districts rely heavily on these partnerships or recruit from regional and national databases (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

Darling-Hammond and Berry (1999) claim current district hiring practices cause teacher shortages. Their employment procedures may be time consuming and create obstacles when hiring qualified teachers. Hiring agents within school districts are slow to respond to potential employees and applicants may feel that hiring practices are degrading. Wise, Darling-Hammond, and Berry (1987) found that some teacher candidates do not teach because their applications were lost, they were not impressed with the way hiring agents conducted their interviews, they did not have their questions answered sufficiently, or they got last minute notification of job vacancies. Many districts do not pay for travel relocation expenses and some districts place beginning teachers in hard-to-staff schools that have the highest rates of teacher turnover (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). While some districts give signing bonuses to beginning teachers or teachers new to a district, others place limits on salaries paid to experienced teachers which may require them to take pay cuts. Inevitably, many may move to another district or exit the field altogether (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

In order to eliminate teacher shortages, some districts have streamlined their employment procedures to make the hiring process more efficient. They anticipate vacancies and hire in the spring and implement strategies to welcome candidates and help them to become acclimated into the district (Snyder, 1999). Some districts have increased teacher salaries in an attempt to promote salary equalization. Darling-Hammond and Berry (1999) propose, “A more systematic approach seeks to address teacher salaries and supports through reallocation of state resources. One major cause of teacher shortages in

urban and poor rural districts is that few states have equalized school funding or teachers' salaries so that districts can compete equally in the market for well-prepared teachers" (p. 262).

Improved Teacher Recruitment and Training Efforts

Pre-collegiate Programs

Research shows career decisions are made much sooner than originally thought (Gordon, 2000; Newby et al., 1995). Many programs implemented by districts, colleges, professional associations and states have been developed to increase interest in teaching. Many programs aimed at recruiting and retaining minorities stress recruiting before minorities attend postsecondary institutions; once in college, potential teacher candidates are lured to other fields (Futrell, 1999). As early as 1988 the Education Commission of the States created the Alliance for Minority Teachers to urge colleges and high schools to form partnerships to identify minority students as possible teacher candidates so that support and guidance such as mentoring opportunities could be made readily available (McMahon, 2001). Williams (2001) and Lankard (1994) stress these programs are essential to recruiting potential African American teachers while they attend middle school and high school. A national survey conducted by RNT identified 253 pre-collegiate teacher recruitment programs (1996a). These programs had 50,000 participating students, 64% of whom were students of color (RNT, 1996a).

Community College Articulation Programs

Making it easier to transfer course credit to four year universities may increase interest in teaching. Some four-year colleges have created articulation agreements with community colleges that historically issue two year degrees (Darling-Hammond & Berry,

1999). Students can take classes at junior colleges and transfer them to teacher education programs at universities (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

Para-educator Pathways into Teaching

Recruiting minorities from those who are currently employed as substitute teachers or paraprofessionals impacts the number of minorities becoming teachers (Duarte, 2000; Gursky, 2002; Shure, 2001). According to Guarino, Santibanez and Daley (2006) alternative teaching programs appeal to more diverse groups. RNT (1996b) conducted a national survey and found there were almost 150 programs that trained paraprofessionals to become teachers. Almost 70% of the participants were people of color. These programs offer assistance in the form of financial aid, mentoring, advisement and tutoring (RNT, 1996b). According to the research, para-educator programs show lower attrition rates than traditional teacher training programs (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Guarino et al., 2006).

Collegiate Recruitment Programs

During the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government offered numerous recruitment initiatives such as scholarships and loan forgiveness to encourage college students to choose careers in teaching (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). Federal government funding for these programs ended in the 1980s. Some states continued funding these programs as the demand for teachers increased (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

Post-baccalaureate Programs

Going outside the parameters of education and recruiting individuals who are interested in a career change impacts the number of minorities entering the teaching

profession (Futrell, 1999). Participants of non-traditional and alternative teacher training programs show higher retention rates when compared to national recruits (Guarino et al., 2006). These programs are designed to attract those with four-year college degrees and have experience in other careers. Duarte (2000) and Shure (2001) suggest attracting those who are mid-career professionals, retired military professionals, and former Peace Corps volunteers. Many programs expedite teaching licensure requirements which may make them attractive to someone considering a career change (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

Current Retention Policies

Mentoring and Induction Programs

According to the literature, the most widely used retention policy is offering mentoring and induction programs (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Pan, Mutchler, Shapley, Bush, & Glover, 2000; Townsell, 2007). Pan et al. (2000) maintain that the mentoring of beginning teachers became a new practice in the 1980s to increase retention by helping teachers develop and mature professionally. Mentoring provides emotional and professional support and on-the-job training. It creates a culture of collaboration among the faculty which also improves job performance (Mullinix, 2002). Research indicates schools that offer mentoring and induction programs have lower turnover rates for beginning teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001).

Numerous studies show that mentoring and induction programs along with class size, the amount of teacher autonomy, and the amount of administrative support are components affecting job satisfaction thus affecting retention. A survey conducted by Ingersoll and Smith (2004) of 3,000 beginning teachers found teachers who got

mentoring support and took place in induction programs were more likely to remain in their jobs. As the support for beginning teachers increased, the likelihood they would stay also increased. Specific types of support included having common planning periods with mentors, creating a cohesive network of teachers and collaborating with others.

Assigning mentors should be a meticulous process and principals should be lead mentors by modeling and articulating administrative expectations (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

These measures will not be effective unless they are enforced by administration.

Increased Salaries

According to Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), another retention policy includes offering higher salaries. Some school districts have paid out bonuses or increased salaries to attract teachers in critical areas or hard-to-staff schools, but there is little evidence to support that these incentives are successful in retaining teachers. Bruno (1986) found that offering financial incentives to teach in difficult schools are not successful in retaining teachers. Bruno (1986) maintains that “combat pay” can actually create more problems because schools may not be able to continue paying salary increases once funding expires. According to Bruno, if the real underlying problems of retention are not adequately addressed, incentive strategies are doomed to fail because they do not produce desired results – lower teacher attrition rates (1986).

Summary

The review of the literature includes an overview of the material related to the recruitment and the retention of African American teachers to rural school districts. The literature exposes many reasons why African Americans choose or do not choose a career in teaching. According to the literature, African Americans are attracted to teaching

because they are influenced by others and because of the intrinsic rewards it offers. Additionally, the literature reveals there are many factors contributing to African Americans' decision not to teach: negative perception of teaching; lack of academic preparation or the failure to pass admission or teacher entrance exams; decline in African Americans obtaining baccalaureate degrees; difficulty passing teacher competency exams; other career options and; poor working conditions. Also, the literature shows it is even more difficult to recruit and retain teachers especially to rural school districts. Rural administrators acknowledge the difficulty of this task because rural teachers are paid lower salaries, have feelings of isolation, and often must obtain multiple certifications.

Recruitment and retention policies have been developed at the federal level but are implemented by the states and local districts. Although state policies usually have an abundance of funding and resources, local programs can be just as effective because these programs are distinctively tailored to meet the needs of specific schools or district. District plans are usually created on an individual basis by forming partnerships with local colleges and universities. Current recruitment programs usually include one of the following plans: pre-collegiate programs; community college articulation programs; para-educator pathways into teaching; collegiate recruitment programs; and post-baccalaureate pathways. Retention policies tend to focus on mentoring and induction programs and increased salaries.

Administrators have a significant role in the recruitment and retention process. The rural school administrator is in a unique position because he or she monitors every part of the school. Usually, it is up to principals and other building level administrators to ensure that teachers, particularly beginning teachers, get support and resources they need

to be effective in the classroom. It is imperative that they attract highly qualified teachers, particularly African Americans, who currently represent a small percentage of the overall teacher population.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this qualitative study the researcher explored the experiences of African American teachers in rural Georgia school districts. The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and the reasons they remain there. Chapter one briefly outlined the statement of the problem and the significance of the study. It also briefly explored the importance of the rural administrators' role in recruiting and retaining teachers.

Many factors influence the number of African Americans entering the teaching workforce. A closer examination of these factors including the rural administrators' role regarding African American teacher recruitment and retention will add valuable research to the literature that currently exists on this subject. Chapter two is a more in-depth review regarding the following: (1) factors contributing to African Americans' decisions to teach or not to teach, (2) factors affecting rural teacher recruitment and retention, (3) the administrative role in recruitment and retention, (4) improved teacher recruitment and training efforts, (5) current recruitment policies, and (6) current retention policies. This chapter presents an overview of the manner in which the research was conducted. Information is provided over the following: (1) research questions, (2) research design, (3) participant selection and profiles, (4) data collection methods, and (5) data analysis/data reporting.

Research Questions

This study has two research questions. They are:

- 1) What brings African American educators to rural Georgia school districts to teach?
- 2) What experiences cause African American educators to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts?

These major questions have been developed from the research on African American educators and teaching experiences in rural school districts. Since research is limited on African American educators, these qualitative questions are essential to describe their teaching experiences and their perceptions of these experiences in order to identify factors that influence recruitment and retention.

Research Design

This research study was a qualitative design employing the use of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research allows the researcher to gather data about people based on their real life experiences and helps the researcher to understand behavior within its wider context (de Vaus, 2002). Qualitative researchers employ various methods such as observation, unstructured interviewing, case studies, and focus groups in their investigations (de Vaus, 2002; Glesne, 2006). Because qualitative research relies on fewer participants, the researcher is able to conduct an in-depth investigation of each participant's experiences (Glesne, 2006).

According to Glesne (2006), using open-ended interview questions does not bind the researcher or respondents to parameters such as those established in questionnaires. Reliance on open-ended interview questions allows the researcher to explore the

attitudes, experiences and opinions of participants by giving them the opportunity to fully express themselves without constraints (Glesne, 2006). Glesne maintains that a qualitative research design allows the researcher to ask probing questions to participants in order to fully understand how their experiences color their perceptions (2006). Qualitative researchers do not try to generalize but through deliberate and purposeful exploration attempt to find patterns based on participants' responses (Glesne, 2006).

This study consisted of interviewing eight African American teachers who volunteered to participate. The qualitative design of this research study used open-ended interview questions based on the assumption that participants gave trustworthy responses. Using the interview method to conduct a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because it permitted the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of each participant (Glesne, 2006). Also, these interviews allowed the researcher to explore how these experiences affect participants' decisions to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts. Furthermore, using the interview method allowed the researcher the flexibility of modifying interview questions as it related to the study (de Vaus, 2002; Glesne, 2006).

The researcher attempted to understand and identify the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and the reasons they remain there. The limited amount of research on this subject contributed to the motivation for this study. The findings from this study can be considered in developing recruitment and retention plans specifically aimed at attracting African American educators to rural Georgia school districts. The purpose of this study, the research questions, and the limited amount of literature on this topic called for a thorough in-depth investigation and

contributed to the research method chosen for this study. A qualitative research design provided an appropriate methodology for conducting this study.

Delimitations

1. The research study is limited to rural southeast Georgia school districts.
2. The research study is limited to African American teachers with at least three years of teaching experience.

Limitations

1. Because the study includes information from rural Georgia African American educators, the findings may not be applied to African American educators in larger districts or elsewhere in the state or nation.

Participant Selection

Due to the in-depth investigation of this study, eight participants were selected. After meeting and discussing the purpose of this research study with school administrators in two school districts, each principal granted permission to conduct this study by signing a permission letter. The researcher compiled a list of potential participants based on administrators' recommendations. Participants were African American teachers who volunteered to participate in this study. Participants in this study were African American educators with at least three years of teaching experience who were teaching in rural Georgia school districts.

Data Collection Methods

This study included interviewing eight African American educators who were teaching in a rural Georgia school district. The researcher developed interview questions and a demographic questionnaire based on previous research and literature pertaining to

the factors contributing to African Americans' decisions to teach and the factors contributing to the recruitment and retention of teachers to rural school districts (Ingersoll, 2003; King, 1993; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). The demographic questionnaire provided information on participants' personal and professional profiles. This qualitative study attempted to understand the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and reasons they remain there. Utilization of this particular research technique provided the best approach to answer the research questions posed in this study because it involved conducting a thorough investigation of the topic.

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed interview questions using interview guidelines suggested by Glesne (2006) and DeVaus (2002). Interview questions were developed from a brainstorming panel. The purpose of the interview questions was to answer the two research questions. The researcher obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. Once participants gave informed consent, the researcher scheduled interviews at times and places that were convenient for each participant.

The researcher used a tape recorder to record the responses of each participant during interviews. Utilization of a tape recorder to record all interviews alleviated the need to take extensive notes during the interviews. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. The first interview served to elicit responses from each participant based on his or her teaching experiences in a rural Georgia school district. The first interview session was no more than one hour in length and was conducted during the spring of 2008. The researcher asked probing questions as the opportunity arose and as it related to participants' responses. Follow up interviews

were scheduled as needed to clarify participants' responses. Tapes of all interviews were locked away and stored until they were transcribed. All recordings of the interviews were destroyed following the completion of this study.

Data Analysis/Data Reporting

All interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the data. The researcher conducted a content analysis of each interview looking for recurring patterns and themes developed from the literature and the research questions. The information was grouped based on themes and patterns found in the literature.

Summary

This study attempted to examine the experiences of African American educators who teach in rural Georgia school districts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and the reasons they remain there. A qualitative design was used to conduct this study. The participants were eight African American educators with at least three years of teaching experience who were teaching in rural Georgia school districts. Once permission was granted from the University IRB and participants gave informed consent, interviews were scheduled. After participants completed demographic questionnaires, they were interviewed in person using semi-structured interview questions developed from a brainstorming panel. Follow up interviews were scheduled as needed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and data analyzed according to recurring themes. Upon the completion of this study, more insight was gained on the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and the reasons they remain there.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The examination of the factors that affect African American educators' decisions to teach in a rural Georgia school district and the reasons they remain there are presented in this chapter by exploring the experiences of the eight participants in the study. Brief descriptions of the personal and professional profiles of the eight participants are presented followed by an analysis of each participant's responses. The analysis is a presentation of how responses relate to the two research questions:

- 1) What brings African American educators to rural Georgia school districts to teach?
- 2) What experiences cause African American educators to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts?

All Interviews were conducted in person at a time and place that was convenient for each participant. There were no interruptions during the interviews and all sessions were conducted in approximately forty minutes.

Participants' Demographic Profiles

Six participants are female and two are male. Four participants in this study are between the ages of 40 to 49, three are between the ages of 50 to 59, and one is over 60 years old. Five participants are married, one is divorced, and two are widowed. Six participants grew up in rural communities and two in suburban communities. While three participants have Education Specialist degrees, two have Masters degrees, and three have

Bachelors degrees. Four of the eight participants have work experience in another career.

Tables 1-6 represent frequency distribution of participants' gender, age, marital status, home community type, highest level of education, and work experience in another career.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Participants by Gender (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Gender	Number
	Male	2
	Female	6

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Participants by Age (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Age	Number
	29 or less	0
	30-39	0
	40-49	4
	50-59	3
	60 or over	1

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Participants by Marital/Relationship Status (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Marital/Relationship Status	Number
	Single/never been married	0
	Married	5
	Separated	0
	Divorced	1
	Widowed	2

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of Participants' Home Community Type (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Home Community Type	Number
	Urban	0
	Rural	6
	Suburban	2

Table 5
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Highest Level of Education (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Highest Level of Education	Number
	PhD	0
	EdD	0
	EdS	3
	Masters Degree	2
	Bachelors Degree	3

Table 6
Frequency Distribution of Participants with Work Experience in another Career (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Work Experience in another Career	Number
	Yes	4
	No	5

Five participants have teaching experience in suburban school districts and three participants have experience in urban school districts. While three participants have teaching experience in elementary schools, five have taught in middle schools, and only two have taught in high schools. Currently, three participants are teaching in elementary schools, four are teaching in middle schools, and one is teaching in a high school. Tables 7-12 represent frequency distribution of participants' teaching experience in suburban and urban school districts, participants' teaching experience in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools, and participants' current grade level teaching.

Table 7
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Teaching Experience in Suburban School Districts (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Teaching Experience in Suburban School Districts	Number
	Yes	5
	No	3

Table 8
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Teaching Experience in Urban School Districts (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Teaching Experience in Urban School Districts	Number
	Yes	3
	No	5

Table 9
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Teaching Experience in Elementary School (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Teaching Experience in Elementary School	Number
	Yes	3
	No	5

Table 10
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Teaching Experience in Middle School (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Teaching Experience in Middle School	Number
	Yes	5
	No	3

Table 11
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Teaching Experience in High School (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Teaching Experience in High School	Number
	Yes	2
	No	6

Table 12
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Current Grade Level Teaching (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Current Grade Level Teaching	Number
	Elementary	3
	Middle	4
	High	1

Regarding years of teaching experience, two participants have 10-15 years of teaching experience, two have 20-25 years, two have 25-30 years, and two have been teaching for 30-35 years. Regarding participants' years of teaching experience in rural school districts, one participant has less than five years, one has 5-10 years, and one has 10-15 years of rural teaching experience. While three participants have 15-20 years of rural teaching experience, one has 20-25 years, and one has 30-35 years of teaching experience. One participant has been in this position for less than five years, two participants for 5-10 years, one participant for 10-15 years, and four participants for 20-25 years. Tables 13-15 represent frequency distribution of participants' years of teaching experience, years of teaching experience in rural school districts, and years in current position.

Table 13
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Years of Teaching Experience (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Years of Teaching Experience	Number
	Less than 10 years	0
	10 – 15 years	2
	15 – 20 years	0
	20 – 25 years	2
	25 – 30 years	2
	30 – 35 years	2

Table 14
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Years of Teaching Experience in Rural School Districts (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Years of Teaching Experience in Rural School Districts	Number
	Less than 5 years	1
	5 – 10 years	1
	10 – 15 years	1
	15 – 20 years	3
	20 – 25 years	1
	25 – 30 years	0
	30 – 35 years	1

Table 15
Frequency Distribution of Participants by Years in Current Position (N=8)

Demographic Variable:	Years in Current Position	Number
	Less than 5 years	1
	5 – 10 years	2
	10 – 15 years	1
	15 – 20 years	0
	20 – 25 years	4

Table 16
Summary of Participants' Professional and Personal Profiles

	Richard	Natalia	Cindy	Deleon	Eve	Trina	Melissa	Sheila
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	60 or over	40-49	40-49	40-49	50-59	50-59	40-49	50-59
Relationship Status	Married	Married	Divorced	Married	Widowed	Widowed	Married	Married
Home Community Type	Rural	Rural	Rural	Suburban	Rural	Rural	Rural	Suburban
Highest Level of Education	Bachelors	Ed. Spec.	Ed. Spec.	Masters	Bachelors	Bachelors	Ed. Spec.	Masters
Other Work Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Suburban School Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Urban School Experience	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Elementary School Experience	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Middle School Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
High School Experience	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Current Grade Level Teaching	Middle School	Middle School	Middle School	Elem. School	Elem. School	Elem. School	High School	Middle School
Years of Teaching Experience	26	14	11	21	31	35	21	26
Years Taught in Rural Schools	20	13	2	21	21	35	19	10
Years in Current Positions	20	13	2	21	21	21	7	10

The following twelve open-ended interview questions were used when conducting participants' interviews.

1. What made you decide to become a teacher?
2. Tell me how you came to be in your present position? (your hometown, recommendation, word of mouth, internet, job fair)
3. What are the benefits to you as an African American educator to remain in this county?
4. Describe your place as an African American educator in your school. How do you see yourself in this county? How do others see you?
5. What made you leave your last job to come here?
6. How long have you been there? What has made you stay for __ years?
7. If I asked your principal to describe you, what would he/she say?
8. If I asked one of your colleagues to describe you, what would he/she say?
9. Tell me about the support that teachers in this school get from administrators. What kind of administrative support do you get as an African American educator?
10. Tell me about one incident in which you knew that you had made the right decision to become a teacher.
11. How likely is it that you will stay here?
12. Tell me about any other experience that you have had as an African American educator here that I have not asked you about but that you want me to know.

Professional and Personal Profiles

The following pseudonyms are used to identify the participants throughout the remainder of the study: Richard, Natalia, Cindy, Deleon, Eve, Trina, Melissa, and Sheila.

Participant 1 – Richard

Richard teaches in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. He is a military veteran who served in the Army. Richard has 26 years of teaching experience and has taught in this school district for the past 20 years. For six years, he taught in a suburban school district. Richard was born and raised in this county as well.

When asked about his decision to become a teacher, Richard said, "I had very few male teachers and there really weren't very many, but the one or two that I did have, I was impressed with them. They were kind of like role models. I knew that at that time there was a shortage of male teachers, particularly minority male teachers." Richard

stated that there were few professional careers available to African Americans in a small rural community. He explained, “And so there was nothing else to do in a rural area and nothing much to do when you get out of school so I decided then that I thought I might be interested in it.”

Although Richard currently teaches in his hometown, he began his teaching career in a suburban school district. After teaching in this school system for three years, Richard resigned and worked in private industry for six years. He planned to retire from this job, but when he was laid off, he returned home to work on the family farm. Later, he saw an ad in the local paper for another job in private industry. He applied for the job and was offered a position as a supervisor. Once again, Richard was laid off after six years of employment. He referred to himself as the “prodigal son” and thought about entering teaching again. He told himself, “You know this is what you trained to do. And you know schools are open. School is a business.” When a principal in his hometown offered him a job, Richard accepted it. Richard’s wife was also employed in this school system.

When asked about the benefits he received as an African American educator to remain in his current employment, Richard responded, “My roots are here.” He continued by saying, “The cost of living for me would be somewhat less than some other area. It really doesn’t offer anything else here...I’m not one that requires a lot. I don’t have to attend a lot of social events and things like that. It’s kind of ideal for me because I’m kind of secluded.”

When asked to describe his place as an African American educator in his school and how others saw him, Richard described himself in terms of being a male and a minority. He believed his school wanted to have more minority males. Richard stated,

“Now I’ve never been told this, but I think they kind of appreciate my presence just because of that really.”

Richard reported that his principal would think of him as a good employee. He stated that he would be described as a teacher who is punctual, disciplines students, motivates students, and one who is rarely absent. He said, “For several years I had perfect attendance.” He went on to say that he did not mind taking on the “little extra assignments.” Although he thought his colleagues would make similar comments, he also believed they would say that he was strict and concerned about his students’ learning.

In general, Richard believed his administrators were supportive. He said that he did not have written reprimands. Also, he stated, “I think they support me by giving me an avenue in which to work under and the times I’ve been observed, I’ve never had a real negative report or things of that nature. If I ask for something, they try to do the best they can to supply it here.” Although Richard believed administration was supportive, he felt like they were not strict enough. Richard commented, “I have a problem with that sometimes because I think according to the rules, punishments don’t stand up to what it says in the rules.” After a long pause, Richard seemed to retract this statement slightly by saying, “But then, with them being administrators they see things that I don’t see...I think that sometimes, we question those decisions.” Additionally, Richard did not think he got support because of his race. He said, “I have never seen a situation where it was because of me.”

Richard was very appreciative of the way education provided him with other opportunities. He believed that being an educator paved the way for him to become an assistant probate judge. Richard stated, “It wasn’t necessarily that I was a teacher, but an

educator. At least that is what I think it was in my case. I don't know if they were necessarily looking for a black person, a minority or what. They offered it to me and I accepted it.”

When asked if he would remain in his current employment, Richard stated that he was “99.9% sure” that he would. He estimated that he would continue to work another two or three years and that he had no plans to work in another school system. Richard stated that out of his 26 of teaching, he had never had a real negative experience. Although he enjoyed teaching, Richard commented that he would have liked being a farmer. He said that if crops didn't fail, he would do that full-time. After a long pause, Richard stated:

I believe in helping people. We talk about giving back and I don't know if I will have anything to give back except my time. Maybe I can say one or two things to try and encourage somebody. And look, we've had some results. I've had people to come back and tell me how they appreciate me and the stuff that I've done.

Participant 2 –Natalia

Natalia is currently employed in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. Although she was born and raised in another state, she grew up in a rural community. She has been employed in as an educator in her current position for the past 13 years. Natalia taught for one year in a suburban school district and was previously employed with a government agency that works with at-risk students. She has 14 years of teaching experience.

When asked about her decision to become a teacher, Natalia said it was because she wanted to be on the same schedule of her children and her desire to make a

difference. She stated that she wanted “to make a difference in the kids who were trying to do something other than those children who are discipline problems and who are locked up for whatever reason.” After being recruited by the superintendent, Natalia left her first teaching job and began teaching in her current position. Natalia said she was compelled to leave her job working with at-risk students and go into teaching. She stated,

To make a difference by coming into the school system to deter those kids and keep them from getting to that level was pretty much the reason why I came into this school system. Those kids have run their course and if I could prevent that before they got there, I could do that at the school level.

Natalia stated that there were many benefits to her as an African American to remain in her position. Again, she remarked that she is on the same schedule as her children and her husband is employed in the same county. Natalia further commented that “the cost of living is not as high as being in Atlanta or Macon.” Also, Natalia noted that she enjoyed having a small population of kids which would allow her to “make a difference with a few.” Natalia stated that working in this county allowed her to be closer to home and that she found the environment to be pleasing.

When asked to describe her place as an African American educator in her school and how others saw her, Natalia described herself as being a role model. She stated that we need more African American teachers, particularly in this area. She later commented, “I’m hoping that’s how they see it because we have very few African American teachers and if we leave, then there won’t be any.”

Natalia reported that her principal would describe her using positive comments by such as “easy going, fair, consistent dependable, reliable, good heart, disciplined, loyal

and concerned loves the kids and gets along well with parents.” She reported that her colleagues would say things like “she is easy to talk to” and that “she’ll try to help you if she can.”

Natalia felt that her administrators were supportive. She stated, “I think teachers, any teacher in a small county, get administration support because most of them are local teachers. They grew up here, were able to leave, get their degrees, and come back.” She also commented that administrators who wanted to keep people would show support. Furthermore Natalia believed this support transcended race and stated, “And it wouldn’t matter if I was not an African American. They would support me regardless.”

Natalia felt that she was always meant to be a teacher. She recounted an incident in which she had two students to exit the special education program and graduate with regular diplomas. She reported, “You work hard with them ... and then you see them successfully graduate on time with a regular diploma and they were in your class in special education and then you know that you have done something. And I knew then that was the right calling.”

When asked if she would continue teaching in her school, Natalia said that she would stay for at least ten more years and then do something else in another school system. Natalia further commented, “Every school system is different and I would like to know how they run their system. I hear and meet other teachers and I would actually like to function in another system just to see if I could do it because you become content and that’s not good.”

When asked about other experiences she encountered as an African American educator in her school, Natalia addressed the challenges facing African American educators. She stated,

I guess the biggest thing is being an African American in this small rural setting is that you have to play so many different roles for so many kids, pretty much for the African American children. They have mixed feelings with accepting our role and I think that is just growing up around here because they don't see many of us here at school... and I'm talking certified African Americans.

Participant 3 – Cindy

Cindy teaches in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. She has 11 years of teaching experience and has been in her current position for two years. Cindy taught for eight years in an urban school district and for one year in a suburban school district. She was once employed by a government agency for eight years. Cindy was born and raised in this community as well.

When asked about her decision to become a teacher, Cindy said that she did not decide to become, but felt she was “called to be a teacher.” Initially, Cindy began her teaching career in an urban school system. Cindy decided to leave the city when her youngest child graduated high school and attended college. She wanted to leave “city life” behind because she “needed a break.” After moving back home, the local school system had a teaching position available. She accepted the job when it was offered to her.

When asked about the benefits she received as an African American educator to remain in her position, Cindy said there were none but that her students benefited from her presence. She said, “I think they need to have African American teachers because

there are so few of us. I think they need to see more people like them in professional positions so that they can be motivated.” Cindy seemed to get excited and said, “When you think about it, the majority of them in this small rural town...every professional that they probably deal with is white from a doctor to anything else.”

When describing her place as an African American educator in her school, Cindy stated without resignation that she is to “help all students to achieve their fullest potential” and to be a role model for them, but especially for African American students. She felt that others saw her as being “patriotic, respectful, hardworking, and caring.” Cindy seemed eager to share why she left her previous employment. She articulated that teaching in an urban district was extremely challenging and stressful. She shared that she grew tired of the “big city” and the “big school district.” She became frustrated with the “power struggles” and “people trying to make a name for themselves.” She expressed disdain with the way new administrators would require teachers to perform unnecessary tasks. She had countless meetings and duties and described the working environment as “crazy.” She reported that teaching in a small rural school district is less stressful. In her previous employment, Cindy had 120 students on her roster. Now, she is happy that she teaches fewer students. Although she still deals with discipline, her problems are different and less challenging when compared to her previous employment. She stated,

I have problems, but I would say the biggest problem I have with students is just talking. But in the big city...you have drugs, kids making drug drops right in front of your door. You have fights. Well, you just never know what could happen. It’s all the time. They have problems with each other all the time because there’s just

so many of them. There were just a lot of things going on in a big school that I was just tired of dealing with.

Reminiscing about her teaching experience in an urban school district seemed to make her relive the events. Cindy laughed and stated with complete affirmation, “I was just pretty much burned out a little bit, and I needed a break. It was just fortunate that I could come back.”

Cindy stated that her principal would describe her as being an “asset” and that she gets along well with other staff members, students, and parents. She stated that she was not the kind of employee that was “off all the time” or “called in all the time.” Cindy maintained that her colleagues would describe her as being “easy-going, works well with people, a team player.”

Cindy believes that her administrator is supportive. Although she said most times teachers hear that “there isn’t money for this or that”, she has been able to get materials and supplies for her classroom. Cindy was also complimentary in the way her administrator deals with discipline. She stated, “Anytime that I’ve had a problem with a student and written that student up, I haven’t had a problem with that. She handles it in an appropriate way.” She continued by stating, “I see that as being supportive and being respectful of my judgment as far as what’s going on in the class and backing that up.” When comparing the support she currently receives to her previous administrator, Cindy exclaimed, “I don’t think I’ve ever had to justify anything as far as writing a student up, sending a student to the office or just sending a student out of my class. She has given me support. In my previous school, I’ve had students to come right back to class with a note for me to come to the office!” Cindy has not observed any difference in administrative

support in terms of race. She said, "I don't think there is a difference in it. You know everybody has their complaints and their complaints can be for a whole lot of reasons. I don't see any blatant disrespect of one over the other."

Cindy affirms that she always knew she was meant to teach. Although she believes No Child Left Behind has made the job more difficult, she stressed the rewards of teaching. Her face lit up when she happily exclaimed,

Well you can dwell on it and say this is not for me but when I'm actually teaching my class, it affirms that's what I'm supposed to do. Talking to students and seeing them learn...it wipes out all the other stuff, that doubt that I just can't take this anymore. Those moments that you are teaching and you see that they are learning and you see that they understand you and you enjoy it...everyday that happens. I just know this is it. I could not see myself doing anything else for thirty-something years.

When asked if she was likely to continue teaching in this county, Cindy said adamantly, "It's very likely. As long as I am at ease and know this is where I'm supposed to be, this is where I'll be because I have no problems with the place. I enjoy working here. The stress level is pretty much nonexistent." When Cindy told her friends at her previous job that she was moving back home to teach, they chided her decision because she would "die of boredom" but she responded, "I'm different. I'm older." Cindy admits that if she were younger, she doubts she could live and teach in a small rural town.

According to Cindy, not only is teaching in a small rural school district less stressful, but that life in general is less stressful. She said, "I've been here two years. And the reason I stay is because it's just less stressful. I can't think of going back to the city

right now because it just feels good.” Cindy appreciates the little things that people take for granted. She appreciates the lighter traffic she encounters in her daily commute to and from work. She smiled and said, “That alone, the first week of driving was such a relief. I mean no stress because half the time, I was the only person on the road. I could get in my car. I didn’t have to put my foot on the brakes until I got to a stop sign! At my other job you would try to hurry up to beat the traffic.”

Although Cindy is content to live and teach in a small rural county, she misses some aspects of city life. For instance, she said, “When you think about the job, it is fine but when you think about outside of the job...this is a small, very small town. It’s very boring and there’s nothing to do really but this is my hometown and I do have a few family members that are still here.” She misses going out with her friends every Wednesday night to commune and talk away the stress. She recounted those moments with forlorn look and said, “The first week I was here after moving here, I felt that something was not right. I miss the socialization because you would have somewhere you could go and do something outside of work. It helps your attitude about work.” She remarked her salary is less than it was when she taught in an urban district. Also, Cindy mentioned that she had to travel a long distance to do something as simple as shopping. She laughed and stated, “You have to drive 52 miles to see a movie!” Even though Cindy misses parts of city life, she stated emphatically that she does not regret her decision to relocate to her hometown. She said, “I don’t have any regrets about leaving the city to come here because this is exactly what I needed at the time. I weighed out everything.”

When asked about other experiences she encountered as an African American educator in this county, Cindy compared her current teaching experiences to those in an

urban school. She remarked, "...it's been different because most of the schools that I've worked in were predominantly black, students and teachers. So that has been a big difference adjusting to it, just being used to it. You just relate differently to people of your own race, adults and children." Cindy commented that she had to get used to hearing different voices. She stated,

I had to get used to the difference in tone, the voice because there is a difference in the way African Americans and Caucasians talk. I wasn't used to hearing white people talking, and I had to get used to that and those sounds were very strange. And the students since there are more white kids, I was used to having black kids. The conversations are different. The voices are different.

Participant 4 – Deleon

Deleon is currently employed in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. He was born and raised in a suburban community. Deleon has taught in the same school district for 21 years.

When asked what made him become a teacher, Deleon said it was because of his involvement with sports. As a student, he participated in sports and wanted a career where he could remain active in sports. Just as Deleon applied for a teaching position in Atlanta, he heard about a job opening in a small rural county. Although he was not familiar with the area, he applied for teaching position anyway. When offered the job, he accepted.

When asked about the benefits he receives as an African American educator to remain in his position, Deleon responded, "The benefit is being able to support the community in some way as an African American. They can see it's possible to achieve

something.” He commented that he is able to be a role model. He stated, “Not just to black students, but when you are an inspiration to another person of another color, then you know that it’s not just because of your color but because of who you are.”

When asked to describe his place as an African American educator in his school and how others saw him, Deleon described himself as a “person of authority”. He feels that his opinion is valued and that he provides “another outlook of being able to see how someone else feels.” Deleon remarked, “A lot of times you don’t have that outlet if it’s not there. I believe that I am outlet for administration and the community.”

When asked how his principal would describe him, Deleon said that she would say that he was “dependable and knowledgeable.” He explained with pride, “I’m knowledgeable in my subject area and my job, those things that make you more effective as a teacher. I try to stay abreast of things that are beneficial to my students. And being dependable, if you know something and you’re not there, what good is knowing it if you’re not there to perform?” He remarked that his colleagues would make similar comments.

Although Deleon believes administration at his school is supportive to all teachers, he makes a distinction in the support that he receives. He stated, “They try to support to me as an African American teacher, and they also try to listen to my suggestions. I feel like they greatly support me in my efforts to be a good employee or a person they can depend on.”

When asked to describe an incident in which he knew that he had made the right decision to become teacher, Deleon recounted occasions when he had students to become teachers. Deleon proudly stated that students came back to the community to teach.

Deleon was even more proud of the fact that he did not advise any of these students to become teachers, but that they arrived at this decision without counsel. Deleon stated, “They chose to teach because they felt the way I felt. My influence may have been that they saw something that they like, and they were impressed with it. I’ve had more than one, so that is something I am most pleased with that some have chosen to become teachers, coaches, and so on.”

Deleon said that he was likely to remain in his job. When asked about other experiences he encountered as an African American educator, Deleon made favorable comments. He responded,

Well my only experiences as an African American male here is that I’ve never been confronted with my color. It may not be an experience as far as something that you have done, but I think it is one of the most gratifying things. I’ve never been confronted with the experience of having to justify because I’m black. I think that is great...I’m not saying it’s never going to happen before I’m finished, but I’ve not been confronted with that since I’ve been teaching.

Participant 5 – Eve

Eve teaches in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. She has 31 years of teaching experience and has been employed in this school system for the past 21 years. Eve taught for six years in a suburban school district and for four years in an urban school district. Eve was born and raised in this community as well.

When asked about her decision to become a teacher, Eve said it was because “teaching is a highly respected and valued profession.” She also stated that teaching is a way that she could “give back to community.” Eve said she arrived in her present

position because this is her hometown. When her aging parents could no longer care for themselves, she came back home to take care of them. If her parents had been able to take care of themselves without assistance, Eve stated that she would have remained with her previous employer because she enjoyed her job.

When asked about the benefits she receives as an African American educator to remain in her teaching position, Eve responded that the community gained the most benefit. She explained, “Children and students need to see what they can become. When there is diversity, it shows that different races of people can become teachers.” Eve smiled broadly and exclaimed, “I’ve had students to go and become teachers. It makes me feel wonderful!”

When describing her place as an African American educator in her school and how others see her, Eve responded, “I’m able to teach some of my peers’ children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. It inspires my community to be able to see an African American teacher from the same community and background. It motivates them to become teachers.”

When asked how her principal would describe her, Eve believed that she would speak highly of her work ethic. She stated, “I hope she would say that I’m professional, committed, dedicated, motivated, educated, humble, sincere, influential, and works well the students.” She remarked that her colleagues would make similar comments. She said they would also say that she was “creative, well-rounded and keeps students encouraged.” Eve reported that she felt teachers at her school receive the same kind of support regardless of race. She stated, “As a whole, we have a supportive administration.

They stand behind us. They are right there to assist us. They make sure we have what we need.”

Eve believes she made the right decision to become a teacher because she is able to expose her students to different things. Her face glowed as she recounted one particular anecdote. Eve explained, “I realized a lot of my students aren’t exposed to a lot of things. For instance, take the largest seed in the world, the coconut seed. They had never seen one before. You have different foods with coconut in them. So I went and got things. I was able to expose them, to show them what they didn’t know.”

When asked if she planned to remain employed in this county, Eve responded, “I’ll be here. I’ll be in this community always to encourage the students. Retirement is in my near future, but I’ll always be involved in functions that promote growth and nourishment.” She continued by saying,

It motivates me when I see students eager to learn and they want to learn, to make it fun. Teaching is an opportunity to encourage them that they can achieve and accomplish their goals in life. I get a chance to mold children. They have so much potential. I know that I, as an educator, have a hand in molding and shaping our future Americans.

Participant 6 – Trina

Trina is currently employed in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. She has 35 years of teaching experience and has been in her current position for the past 21 years. Trina has taught 14 years in another rural school district. Eve was born and raised in a nearby rural county.

When asked about her decision to become a teacher, Trina responded, “I don’t know if I really decided or my family decided. It was planned that I would be a teacher.” She had seven brothers and her mother and grandmother decided that she would be the one to attend college. Trina enrolled in a work study program at her college and worked in a daycare and “fell in love with little children.” She explained that during this time period, “teaching was a dignified job” and that teaching was the only profession she had worked in.

Although Trina currently teaches in this district, she began her teaching career in another rural school district. When she got married and had a child, she stopped working for three years. Her husband was away in the military so Trina moved back to her hometown. One day when she was visiting her in-laws, she ran into a principal who asked her about teaching in the county. Trina did not take it seriously until the principal called her and offered her a job. Although she accepted the job, Trina said, “At that time did she want me to be here? I don’t know or if they just needed a black teacher. There were two black teachers at the school at the time.”

When asked about the benefits she receives as an African American educator to remain in this county, Trina replied that the community got the most benefit because she taught there. She stated, “I feel like I’ve been a benefit to the community especially to our black kids, and some of the whites. They are not exposed as other children.” She stated that she is able to expose students to things that they may not have a chance to experience. Trina continued by saying, “Parents here, some parents do not see the importance of exposing children to different things. People look at this as a babysitting job and it’s not.”

When asked to describe her place as an African American educator in her school and how others saw her, Trina remarked that those in her school probably thought of her as being “vocal”. She considers herself to be a “why” person. She replied, “I’m quick to say no, especially with our black boys ...with the pushing and shoving. They are not aggressive. I’m black and I’ve live in the community with them. They’re not disrespectful. That’s just their culture. I say exactly what I’m thinking about.”

Trina believes that her principal would speak positively of her. She commented, “I would think that she would say that I do my job. I think she would say that my first concern would be the children. And I do make a lot of sacrifices for them. I will go the limit for my children.” Trina says that she is has a lot of energy and believes that her colleagues would say that she needs to slow down and “settle down a bit.”

Trina believes that her principal is supportive. She said, “She’s wearing so many hats that by the time she gets around to you, I’ve already found a solution.” She remarked, “When she comes in for evaluation, I feel like she’s really a fair person. And she gives you your bad points as well as your good points. And she doesn’t mind you questioning her about her thoughts on your bad points.”

Trina described one particular incident in which she was certain she made the right decision to become a teacher. Trina shared a story about an extremely shy student who needed extra care and attention. Trina explained, “She was so shy and she was a little white girl. If I said, “Good Morning”, she would go into shock. By the end of the year, she was just as loud as I was. I had to find so many ways for her to come out of that shell.” Trina stated that she was also influential in encouraging the mother of this student to get her degree. The mother obtained her degree and wrote a paper on how Trina was

instrumental in helping her daughter. With pride, Trina stated, “I’ve still got a copy of the paper.”

When asked if she planned to continue teaching in this county, Trina replied, “Not very likely. I’m going to retire from this county this year. This is my last year.” When asked about other experiences she encountered as an African American educator in this county, Trina paused momentarily and looked away. Her voice softened and she explained,

When my husband died...everyone in this school, not just one or two of them, the entire faculty rallied around me. Everyday they were there with me. Even after the service and everything, they were still there. I even had a faculty member to come up to me and give me \$500. And I just find that really...what would be the word...unusual? That I work with you and that I did grieve with you when something has happened. In general, I find that people here really like me as a person not because I’m black, but just for me.

Participant 7 – Melissa

Melissa teaches in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. She has 21 years of teaching experience, nineteen of which have been in rural school districts and two years in a suburban school district. She has been employed in her current position for the past seven years. Melissa was born and raised in a nearby rural community.

Melissa stated that she never intended to become a teacher. She began her professional career working as a secretary in her home county. When she compared her salary to that of her friends who were teachers, she decided to change careers. Although

Melissa had a bachelors degree, she was not certified to teach. Once she obtained her teacher's certification, she began teaching in her home community. Melissa remarked,

Once I started teaching, I realized that I liked it. I enjoy being in the classroom and being a part of student learning. It is invigorating! I became a teacher because I knew I could make more money doing that instead of working an office, but I found that I love it because I see the difference I make when my students succeed. I honestly could not see myself doing anything else.

After teaching in this position for 12 years, Melissa left and taught in a suburban school district for two years. From there, she began teaching in another rural school district where she is currently employed. Melissa left her teaching position at the suburban school because the commute was too long and "wore her down".

When asked about the benefits she receives as an African American educator to remain in this district, Melissa commented that she was able to live at home and be close to her family. Although Melissa no longer teaches in her home community, she teaches in a neighboring community. Melissa said, "At my school, I know the people around me. I know the community. This is a small place and I like that. I know where my students live. I know my students' parents. Being here makes my job a lot easier because the community is small. My classes are small. We take care of each other here." After a moment she continued by saying, "Now, I don't want you to think that it is easy. By no means is it easy, but I've been in other places and hear other teachers talk about what goes on in their schools. I'll take being here any day of the week."

When asked to describe her place as an African American educator in her school and county, Melissa sees herself in a complicated position. She explained,

As the only African American in my school, I see myself as a representation for all African Americans. I'm not trying to be that because I'm just one person. I'm just me, but I feel since I am the only one I have to succeed in everything I do on the job. I feel as if I can't let up because others will be judged by me, by my mistakes, by what I say, what I don't say, what I do, what I don't do. That's not fair. No one should be in this position because there's a lot of pressure. I second guess myself a lot. I get so tired, emotionally, mentally, and physically. But then I get to a place where I'm okay, I'm comfortable. I just have to be myself. So far, it must be working. It must be good enough because I'm still here and I guess, well I hope that speaks for itself.

Melissa said that she also sees herself as a role model. She does not try to present herself as being "perfect". She explained, "I'm doing the best I can with what I have." She encourages her students to do their best and talks to them about planning for their future. Melissa explained that she thought others in her school felt as if she did a good job. Again she commented on the pressure she feels. She stated, "I'm not trying to whine or complain, but imagine being the only one. I hope they don't see me as a black teacher who tries to do a good job but as a teacher who tries to do a good job."

When asked how her principal would describe her, Melissa believes that her principal would describe her as a good employee. She said that she is always punctual, completes her teaching duties, and gets along well with others on staff. Although Melissa believes her colleagues would speak favorably of her as well, they really don't know her apart from the job. She does not socialize with her colleagues and makes it difficult for them to get to know her. She explained, "When I'm on my job, it's all business. I've

learned a long time ago, it works best for me to keep my personal life out of my job.”

Melissa paused for a moment and continued, “I get along with my coworkers. I don’t want to get so comfortable with them or them to get so comfortable with me that we feel as if we can butt into each other’s lives. I socialize with my friends. My coworkers are my coworkers and my friends are my friends. It makes life a lot less complicated and stressful.”

Melissa believes her administration is supportive and that race is not an issue when it comes to support. She says her principal makes sure she has everything she needs for the job. She also noted that it was not a “hassle” to schedule a day off from work. Melissa stated that her administration was supportive when she sent students to the office and whenever she had parent conferences. When asked to describe an incident in which she knew she made the right decision to become a teacher, Melissa said that she could not think of one particular incident. She said, “If I got to the point where I could not get up out of my bed 180 days a year before the crack of dawn to teach my kids, I would have to find something else to do. I like what I do. So I guess there isn’t one defining moment for me because I have something new, something different to look forward to everyday.”

When asked if she was likely to remain in her current position, Melissa said she would. She remarked that she was happy in her job and that she hoped to retire from this county. When asked about other experiences she encountered as an African American educator in this county, Melissa commented, “Most of my experiences have been good. If I felt like I was in a bad place, I wouldn’t be here.”

Participant 8 – Sheila

Sheila teaches in a rural Georgia school district with less than 1600 students. She has 26 years of teaching experience and has been employed in this district for the past 10 years. Sheila taught nine years in an urban school district and seven years in a suburban school district. Sheila was born and raised in a suburban county.

Sheila stated that there were two main reasons she become a teacher. She explained, “Of course, there is a long line of teachers in my family and I also had a younger brother who was mildly handicapped.” Sheila participated in an internship during her senior year of high school and worked as a student assistant in the special education department. During her intern, Sheila said an older teacher encouraged her to “focus more on special education children rather than the regular population.”

Although Sheila has been in her current position for 10 years, she began her teaching career in an urban school district. Sheila got married and she and her husband had a “commuting marriage” while she lived in Atlanta and he in his hometown, the town in which she currently lives and teaches. After deciding to settle down in one place, Sheila relocated to her husband’s hometown and began teaching in a nearby suburban community. The superintendent in her husband’s hometown offered her a teaching position, and she accepted. During this time of reflection, Sheila added that she “made the sacrifice of leaving Atlanta to come and live here.” Sheila defines this as a sacrifice because she was “relatively happy” in her previous job where she felt like her students benefited from her teaching. She also liked living in the city where she had a wonderful church, lived in a good area, and had access to things that made life easier.

Sheila stated that it was difficult to adjust to teaching in a rural school district. At her last job, she taught in a larger school that had a more diverse teacher and student population. She had access to more resources and materials such as computers. Also, she commented on the differences in socialization between her previous school and this one. She exclaimed, "At my other school there were always social events and different things going on that kind of kept us bonded when we did things together. Down here, I don't see that as much. It's not as sociable. There are social events, but it's more like cliques."

Sheila also stated that it was somewhat difficult to adjust to life in a rural community. Sheila commented on not having access to leisure activities or entertainment. She said, "I remember when I found myself in this situation here, my sister asked me how far was the closest McDonalds, and I told her 30 miles. She told me I would never make it because it was just access, having access to those kinds of things, having easy access." As Sheila's reflection became more positive, she stated,

But then on the other hand, I was able to change my budget altogether because I wasn't spending as much. I wasn't spending as much, going as much because of the lack of access because I wasn't always willing to drive 40 miles to get somewhere. Therefore you spent less. You made less, but you spent less.

Sheila is quick to add that it would be difficult to attract young African American teachers to such a small rural town because of the lack of access to entertainment, malls, and restaurants. She declared, "It would be detrimental for them to come to a place like this because it would not be stimulating enough and they would have to drive 30 to 50 miles to find anything entertaining, socialize, or even go to the mall."

When asked about the benefits she receives as an African American educator to remain in this county, Sheila commented that she derived benefit from “having to deal directly with the children and trying to motivate them and keep them on the same track.” Also, Sheila replied that she did not see it as “being advantageous to be one of the few blacks in this system because there are just not enough of us here to make a difference.” Sheila clarified her statement by saying,

There aren’t many African Americans in influential positions in this county. That puts a lot of pressure on me as an individual because I’m kind of limited. You have to give more consideration to the things you do, the places you go and be more mindful of how others might perceive that. And that makes it even harder for me being one of the few because our children are just so needy. They want so much of you, they need so much of you and you want to give everything you can to influence them...”

After a long sigh, Sheila stated, “...it takes so much more from me that it affects my getting things done in a timely manner. But that’s part of the pressure that is on me as one of the few blacks here in this school...”

When asked to describe her place as an African American educator in her school and county, Sheila sees her in various roles. While Sheila sees herself as a “slight role model”, she also describes herself as being a “second mother, a protector, and a referee.” Sheila continued by saying, “A role model who is a regular person, who does regular things, and who is not perfect, and has gone through things.” She continued by explaining, “Just to let them know that there are a few of us here that they can come to and they can try to be like in some aspect, attain some of the things that I’ve attained and

do well.” When commenting on how others saw her, Sheila again remarked about the pressure of being one of the few African Americans in her school and system. She stated, “They’ll come and say that I should speak out about this or that and there times in which I’ve learned that there are some things that are better left unsaid. It sometimes gets tough as a black female educator in this school system. It’s tough.”

When asked how her principal would describe her, Sheila stated, “That I love the kids more than I love my job because I am always putting myself in jeopardy as far as my job in concerned. I’m always concerned with dealing with the children rather than the paperwork. I’m here for the kids and not for anything else.” She remarked that her colleagues probably think she is strange and that she speaks her mind but tries to do it in a “Godly way”. Sheila also thinks they would say that she would do whatever she could for the children.

Sheila believes that her administrator is supportive. She describes her principal as “diplomatic”. Sheila laughs and gives an example by saying, “She can tell me off about not doing something in the nicest way that I’ve ever seen a principal do. And I know it sounds crazy, but I love that about her.” She further stated, “I think she knows how to support and she knows the type of support you need and she’s going to support you in that way.” She continued by saying, “I don’t think she shows difference based on race. And I’ve heard negative things. I don’t think they understand. She’s simply trying to get them to do what is right as far as the needs of a child are concerned. There are differences based on need, and some people don’t understand that.”

When asked to describe one particular incident in which she was certain she made the right decision to become a teacher, Sheila thought for a long moment. She described a

former male student who was ostracized by other students in the school. She recalled this student with a smile and with tenderness in her voice. Sheila remarked,

The mother came up to me and said after her child graduated from high school that I was the one person who made him feel like he was, like he could make it. And he ended up being a very successful businessman in Atlanta. But it was just the fact that I and I didn't do anything different but just made sure he was treated right.

Sheila finished by saying, "That mother made me feel like if I hadn't intervened in that child's life, it would have been different for him. Situations like that, when a parent comes back and tells you that you made a difference."

When asked if she was likely to continue teaching in this county, Sheila replied, "I love the people here and I love being here, and I'll probably finish out my years of education here." She continued by saying,

I've adjusted. It may take a little more to get what you want to get what you desire, but as long as I have access to it and have means to get to it, I'm okay. Even though this is a small rural setting, there are advantages to being in a rural setting. I don't want to move my child. Her class sizes are small. I have a good relationship with the school system. Teachers know who she is.

Sheila then stated, "Living in an urban setting, it's just not that way. You don't have that feeling of consistency that is kind of throughout this community. It makes a difference."

When asked about other experiences she encountered as an African American educator in this county, Sheila talked about the differences in socialization and having feelings of isolation. She remarked,

There are things as an African American that I would not do like eating in the lunchroom or eating in the lounge. It just seems like when I'm there, they're always talking about children in a negative way or something that I'm not comfortable with. Or in the lounge, there's always this conversation or that conversation. They're not conversations that I want to be a part of. I can't deal with all that negativity.

Although Sheila misses socializing with her colleagues, she freely admits that this self-imposed isolation is necessary. She emphatically declared, "As an African American here in this school, I'm uncomfortable with hanging in the office like some teachers do. I'm uncomfortable with sitting at the table eating lunch with other teachers talking about kids. I'm uncomfortable with that."

Research Question Analysis

Research Question 1: What brings African American educators to rural Georgia school districts to teach?

This research question was answered by participants' responses to five questions (See Appendix D) that were designed to elicit an exploration of factors that influence African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts. The participants answered these questions by addressing factors affecting their decisions to become teachers and how they came to be in their present positions. Also, participants discussed reasons they left their previous employment and the length of time they remained in there.. Finally, participants discussed incidents that affirmed their decisions to become teachers.

Although responses by participants indicate that many were influenced by a role model or a significant other to pursue a career in teaching, most participants had multiple reasons for entering the profession. Richard remarked that although he had few male teachers, he was “impressed with them”. Trina was encouraged by her mother and grandmother to pursue teaching. Sheila comes from a long line of teachers and thought it was only natural to pursue teaching. During her internship as a student teaching assistant, Sheila’s decision to become a teacher was heavily influenced by the teacher she worked with in the special education department. Interestingly, Sheila is the only participant who completed a student teaching internship.

Comments by participants also suggested teaching was attractive because of the intrinsic rewards it offers. Two participants were attracted to teaching because of its prestige. Eve saw teaching as a “highly respected and valued profession” and as a way to “give back to the community.” Trina stated that teaching was a “dignified job.” After participating in a work study program working with daycare students, Trina “fell in love with little children” and decided to become a teacher. Although Natalia and Cindy were involved in other careers they could no longer resist the call to teach. Natalia felt as if she could “make a difference”, and Cindy felt that teaching was an “internal calling”.

Various other comments rounded out participants’ reasons for becoming teachers. Richard noticed there was a “shortage of minority male teachers” and thought that he could help his community meet this need. Also, he did not see any other viable professional employment opportunities available to him in a small rural community. Sheila’s decision to become a teacher was also influenced by her having a handicapped brother. While Natalia remarked that teaching allowed her to be on the same schedule as

her children, Deleon declared that his “involvement with sports” drove his decision to become a teacher. Melissa became a teacher because it paid a higher salary than her previous employment.

Many participants were in their present positions because this was their hometown or either their spouse’s hometown. Usually, they were recruited by an administrator to assume teaching positions in the county. Richard, Cindy, and Eve are all from the same county, yet they began their professional careers elsewhere. Eventually, they moved back home to teach. Sheila and Trina were teaching in other systems, but after getting married, relocated to their spouse’s hometowns to teach. Richard, Natalia, Eve, Trina, and Sheila were offered teaching positions by the superintendent or principal. Deleon applied for a teaching position and was offered the job. Although Melissa began her teaching career in her home community, she now teaches in a nearby community.

Participants gave varying responses as to why they left their previous jobs to come teach in a small rural community. Also, they remained on these jobs for varying lengths of time and stayed in those jobs for different reasons. After being laid off twice in private industry when the “economy went bad”, Richard decided to teach because it offered more stability. Richard felt comfortable coming back to live and work in the community in which he grew up in. Richard enjoyed working in private industry for 12 years and hoped to retire in this profession. Natalia worked in her previous employment for one year while waiting for a position to become available in the same school system as her husband because she wanted to “get closer to home”. She also liked the superintendent and was pleased with the school environment. After working at an urban school for eight years, Cindy grew tired of the “big city” and was constantly under stress

as a teacher in an urban school system. She welcomed the opportunity to teach in a small rural school. All of Deleon's 21 years of teaching experience has taken place in the county of his present employment. Eve worked in her previous employment for six years responding and moved back home to take care of her aging parents. When Trina had her first child and her husband was stationed elsewhere, Trina moved to be closer to her family and her in-laws. Melissa got tired of the long commute and decided to teach in a school near her home community. Sheila made the "sacrifice" to leave Atlanta and to settle down with her husband in his hometown. She taught in a nearby suburban school for seven years until a teaching position became available in her husband's hometown.

When responding to an incident that affirmed their decisions to become teachers, many participants' recounted anecdotes of seeing students succeed or receiving parental praise. Natalia recalled having two special education students graduate with regular diplomas and knowing that she was in the "right calling." Trina reflected on a time when a shy student blossomed. A mother told Sheila her intervention made her son feel like "he could make it." Eve commented that exposing her students to something as simple as a coconut seed affirms her belief that she entered the right profession. Cindy and Melissa said that their decision to become a teacher is affirmed daily when they are teaching and students are learning. Deleon knows he made the right decision to become a teacher when he sees his former students become teachers. Richard responded that former students have thanked him for his efforts and that education provided him with the opportunity to become an assistant probate judge.

Research Question 2: What experiences cause African American educators to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts?

This research question was answered by participants' responses to eight questions (See Appendix D) that were designed to elicit an exploration of items that influence African American educators' decisions to remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts. The participants answered these seven questions by addressing the benefits they received as an African American to remain in their present employment, their place as an African American educator in their school and how others saw them. Also, participants discussed the way their principal and colleagues would describe them, the support they receive from their administrators, how likely they would remain in their current position, and any other experiences they had encountered as an African American educator.

Participants gave varying comments when discussing the kind of benefits they receive as an African American educator to remain in their present employment. Many participants did not feel it was beneficial for them to continue teaching in their current positions. They believed the community and students derived the most benefit from their presence because they got the opportunity to see African Americans as professionals, in authority positions, and as role models. Cindy stated, "They need to see people like me in professional positions." Deleon said that he gets to be a support to the community. Eve believed that it was important to promote diversity and to encourage other African Americans to teach. Trina stated that she was a benefit to the community and the students. Although Sheila felt as if she benefited from working directly with students, she did not see other advantages. Melissa said that it was professionally beneficial to work in a small school and to have small classes.

Other comments from participants discussed the personal benefits they receive from being employed in a rural community. Richard and Natalia appreciate the low cost of living a rural community offers. Richard likes living in the same community with his family. Natalia enjoys being employed in the same county as her husband and having a more suitable schedule that allows her to spend more time with her family. She also likes working in a school system with a small student population. Cindy likes teaching in a rural school because of the low stress level.

Many participants described themselves as being role models or authority figures when discussing their place as African American educators in their school and county. Similarly, most participants commented that others viewed them in the same way. Participants defined the kind of role models they were. Richard describes himself as someone who is involved in “civic activities” and “serves on certain boards.” As role models, Natalia and Eve believe they can attract other African Americans to become teachers. Cindy describes herself as being “patriotic, respectful, hardworking, and caring.” She believes her place is to help her students reach their “fullest potential.” Deleon believes he offers administrators “another outlook” and a “different perspective” from an African American point of view. Also, Deleon describes himself as a “liaison” between administration and the community. Trina views herself as a “why” person and as an advocate for her students, particularly black males when they are misunderstood or unable to defend themselves. Trina asserts her ownership of this role because she shares their culture. Sheila feels that she serves in multiple roles. She and Melissa describe themselves as being normal people who have worked hard to achieve their goals and who can be examples for their students.

Participants believe their principals would describe them regarding the kind of employees they are. All but one participant believe their principals would describe them as good employees. Participants suggest their principals would describe them by using positive comments such as professional, punctual, consistent, dependable, reliable, and knowledgeable. Although Sheila believes her principal would say that she loves her students, she would also say that she often turns in paperwork late.

Most participants suggest their colleagues would describe them using positive comments. Some participants stated that their colleagues probably would not know how to describe them. Cindy said her colleagues have not figured her out yet. Trina reported her colleagues would say that she was too “vocal.” Two participants, Melissa and Sheila, suggested that their colleagues do not really know them that well because they isolate themselves.

In general, all participants felt that they had supportive administrators. Moreover, most participants did not think their race was a factor in getting administrative support. Only one participant, Deleon, believed his support was based on his race. Participants discussed various ways administrators offer support. Four participants commented that their administrators ensured teachers had all the resources and materials needed to perform their duties. Melissa commented that her administration gave her days off when she needed it. Three participants said that their administrators allowed them to make decisions without having to justify their actions. One participant was extremely surprised at the unwavering support she received from her school when her spouse died. Three participants responded that their principals were fair during classroom observations and allowed them to question their scores. While one participant suggested that his

administration needs to improve student discipline, three participants believed that their administrators handled discipline appropriately. In general, participants gave administrators high marks for being supportive.

Overall, most participants described having pleasant teaching experiences as African American educators in rural school districts. One participant considered himself “blessed” because he did not have any negative experiences. Similarly, another participant related that she had positive experiences and talked about the good African American teachers who taught her. Another participant described his overall experiences as “gratifying” because he was never forced to make justifications because of his race. One participant stated that her teaching experiences made her more aware of the differences between the African American and Caucasian teacher and student population in her school. While three participants commented that it was challenging to be an African American educator in a small rural community, two participants remarked that their negative experiences caused them to intentionally isolate themselves from their colleagues.

Overwhelmingly, most participants declared their intention to remain in their current employment. One participant stated that she was retiring this year. Although another participant anticipated retiring in another year, she adamantly stated that she would remain active in the school system to promote education. One participant indicated her plans to leave her position in 10 years to go work in another school system.

Gender differences were noted based on participants’ interviews. Although only two males participated in this study, they were generally more guarded in their responses. Before answering the interview questions, both were deliberate when choosing their

words to express themselves. At times, their guarded responses caused the researcher to ask more probing questions for additional clarification. For instance, both males were reticent about disclosing information on their personal teaching experiences, but once they felt comfortable, their responses came more easily. Also, the male participants would think longer before answering to the questions. Additionally, they were more assertive with their responses. In general, the six female participants seemed more comfortable and spoke more freely during the interview process. Although their interviews were more time consuming, they were eager to share personal anecdotal teaching experiences. In most cases, they shared numerous teaching experiences often without prompting.

Summary

The findings of this study summarize the teaching experiences of eight African American educators who presently teach in rural Georgia school districts. Most participants share similar backgrounds, yet it is evident that their individual life experiences, desires, and opportunities impacted their decisions to pursue careers in teaching. Likewise, each participant encountered different personal and professional experiences which eventually led to their seeking employment as educators in rural communities. Although some common themes became apparent from the results, it must be clearly noted that their decisions to remain employed as educators in rural Georgia school districts depends heavily on how they perceive their overall work experiences. Ultimately, African American educators' teaching experiences and perceptions of these experiences will determine whether or not they remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts.

Participants' responses from the study yielded several common themes.

Participants' comments suggest African Americans' decisions to teach are influenced by certain factors. Although teaching is not seen as a lucrative profession, participants were motivated by a significant other or role model, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and positive perceptions of the career. Similarly, participants' remarks suggest African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and their decisions to remain there are affected by a number of factors. The type of home community reared in, acclimation to the rural lifestyle, location of spousal employment, and having a supportive administration directly affects where African American educators teach.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief summary of the entire study. Relevant conclusions and implications for further study are included. In addition, this chapter includes recommendations from the researcher.

Summary

The motivation for this study came from the researcher's past teaching experiences in rural Georgia school districts. Literature about African American teachers was reviewed. The researcher examined factors affecting African Americans' career decisions and reasons they are attracted to the teaching field. Additionally, the researcher explored the reasons African American educators teach in rural school districts. Finally, the researcher investigated reasons African American educators continue to teach in rural school districts.

In an attempt to identify the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and why they remain there, a qualitative methodology was used. The researcher initiated contact with administrators in rural Georgia school districts and provided them with letters which allowed them the option to grant or deny permission to conduct research using teachers employed in their schools. After establishing communication with administrators, several prospective participants were identified for this study. Once initial contact was made with these teachers, eight individuals volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher scheduled interviews by

coordinating dates and times that were convenient for each participant. Prior to each interview, participants were given a demographic questionnaire and a consent letter.

Each interview session was no more than one hour in length. During the interviews, a mechanical recording device was used to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses. The researcher maintained communication with participants in the event it became necessary to clarify responses. Results of the demographic questionnaire were created into table form and the transcripts were analyzed to identify recurring themes.

Analysis of Research Findings

An examination of the demographic questionnaire and the career histories reveal several similarities and differences among the participants. Although they share similar backgrounds, their personal and professional experiences contribute to their employment decisions. The findings suggest certain factors influence the reasons African Americans become teachers. Findings derived from participants' interviews revealed the following recurring themes regarding African American motivation for pursuing a teaching career: influence of a significant other or role model, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and positive perceptions of the profession. Additional findings suggest several factors impact African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and to remain there as teachers. Findings revealed the following recurring themes: type of community reared in, acclimation to the rural lifestyle, location of spousal employment, and having a supportive administration.

Discussion of Research Findings

Although the findings of the study reveal numerous similarities with the literature reviewed in chapter two, gaps became apparent. A qualitative methodology employing the use of in-depth interviews, led to the researcher investigating other factors that influence African American teacher attrition in rural Georgia school districts. Relying on a qualitative research design, allowed the researcher the opportunity to explore African American educators' teaching experiences which ultimately affected their career decisions. As mentioned earlier, participants' responses yielded recurring themes.

King (1993), Newby et al. (1995), Piercynski et al. (1997), and Shipp (1999) postulate the influence of significant others or role models is a motivational factor for African Americans becoming teachers. Piercynski et al. (1997) found that many participants of their study had parents who were employed in the education field. King (1993) maintains the close nature of these kinds of relationships has significance on African Americans career interests. Just as participants of these studies cited the influence of significant others and role models a reason to pursue teaching, many participants of this study did as well. One participant noted that she comes from a "long line of teachers" and felt compelled to continue the tradition, and another exclaimed the persistence of her mother and grandmother caused her to become a teacher. The findings of this study corroborate the findings of the aforementioned studies.

Gordon (2002) and King (1993) found that teachers have a profound impact on students' perceptions of teaching as a career choice and in their decisions to become teachers. Two participants of this study remarked that although they attended schools in rural districts that employed few African Americans, these teachers were positive role

models who modeled professional characteristics that they hoped to emulate once they became teachers. Another participant stated that her internship as a student assistant with a special education teacher clearly motivated not only her decision to teach, but also her area of concentration. Therefore, the results of the study are analogous with the current literature.

According to Brown & Butty (1999), King (1993), and Shipp (1999), African American educators are attracted to teaching because of the numerous intrinsic rewards it offers. Brown and Butty (1999) and Shipp (1999) found that intrinsic rewards such as having an opportunity to work with young people and the desire to impart knowledge were among the main reasons African Americans pursued teaching careers. Findings from this study indicate the same. Several participants of this study cited that they “love working with children” or have an “internal calling”; accordingly, teaching allows them the opportunity to “make a difference” and to “give back to the community”. Another participant decided to become a teacher because he could remain actively involved in sports. Participants’ comments from this study support the current research.

Contrary to studies by Brown and Butty (1999), King (1993), and Shipp (1999), participants of this study cited the appeal of extrinsic rewards as well. One participant became a teacher because it paid a higher salary than her previous career as a secretary. Another participant changed career paths and began teaching because it allowed her to spend more time with her family. Another participant noted a limitation of career choices because there was a lack of career options made available to educated African Americans who resided in rural communities when he entered the workforce; essentially, teaching was his only viable alternative. Just as the literature indicates intrinsic rewards are strong

predictors of African Americans choosing careers in teaching, results from this study emphasizes extrinsic rewards can not be ignored.

Burant et al. (2002), Gordon (2000), and Newby et al. (1995) suggest negative perceptions of teaching deter prospective candidates from entering the profession. Futrell (1999) states the portrayal of teaching in an unflattering manner lowers interest from African Americans, thereby depicting the profession as an unappealing career choice. Similarly from their study, Newby et al. (1995) concluded students' negative perceptions of the profession leads to the belief that other careers are more important than teaching. The results of this study appear to contradict Burant et al. (2002), Gordon (2000), and Newby et al. (1995). Two participants of this study perceived teaching in a positive manner and described it as being "dignified", "respected", and "valued". Accordingly, their positive perceptions of teaching motivated them to become teachers. However, a closer examination of when these participants began their teaching careers may be indicative of a time period when teaching was seen as having value and worth. Collectively, both participants have 61 years of teaching experience; one has taught for 35 years and the other for 31 years. When they embarked on their careers, teaching may have been viewed in a more positive manner.

Research by Piercynski et al. (1997) indicates the kind of home community educators are reared in is a factor affecting their decisions to teach in rural school districts. Piercynski et al. (1997) reported almost half of the respondents in their study taught in rural school districts because they had previously lived there and had maintained contact with school administrators about job openings. All but two participants in this study grew up in rural communities. Furthermore, five participants

began their teaching careers in either urban or suburban schools. Three participants indicated they decided to teach in the rural communities in which they were born and raised. Even though these participants began their teaching careers in urban or suburban school districts, they eventually moved back home to teach. Also, they found that moving back home was a smooth transition and gained employment quite easily and often without aggressively applying for teaching positions.

Murphy and Angelski (1996/1997) and Piercynski et al. (1997) postulate some teachers seek employment in rural schools and continue in their positions because a spouse secured employment in the community. Murphy and Angelski (1996/1997) found teachers maintain employment in rural school districts because they became accustomed with the rural lifestyle. Two participants of this study said they obtained employment in rural school districts because their husbands had jobs in the community. Because they were spouses of people who were born and raised in the community, administrators readily recruited them to teach in their schools. This was the first time either of these participants had taught in a rural school district. While one had previously taught in an urban school, the other had worked in a suburban school. Therefore, their decision to teach in a rural school district was motivated by their spouse's job location. Additionally, these participants remained as teachers in rural communities because they were comfortable with the rural lifestyle. Based on the literature review and the findings from this study, it appears that home community type influences teachers' decisions to teach in rural communities. Also, the location of spousal employment and adaptation to the rural lifestyle determines whether or not African American educators will sustain employment

in these school districts. The results of this study corroborate the findings of Murphy and Angelski (1996/1997) and Piercynski et al. (1997).

According to Barlow (2006), Jehlen (2001), McClure (2006), and Reeves (2003), attracting teachers to rural school districts is difficult because they typically pay lower salaries when compared to urban or suburban school systems. Studies by Ingersoll (2001) and McClure et al. (2003) maintain poor rural teaching salaries will negatively impact teacher recruitment and retention. Findings from McClure et al. (2003) suggest rural teachers incur additional cost of living expenses and have no financial incentives to remain in rural communities. However, Piercynski et al. (1997) found rural teaching salaries have virtually no impact on African American educators' attrition rates. Additionally, Bruno (1986) and Darling-Hammond and Berry (1999) maintain there is little evidence to support that offering financial incentives such as higher salaries retains teachers.

Results from this study contradict the findings of Barlow (2006), Jehlen (2001), Ingersoll (2002), McClure et al. (2003), McClure (2006), and Reeves (2003), but support the findings of Bruno (1986), Darling-Hammond and Berry (1999), and Piercynski et al. (1997). While most participants of this study did not address financial concerns, two participants of this study described the cost of living in their community as being "low" and as a benefit. Although another participant recognizes her current salary is lower than what she earned as a teacher in urban and suburban schools, her living expenses actually decreased because of limited access to entertainment, restaurants, and malls. None of the participants expressed a desire to end employment because of low teaching salaries.

Many studies show that having a supportive administration affects teacher retention (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Mullinix, 2002; Piercynski et al. 1997; RNT, 2000). A study of rural teachers conducted by Piercynski et al. (1997) found almost half remained in their jobs because they had a supportive administration. Ingersoll (2001) found that teachers will not only leave their teaching positions but will exit the field completely because of because of an unsupportive administration.

Participants in this study defined a supportive administration in different ways. Four participants were complimentary of their administrations supplying them with the resources and materials needed to perform their duties as teachers. One participant spoke openly of her administration providing a supportive environment when her husband died. Not only was she surprised by their emotional support, but also the financial support they gave her.

A study conducted by Certo and Fox (2002) found that teachers want an administration that gives them more decision-making power. Futrell (1999) maintains teachers do not have much autonomy and lack more decision-making power. King (1993) found African Americans do not pursue teaching careers because of not being able to participate in the decision-making process. Five participants of this study spoke favorably of their administrations giving them the freedom to make decisions and find solutions to problems. Because administrators sought their opinions on different issues and not necessarily race issues, participants felt as if their opinions were valued. As a result of administration creating a culture of shared decision-making, participants were comfortable when making suggestions. Participants seemed to appreciate administrators'

willingness to look at a situation from another prospective. Only one participant believed his race influenced the kind of support he received.

Isolation is another factor affecting rural teacher retention (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; McClure et al., 2003; Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). Ingersoll's study of urban, suburban and rural teachers found rural teachers were the only group to cite isolation as a reason for leaving (2003). Boylan and McSwan report that personal isolation refers to having limited contact with others from similar backgrounds and who share similar interests (1998). While two participants of this study said they experienced personal isolation, they intentionally limited opportunities to socialize and bond with their colleagues. Another participant was personally isolated because there were not enough opportunities to socialize with her coworkers. None of these participants expressed a desire to leaving their jobs as a result of the personal isolation they experienced. McClure et al. (2003) state rural communities do not provide social amenities and outlets causing teachers to experience geographic isolation, thus affecting retention. Although some participants of this study indicated they were negatively affected by geographic location, they did not see it as a reason to leave their rural teaching positions. Therefore, the results of this study contradict the aforementioned studies.

Based on the literature review and the findings of this study, rural administrators have room to improve their recruitment efforts of African American teachers. While participants in this study speak favorably of their teaching and professional experiences in rural school districts and mentioned that they had no immediate plans to seek employment opportunities in other systems, two participants, each with 30 or more years of teaching experience indicated their intention to retire within two years. An

examination of participants' demographic profiles show that all participants are 40 years of age or older thereby reflecting a desperate need to aggressively recruit young prospective African American teaching candidates. Another closer inspection of participants' demographic profiles reveals that the participant with the fewest years of teaching experience has taught for 11 years. If administrators do not adequately address their recruitment and retention needs and design plans to generate interest from African Americans to teach in their communities, their current supply of African American teachers could potentially expire within the next 19 years.

One recruitment policy currently in use is developing pre-collegiate teacher recruitment programs designed to increase interest in teaching among minorities before they attend postsecondary institutions (McMahon, 2001; RNT, 1996a; Lankard, 1994; Williams, (2001). Lankard (1994) and Williams (2001) stress these programs are essential to recruiting potential African American teachers while they attend middle school and high school. Only one participant in this study participated in a pre-collegiate program as a senior in high school. Her internship program not only increased her desire to become a teacher, but also prepared her for a career in teaching. Developing and implementing some kind of student internship program for high school students may be one possible recruitment strategy for rural administrators to consider.

Darling-Hammond and Berry (1999), Pan, Mutchler, Shapley, Bush, & Glover (2000), and Townsell (2007) state the most widely used retention policy is offering mentoring and induction programs. According to Mullinix (2002), mentoring creates a culture of collaboration among the faculty which also improves job performance While studies by Guarino et al. (2006), Ingersoll (2001), and Ingersoll and Smith (2004)

indicate schools that offer mentoring and induction programs have lower turnover rates for beginning teachers, none of the participants in this study participated in or was offered the opportunity to participate in a mentoring or induction program once they were hired in their present positions. An examination of participants' demographic profiles reveal that while one participant has less than five years of teaching experience in her current position, four other participants have been teaching in their current positions for 20-25 years. Also, one participant who has taught for 21 years has all of his teaching experience in his present position. It should also be noted that while two participants plan to retire within the next two years, the other participants do not have immediate plans to leave their current positions. Based on the results of this study, it appears that while mentoring and induction programs help lower teacher attrition rates, participants' decisions to continue employment in their present positions have not been influenced by participation in mentoring programs.

Conclusions

Findings from this study suggest there are many reasons African Americans decide to become teachers. Findings from this study also indicate many factors influence African American educators' decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and to remain there as teachers. School administrators must realize African American educators control and make their own career decisions on whether or not they will teach in rural school districts. Yet, it is also clearly evident that administrators are not entirely powerless and can influence whether or not African American educators decide to teach in rural communities.

Based on the findings of this study, rural administrators who are proactive in providing support to African American educators and create a pleasant work environment are more likely to sustain a stable African American teacher population. When school administrators are supportive, they create a healthy environment that nurtures teachers and empowers them to become active participants in the school. Administrators who make teachers feel appreciated and valued offer autonomy and show respect for teachers' decisions. African American educators are more likely to remain in rural teaching positions if they once lived in a rural community or have become accustomed to the rural lifestyle and if a spouse gains employment in a rural community. Ultimately, African American educators' teaching experiences and their perceptions of these experiences will determine how successful administrators are in recruiting and retaining a constant African American teacher population. Their motivation and actions in promoting a supportive work environment can increase the likelihood of maintaining an adequate supply of African American teachers. Not addressing the problem of recruiting and retaining African American educators in rural school districts will undoubtedly have dire consequences. Rural school administrators have been limited in their role and actions in recruiting African American teachers; however, they can take comfort in knowing that they have some recourse to combat African American teacher attrition.

Implications

The implications of this study directly relate to administrators in rural school districts, the K-12 educational community, and society. This study is important to rural school administrators who desire to create a diverse teacher workforce. School districts are aggressively searching for ways to increase their African American teacher

population, especially in hard-to-staff school districts located in rural areas. In an effort to compete with other districts for a shrinking African American teacher population, many schools have developed and implemented recruitment and retention plans designed to attract highly qualified teachers of color. The success or failure of recruitment and retention programs depends heavily on administrators. Findings from this study can be instrumental in designing recruitment and retention plans to attract and maintain a steady pool of African American teachers. Rural administrators can acquire feedback from African American educators based on their teaching experiences and make needed improvements to recruitment and retention plans. Unless special attention is given to this topic, rural school districts will continue to use ineffective plans and be unsuccessful in decreasing African American teacher turnover rates.

This study is beneficial to society because it is important for all students to have experiences with diverse role models and authority figures from various racial and cultural backgrounds. Although the minority student enrollment across the U.S. continues to increase, the pool of African American teachers is steadily declining. Many public school students will complete their K-12 education without being exposed to or interacting with African American teachers. African American teachers have a critical role in educating our youth, and it is crucial that schools hire a more diverse teacher workforce. Findings from this study can help the K-12 educational community develop strategies to attract African Americans to the teaching field which would illustrate a more accurate representation of our increasingly diverse society. If the problem of African American teacher recruitment and retention is not handled accordingly, it will continue to get worse.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research include conducting a comparative study of African American and Caucasian educators to examine the factors that influence their decisions to teach in rural Georgia school districts and to remain there. Considering the paucity of literature and research on rural teacher recruitment and retention, administrators can benefit from this kind of study. At a time when more scrutiny is given to rural education, this kind of study could provide valuable information on how to attract and maintain more interest to teach in rural school districts.

Additionally, further research could be conducted to examine the affect African American teachers have on students. Research of this type can focus on how African American educators affect student motivation and achievement. At a time when schools are held accountable for student achievement, these kinds of studies may shed some light on how a teacher's race impacts student success on standardized exams.

Dissemination

Rural school districts would be interested in the results of this study because of the difficulty in recruiting and retaining African American educators to rural school districts. Information from this study can help rural school administrators in their efforts to create and implement effective recruitment and retention plans targeting African American teachers. Because public schools are facing a shortage of teachers, especially African American teachers, state and federal educational agencies would also be interested in the results of this study. Since state and federal agencies are better funded and have access to more resources, they would be the best vessels to examine the results of this study and disseminate it local school districts.

The researcher plans to communicate the findings of this study by sharing the results of it at professional conferences such as the National Youth At-Risk Conference. In addition, the contents of this study will be released on the World Wide Web. Also, the researcher plans to publish articles pertaining to this topic in educational journals.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Sarah L. Alonzo-Osborne and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study to finish my educational requirements for the degree. The purpose of this study is to identify the reasons African American educators teach in rural Georgia school districts and the reasons they remain as teachers in rural Georgia school districts.

Participation in this research will involve participating in 2 interviews. The first interview will be for the purpose of answering 12 questions and the second will be for the purpose of clarifying any responses and following up on any necessary responses. A mechanical recording device will be used during the interviews to ensure accurate recording of responses. The risk in this process is minimal but it may include minor issues such as embarrassment and dealing with some sensitive issues. Your name and school system will not be used to ensure your and school system's anonymity. The estimated total time of commitment is 1 hour for the first interview and, if necessary, approximately ½ hour for any follow up questions.

The findings of the study may assist rural Georgia school districts in developing and implementing recruitment and retention programs aimed at attracting rural African American teachers.

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

You are not required to participate in this research and you have the opportunity to end the participation at any time by telling the person in charge. As a participant, you do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to answer. There is no penalty for deciding not to participate.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: African American Educators: Why They Teach in Rural Georgia School Districts and Why They Remain There

Principal Investigator: Sarah L. Alonzo-Osborne, 536 South Thompson Road, Vidalia, GA, 30474, 912-293-5037, sosborne30474@yahoo.com

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Cherry C. Brewton, Department of Teaching and Learning P. O. Box 8134, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA 30460, 912-681-5674, cbrewton@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS: WHY THEY TEACH IN RURAL GEORGIA
SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND WHY THEY REMAIN THERE
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A – PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. What is your age?
 - a. 29 or less
 - b. 30-39
 - c. 40-49
 - d. 50-59
 - e. 60 or over

2. What is your marital status/relationship status?
 - a. Single/never married
 - b. Married
 - c. Separated
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Widowed

3. In what kind of community were you reared in?
 - a. Rural _____
 - b. Suburban _____
 - c. Urban _____

4. What is the highest degree you have earned?
 - a. Ph.D.
 - b. Ed.D.
 - c. Ed. Specialist
 - d. Masters
 - e. Bachelors

SECTION B – EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

5. How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____
6. What grade level do you teach?
 - a. Elementary School (_____)
 - b. Middle School (_____)
 - c. High School (_____)

7. In what kind of school district(s) (rural, suburban, urban) have you previously taught in? How many years in each district?

a. Rural	_____	Number of years: _____
b. Suburban	_____	Number of years: _____
c. Urban	_____	Number of years: _____

8. How many years have you been in your current employment? _____

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. What made you decide to become a teacher?
2. Tell me how you came to be in your present position? (your hometown, recommendation, word of mouth, internet, job fair)
3. What are the benefits to you as an African American educator to remain in this county?
4. Describe your place as an African American educator in your school. How do you see yourself in this county? How do others see you?
5. What made you leave you last job to come here?
6. How long have you been there? What has made you stay for __ years?
7. If I asked your principal to describe you, what would he/she say?
8. If I asked one of your colleagues to describe you, what would he/she say?
9. Tell me about the support that teachers in this school get from administrators. What kind of administrative support do you get as an African American educator?
10. Tell me about one incident in which you knew that you had made the right decision to become a teacher.
11. How likely is it that you will stay here?
12. Tell me about any other experience that you have had as an African American educator here that I have not asked you about but that you want me to know.

APPENDIX D
MATRIX

Matrix for Research Study

Interview Questions	Research Questions	Literature Review
1. What made you decide to become a teacher?	1	Piercynski et al. (1997), Gordon (2002), King (1993), Newby et al. (1995), Shipp (1999), Brown & Butty (1999), Gordon (2000), Futrell, (1999), McMahon (2001), Williams (2001), Lankard (1994), RNT (1996a), RNT (1996b), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), Duarte (2000), Gursky (2002), Shure (2001), Guarino et al (2006)
2. Tell me how you came to be in your present position? (your home town, recommendation, word of mouth, internet, job fair)	1 and 2	Piercynski et al. (1997), Murphy & Angelski (1996/97), Duarte (2000), Gursky (2002), Shure (2001), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), Guarino et al. (2006)
3. What are the benefits to you as an African American educator to remain in ___ County?	2	King (1993), Brown & Butty (1999), Shipp (1999), Gordon (2002), Newby et al. (1995)
4. Describe your place as an African American educator in your school. How do you see yourself in ___ County? How do others see you?	2	King (1993), Brown & Butty (1999), Shipp (1999), Gordon (2002), Newby et al. (1995)
5. What made you leave you last job to come here?	1	Bruno (1986), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), Ingersoll (2001), Certo & Fox (2002), Clewell et al. (2000), Darling-Hammond et al (1999), Snyder (1999), Pan et al. (2000), Townsell (2007), Guarino et al. (2006), Ingersoll & Smith (2004)
6. How long have you been there? What has made you stay for ___ years?	1	Barlow, (2006), Brownell et al. (2005), Bruno (1986), Hill & Barth (2004), Jehlen (2001), McClure (2006), Murphy & Angelski (1996/97), McClure et al. (2003), Reeves (2003), Boylan and McSwan (1998), Ingersoll (2001, 2003, 2006), Ingersoll & Smith (2004), Piercynski et al. (1997), Townsell (2007), Certo & Fox (2002), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999)
7. If I asked your principal to describe you, what would he/she say?	2	King (1993), Shipp (1999), Brown & Butty (1999)

8. If I asked one of your colleagues to describe you, what would he/she say?	2	King (1993), Shipp (1999), Brown & Butty (1999), Boylan & McSwan (1998), Murphy & Angeski (1996/97),
9. Tell me about the support that teachers in this school get from administrators. What kind of administrative support do you get as an African American educator?	2	McClure et al. (2003), Ingersoll (2001, 2003), Townsell (2007), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), Certo & Fox (2002)
10. Tell me about one incident in which you knew that you had made the right decision to become a teacher.	1	King (1993), Shipp (1999), Brown & Butty (1999), Gordon (2002), Piercynski et al. (1997), Newby et al. (1995)
11. How likely is it that you will stay here?	2	McClure et al. (2003), Ingersoll (2001, 2003, 2006), Townsell (2007), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), Certo & Fox (2002), Piercynski et al. (1997), Murphy & Angelski (1996/97), Hill & Barth (2004), Boylan & McSwan (1998), Reeves (2003), King (1993), Furtrell (1999)
12. Tell me about any other experience that you have had as an African American educator here that I have not asked you about but that you want me to know.	2	King (1993), Shipp (1999), Brown & Butty (1999), Boylan & McSwan (1998), Murphy & Angelski (1996/97), Ingersoll (2001, 2003, 2006), Ingersoll & Smith (2004), Barlow (2006), Hill & Barth (2004), Percynski et al. (1997), Townsell (2007), Darling-Hammond & Berry (1999), Certo & Fox (2002)

APPENDIX E
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-0843

Veazey Hall 2021

P.O. Box 8005

Statesboro, GA

Fax: 912-681-0719

IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

30460

To: Sarah L. Alonzo-Osborne 536 South Thompson Road Vidalia, GA 30474
Cherry C. Brewton P.O. Box 8134

CC: Charles E. Patterson Associate Vice President for Research

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs Administrative
Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: February 11, 2008

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H08132**, and titled **“African American Educators: Why They Teach in Rural Georgia School Districts and Why They Remain There”**, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer