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Factors and Circumstances Related to Teacher Retention in Rural, High Poverty Districts in
South Carolina

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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August 2018

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Keywords: teacher retention, rural teacher retention

ABSTRACT

Factors and Circumstances Related to Teacher Retention in Rural, High Poverty Districts in

South Carolina

by

Neal Vincent

According to the literature related to teacher retention in rural, high poverty districts, South Carolina researchers are predicting a major shortage of teachers based on the number of college students enrolled in education majors. Another area of concern is the retention of teachers in high poverty districts and schools. A qualitative study was therefore conducted to investigate the factors and circumstances related to teacher retention in rural, high poverty, South Carolina districts. Specifically, data was collected and analyzed to determine why long-serving teachers have remained in the same district for at least four years instead of transferring or leaving the district.

The results of this study show that the likelihood of a teacher remaining in a challenging school environment over time may be directly influenced by the relative priority they place on intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors, but can also be mediated by the teacher's level of self-efficacy. This study did not seek to investigate the existence or strength of such relationships but attempted to provide deeper insights into the ways in which the identified factors influence teacher decisions to remain in the same district for at least four years instead of transferring or leaving the district. Findings from the research are presented in this study and recommendations are made for use by district and school leaders as they explore factors that lead to teacher retention in rural, high poverty, South Carolina districts.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive wife, Rebecca, and my three daughters, Anna Claire, Ashley Caroline, and Allie Claussen. In addition, it is dedicated to my parents Dr. Rebecca Vincent and Dennis Vincent for their love, encouragement, and support over the years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rural, high poverty, and underserved South Carolina districts are struggling to recruit and retain high quality teachers. Stronge and Hindman (2006) suggest that the most important responsibility of school leaders is hiring, supporting, and sustaining effective teachers. Few educational problems have received more attention than the failure to supply classrooms with qualified teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). Ingersoll (2012) estimated that between 40 percent and 50 percent of new teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years. According to Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2017), turnover and departure of teachers from the profession is normal, inevitable, and can be beneficial. Likewise, Jackson (2010) noted that teachers who switch schools or districts are often more effective after the switch as their fit with the new school may be a better match. However, Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013) concluded that, although there may be cases where turnover is helpful to student achievement, on average, turnover is harmful. The profession of teaching is one with high rates of attrition among newcomers (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Regardless of teaching endorsement area, turnover within the profession leads to staffing difficulties, particularly in rural and high poverty districts.

Using data from the United States Department of Education 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Almy and Theokas (2010) discovered that in high-poverty schools, more than one in every five, or 21.9 percent of core classes were taught by an educator not certified in the subject, compared to one in nine or 10.9 percent of classes in low-poverty schools. These differences between high and low poverty school teaching credentials were also supported by the findings of a study by Gagnon and Mattingly (2014) which indicated that districts with high levels of poverty, greater proportions of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian

populations, or located in rural areas tended to have high percentages of new teachers.

Additionally, Almy and Theokas (2010) found that one in every four secondary math classes in high-poverty schools was being taught by a teacher with neither a math major nor certification in mathematics. Low-income students are therefore at an instructional disadvantage resulting in lower achievement in math and in overall academic performance. Furthermore, new teachers in high-poverty schools often possess little or no prior hands-on training which is designed to equip teachers with the skills required to meet the unique needs of students (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).

Ingersoll (2001) predicted a dramatic expansion in the demand for new teachers as a result of two converging demographic trends: a rise in student enrollments and an increase in teacher attrition due to an aging teaching force. Cowan, Goldhaber, Hayes, and Theobald (2016) noted that the number of new teachers in the U.S. has steadily grown since the mid-1980s. Furthermore, the increase in teacher production has outpaced increases in student enrollment in public schools as the student-teacher ratio for public schools in the United States has decreased from more than 18:1 student-to-teacher ratio in the mid-1980s to approximately 16:1 student-to-teacher ratio currently (Cowan et al., 2016). Despite the decreases in student-to-teacher ratios, over half of all districts and over 90 percent of high-minority districts have reported difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers, especially those designated as highly qualified in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and special education subjects (Goldhaber et al., 2015).

A wide range of teacher recruitment initiatives have been attempted with the aim of addressing these problems and increasing the overall supply of available teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). For example, research findings indicate that the use of bonus payments has been effective

in reducing mean turnover rates of targeted teachers by 17 percent, with experienced teachers exhibiting the strongest positive response to this incentive (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2008). In South Carolina, teacher recruitment initiatives have been introduced, including programs that provide potential teachers from various non-teaching backgrounds with an opportunity to earn professional educator certification (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). These programs include the American Board, Career and Technology Education (CATE); Montessori Initial Certification; Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE); Teach for America (TFA), and Teachers of Tomorrow (ToT) (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016).

Although teacher vacancies are reported in all South Carolina public school districts, some regions within the state face more serious hiring challenges than others. Many of these districts are located in more rural areas of the state with higher levels of poverty (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). The South Carolina General Assembly has allocated responsibility to The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) to develop and administer a teacher recruitment and retention program for rural and underserved districts reporting high rates of staff turnover (CERRA, n.d.). According to CERRA (n.d.), districts eligible to participate in the Rural Recruitment Initiative are defined as those experiencing greater than 11 percent average annual teacher attrition as reported on the district's five most recent state report cards. Additional state funding is provided for identified rural districts to offer initiatives and incentives to assist district administrators and principals in recruiting and retaining high quality staff. Of the 28 eligible South Carolina districts that participated in this program during the 2016-17 school year, 14 experienced an improvement in teacher retention rates (CERRA, 2018).

Despite the recent gains in teacher retention rates, many school districts in rural or high poverty areas continue to experience a shortage of certified teachers with unfilled vacancies and

high rates of teacher attrition. Based on current trends and patterns in teacher preparation programs and retention levels, CERRA researchers have projected that by the 2027-28 school year there will be a shortage in South Carolina of 527 math teachers, 774 science teachers, 650 social studies teachers, and 511 special education teachers (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016).

In South Carolina, roughly two-thirds of all teachers who leave the profession annually do so for one of three reasons: to accept a teaching position in another state district or school, personal choice, or retirement (CERRA, n.d.). Although there has been an increase in the rate of teacher retirement due to the aging workforce, the volume of attrition accounted for by retirement is relatively minor when compared with teachers leaving the profession for other factors, such as job dissatisfaction (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009). Low teacher morale is known to be associated with schools that have diminished budgets and resources, fewer students meeting standards, and fewer teachers who have been highly rated for their performance (Markow, Marcia, & Lee, 2013). In this context, teacher leadership emerges as a potential resource for translating big challenges into opportunities, involving the use of hybrid roles for teachers as leaders and as a method for addressing professional growth and satisfaction (Markow et al., 2013).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the factors and circumstances that contribute to the retention of high quality teachers for more than four years in rural, high poverty districts in South Carolina school district. A theoretical and conceptual framework was developed to guide the design of the study and the analysis and interpretation of the data. This framework combines Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (1985; 2000) with Bandura's

concept of self-efficacy. These frameworks have been used in literature on teacher motivation and retention and have been demonstrated to be valuable in the investigation of these issues.

Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) was built on the earlier work of Herzberg (1959) who first introduced the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards at work. Deci and Ryan conceptualized these in terms of self-determined motivation and controlled motivation and used these concepts to explain the behaviors of employees. Deci and Ryan (1985; 2000) explained that self-determined motivation is driven by intrinsic rewards, or the interest and satisfaction that individuals derive from the actual tasks they are undertaking or the situation they in which they are involved. This interest and satisfaction is often closely related to the personal values and beliefs of the individual. In contrast, controlled motivation relates to extrinsic motivation in which undertaking the task or engaging in the situation is expected to result in specific anticipated consequences which are external to the task itself, such as financial benefits, ideal working conditions or a supportive organizational culture. Deci and Ryan (2000) further identified three basic psychological needs which influence self-determined motivation: need for autonomy, need for perceived competence, and need for relatedness. If an individual perceives himself or herself to have a high level of independence over their own actions, to feel confident and capable of taking particular actions, and to have positive social contacts and be recognized by others, they are more likely to be motivated by intrinsic factors and to put greater effort into their work.

Individuals vary in their personal views on the relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. For example, in research with primary school teachers, Jessop and Penny (1998) identified instrumental teachers, who are mainly motivated by extrinsic incentives, and relational teachers, who are motivated by intrinsic factors such as the moral aspects of helping

students to overcome their challenges. According to self-determination theory, a teacher's level of job satisfaction will be influenced by the extent to which their ideal combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards is met, and in turn, their level of job satisfaction is likely to have an impact on the level of effort they put into their work (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000)

Self-determination theory can help explain the reasons why some teachers choose to remain in rural and high poverty school districts while others do not. Those motivated by intrinsic factors such as the satisfaction gained from assisting students to learn may be more likely to stay, while those placing a high value on extrinsic factors may be more inclined to leave if the favorable working conditions or competitive salaries that they need for motivational purposes are not available. Understanding the role of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and of teachers' need for autonomy, perceived competence and relatedness can also provide schools with opportunities to identify and utilize various types of rewards as recruitment or retention tools.

Teacher self-efficacy theory, as developed by Bandura (1977), is also helpful as a means of understanding why teachers stay or leave challenging school environments and can have an arbitrating effect on the impact of intrinsic or extrinsic rewards on their decisions. Self-efficacy is a concept that is central to Bandura's social cognitive theory of individual behavior and refers to an individual's belief about their own ability to successfully achieve a desired result, rather than this being determined by factors they are unable to control. A person's level of self-efficacy influences his willingness to engage in or continue in certain behaviors, the amount of time and effort he puts into tasks and his willingness to take on challenging situations (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1997) observed that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to have high levels of enthusiasm for and commitment to their roles. They may be more likely to remain

in challenging school environments because they believe in their own abilities to succeed and achieve their goals.

Schools in rural or high poverty areas often have little control over extrinsic motivational factors such as location, salaries, physical infrastructure of the school or available resources, supplies, and equipment. However, the theories discussed above demonstrate that measures which help improve teacher self-efficacy or create more intrinsic opportunities for motivation might be more effective in teacher recruitment and retention in the longer term. Certain forms of extrinsic motivation such as career development and teacher leadership opportunities might also be used to help retain teachers. This was demonstrated in research by Herzberg (1966), which demonstrated that factors such as interesting work, responsibility, advancement opportunities, and recognition are all more effective long-term motivators than pay and working conditions. A conceptual framework based on these theories is shown in Figure 1. This shows that the likelihood of a teacher remaining in a challenging school environment over time may be influenced directly by the relative priority they place on intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors, but can also be mediated by their level of self-efficacy. This qualitative study will not seek to investigate the existence or strength of such relationships but will use the conceptual framework in order to provide deeper insights into the ways in which the factors represented by these concepts influence teacher decisions in practice.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Research Questions

The overarching research questions for this study are:

1. What factors do teachers describe as important in their decisions to remain in rural, high poverty districts?
2. What incentives do teachers cite as influential for the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty districts?
3. What incentives could be added to impact the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty, districts?

Research Design and Data Collection

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of why teachers continue with employment in rural, high poverty South Carolina districts after four years, a qualitative research design was developed and used. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with twelve teachers selected from three rural, high poverty, South Carolina school districts. Teachers were purposively selected to include only those who have worked in their current school districts for at least four consecutive years.

In 2017, there were nineteen school districts in South Carolina with a school district poverty index of 80 percent or higher (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). Three

school districts were selected for this study using the following criteria: (1) districts that were located in South Carolina, (2) districts with a 2017 poverty index over 80 percent, and (3) districts who are identified as Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI) districts with attrition rates greater than 11 percent for the past five years.

The first district (District A) selected is located in rural South Carolina. In the 2016-2017 school year, student enrollment was approximately 4,500 across eight schools (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). This district's poverty index is over 82 percent (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). The second selected district (District B) is a countywide, rural school district with an enrollment of approximately 2,500 students across six schools (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). This district's South Carolina poverty index is around 90 percent (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). The third district (District C) is located in rural eastern South Carolina. Its 2016-2017 student enrollment was around 5,000 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). The poverty index for this district is approximately 90 percent (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017).

Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable information on the views and perspectives of teachers who have been employed for four consecutive years in the same rural South Carolina school district, working with students who live in high levels of poverty. It is anticipated that the findings will be of assistance to administrators and policymakers in the development of strategies or initiatives intended to influence teacher decisions to remain in the profession, with the ultimate objectives of improving teacher retention rates and student outcomes. The results also enhance the existing body of research and literature relating to teacher retention in rural, high-poverty areas. By investigating the phenomenon of teacher retention in rural, high poverty districts in South

Carolina, the study also provides insights into how district and school administrators might improve the retention of teachers in similar disadvantaged districts across the country.

Overview of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, research question, data collection, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relating to teacher attrition at the national and state level. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the research methods used for the study, including information on sampling and participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the descriptive narrative of findings, based on the thematic coding and analysis of the interview data. Chapter 5 summarizes the main findings and includes conclusions and recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors and circumstances that teachers describe are important for remaining in rural, high poverty school districts. Literature was reviewed relating to teacher demand and supply at the national and state level. Studies relating to the size, composition and distribution of the teacher workforce as well as circumstances, and factors influencing teacher recruitment and retention were examined. Further, literature was analyzed and synthesized relating to the challenges and benefits of teaching in rural and high poverty schools.

Teacher Demand and Supply in the United States

Researchers and policymakers have observed a dramatic increase in the demand for new teachers mainly because of two trends: a rise in the number of teachers reaching retirement age and an expansion in student enrollment (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003) the additional factor of teacher attrition, which is especially high among teachers in their first year of work, adds to the increasing demand for new teachers.

To some extent, the demand for new teachers is being met: although elementary and secondary student enrollment has risen by 19 percent since the mid-1980s, the overall number of teachers hired in schools has increased by 48 percent - more than double the student enrollment rate (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). At least in part, the increase in hiring may be due to the success of national incentive programs that have been implemented with the aim of easing teacher recruitment and retention difficulties. Such programs have included Teach for America, which was designed to attract the “best and brightest” into high-need schools, as well as career-change initiatives such as “troops to teachers” and various programs designed to attract teachers from

other countries (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 5). Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) suggest that the increase might also be linked to changes in the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the need for additional special education teachers. Another possible reason for the growth in the teacher workforce is that many states have increased the number of high school courses required for graduation, especially in math and science. The number of students taking classes in these subjects rose by 69 percent and 60 percent respectively between 1987–88 and 2007–08 (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Overall, there has been recent above-average growth in English as a second language (ESL), English language arts (ELA), mathematics, foreign language, natural science, and special education teachers, but lower than average growth rates among general elementary, vocational-technical education, art, and music teachers (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017).

Nationally, high rates of teacher attrition and turnover combined with demographic trends create a situation in which rural, urban, wealthy, poor, public and private school systems and schools are all competing fiercely to recruit the best teachers to support teaching and learning and many are unable to fill teaching vacancies. Ingersoll et al. (2014) suggested that the teaching profession is continually being recreated due to the high rates of attrition and the need to continually fill teacher vacancies. Between 1988-89 and 2008-2009, there was a 41% increase in attrition from the teaching force, from a rate of 6.4 percent to a rate of 9 percent (Ingersoll et al., 2014). As noted by Garrett and Von Nessen (2016), teacher attrition imposes a considerable cost and time burden on districts due to the need to continually allocate scarce resources to the recruitment of teachers with appropriate qualifications and expertise (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). There are also often negative impacts on the morale of other teachers due to the lack of stability among personnel and on students who are prevented from forming the types of long-

term relationships with teachers that are important for their academic and personal development (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016).

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) discovered that 15 percent of teachers leave the profession at the end of their first year, and another 14 percent move to another school. More recently, Dauksas and White (2010) calculated that almost 1,000 teachers leave the teaching profession every single day, at an average annual cost to the U.S. of \$7 billion for the recruitment and training of replacements. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) estimated that 18% of new teachers leave the public school system within their first two years of employment while another 6% move to another school district. Ingersoll and Perda (2010) observed that teacher turnover has a greater impact on overall school staffing problems than retirements, and also noted that high levels of attrition are not unique to teaching. These researchers analyzed national data and reported that attrition rates for teachers are similar to those for police officers, while being considerably lower than those for occupations such as secretarial and paralegal fields and higher than those for nurses and the traditional professions such as lawyers and architects (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010).

Although average teacher turnover rates vary from year to year, the overall increase between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s was 28 percent, from 13.2 percent in 1991-92 to 16.9 percent in 2004-05. This included teachers who either left the profession or moved between districts (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Of the 3,377,900 public school teachers in post during the 2011–12 school year, 84 percent remained at the same school, 8 percent moved to a different school, and 8 percent left the profession completely during the following year (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). In 1999-2000, when hiring difficulties were at a 20-year high point, approximately 31 percent of secondary school administrators across the United States reported

that they had experienced serious difficulties in finding qualified teachers to fill their mathematics or science teaching vacancies (Boyd et al., 2012; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010).

Size, Composition and Distribution of the Teacher Workforce

Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) reported that the overall size and demographic composition of the elementary and secondary teaching force has been changing over time and becoming less stable. Ingersoll et al. (2014) observed that immediately after World War II and before the post-war baby boom, there were just over three quarters of a million elementary and secondary teachers in the United States. By 2011-12, there were over five times as many—almost four million elementary and secondary teachers. In the 2007-08 school year alone, almost a quarter of a million new teachers entered the teaching profession.

Demographic data providing insights into the national composition of the teacher workforce has been compiled by researchers at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This is based on a survey tool called the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which has been administered seven times between 1987 through 2011. SASS data as well as the NCES Common Core of Data demonstrate that the percentage of teachers who are female steadily increased from 66 percent in 1980 to 76 percent in 2007–08. This was not due to a decline in numbers of males entering teaching, which had grown by 26 percent since 1987–88; the number of female teachers grew almost twice as much during the same period (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). These percentages therefore reflect the overall increase in numbers of both males and females entering teaching.

With regard to the ethnic characteristics of the teaching force, Ingersoll and Merrill (2017) state that while minority teachers remain underrepresented in this, both the number and proportion of teachers who are minorities have increased over time. Between 1987–88 and

2011–12 the number of minority teachers grew by 104 percent, compared to an increase in the number of White teachers of just 38 percent. The percentage of all teachers who belonged to minority groups increased from 12.4 percent in 1987–88 to 17.3 percent in 2011–12. In 1987–88, there were about 327,000 minority teachers; by 2011–12, there were around 666,000 (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017). Ingersoll and Merrill (2017) also discovered that the number of Asian and Hispanic teachers had increased at a higher rate than the number of Black teachers, while the number of American Indian teachers had sharply declined during this period. The teaching fields of English as a Second Language (ESL), foreign languages, English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, social science, and special education showed above-average gains in racial/ethnic diversity. However, the teaching fields of general elementary, vocational-technical, and art/music each experienced below-average growth in numbers of minority teachers (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017). Within these overall changes in the racial/ethnic composition of the teaching force there were significant differences by gender. During the period from 1987–88 to 2011–12, the number of White female teachers increased by 49 percent, while the number of White male teachers increased by only 12 percent. In contrast, during this same period, the number of minority female teachers increased by 102 percent, while the number of minority male teachers increased by 110 percent (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017).

Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) observed an overall ageing of the teaching force and an associated increase in retirements in the early 2000s. The number of teachers aged 50 years or older increased from about 530,000 in 1988 to 1.3 million in 2008; as a result, teacher retirements increased from 35,000 in 1988 to 87,000 in 2004 (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). In 2010, the average retirement age for teachers was 59. The number of teachers retiring was projected to reach an all-time high in 2011-2012 and then begin to decline (Ingersoll & Merrill,

2010). Commenting on this trend, Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) noted that while first year teachers provide new ideas and energy; large numbers of veterans leaving the teaching profession make it increasingly difficult to provide mentoring and leadership for new teachers.

Between 1987–88 and 2011–12 the proportion of the teaching force employed in high-poverty schools across the U.S. increased from about 8 percent to 22 percent. The total teaching force of high-poverty schools expanded by almost 325% during this period while in contrast the total number of teachers employed in low-poverty schools decreased by around a fifth. In high poverty schools, the number of new teachers with five years or less of experience expanded by around 300% during this period, thus accounting for the majority of the overall increase. It has been estimated that, by the 2011-2012 school year, more than two-thirds of all public school teachers were working in either high-poverty or mid-poverty schools (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; 2017).

In summary, the elementary and secondary teaching force has changed in recent years. It has become larger while simultaneously including greater numbers of older and younger teachers and those who are less experienced. Further, teachers have simultaneously become less diverse by gender and more diverse by race and ethnicity. There does not appear to have been any decline in the academic ability of those entering teaching; for example, the number of new teachers coming from top-ranked colleges and universities has greatly increased (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Overall, the teaching force has become less stable, as demonstrated by the high levels of teacher turnover and attrition each year (Ingersoll et al., 2014). The net impact is a continuing shortage of teachers in relation to demand. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) estimated that annual teacher shortages in the U.S. would increase to 112,000 by 2018

and remain high in future years. These researchers calculated that up to 300,000 new teachers will be needed annually by 2020, and up to 316,000 annually by 2025 (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Supply of and Demand for Teachers in South Carolina

In this section of the review of literature, studies are presented relating to statistical evidence of the demand and supply of teachers in South Carolina. As in other areas of the U.S., the latest available statistics indicate a significant shortfall in the ability of South Carolina Public Schools to meet current demand for teachers. Although more than 7,300 vacancies were filled by new hires at the start of the 2017-2018 school year, 550 remained outstanding; representing a 16 percent increase on vacancies recorded just one year earlier (CERRA, 2018).

In 2016, the South Carolina General Assembly approved the provision of funds for a statewide teacher supply study. The objective was to develop annual projections of the number of extra teachers needed for grades K5 through K12 in the state's public schools, from 2017 through 2027. The South Carolina teacher supply study is being conducted jointly by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, the South Carolina Department of Education, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, and CERRA. Within this initiative, Garrett and Von Nessen (2016) estimated the number of teachers that will be required during the next ten years and compared this to the estimated number of expected available teachers. Seven core subject areas, including art, business/marketing/computer technology, mathematics, sciences, social studies, special education, and Spanish were identified as likely to experience a shortage of teachers in future years (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). Table 1 shows the projected teacher shortages by subject field for the three school years 2016-17, 2021-22, and 2027-28.

Table 1.

Projected Teacher Shortages, 2016-17 through 2027-28

Subject	Projected Teacher Shortage, 2016-17	Projected Teacher Shortage, 2021-22	Projected Teacher Shortage, 2027-28
Art	20	62	104
Business/Marketing/ Computer Technology	10	101	117
Mathematics	76	459	527
Sciences	89	553	774
Social Studies	74	490	650
Special Education	116	339	511
Spanish	23	123	182

Note. Reprinted from Garrett, J. & Von Nessen, E. (2016, May). Teacher supply study report. From https://www.cerra.org/uploads/1/7/6/8/17684955/teacher_supply_study_5-11-16_1_.pdf

Available data suggests that the ability of South Carolina’s in-state teacher preparation to meet current and expected future teacher vacancies is declining over time (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016), even though these programs continue to account for the majority of newly hired teachers. In the five years prior to the 2017-2018 school year, there was a 25% decline in the number of new teachers hired in South Carolina who graduated from an in-state program (CERRA, 2018). Teachers recruited from other states and countries, and from alternative teacher certification programs, accounted for 9% of newly hired teachers in the 2017-2018 school year or 435.5 FTEs recorded at the beginning of the school year. Most of these were graduates of South Carolina’s Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016; CERRA, 2018). Statistics updated in November 2017 showed that the number of new hires from PACE programs had fallen to 413 as a result of subsequent resignations or failure to complete pre-service requirements (CERRA, 2018).

Overall, data for the 2017-2018 school year show that 21% of teachers hired to fill South Carolina public school vacancies were from in-state teacher education programs, and 31% were teachers moving from another South Carolina public school district. The remainder of new hires included experienced teachers moving from another state (17%), teacher education program graduates from other states (7%) and teachers from different countries (5%), with the numbers of new hires from other states or countries falling slightly compared with 2016-2017 figures (CERRA, 2018). However, all these sources combined are not expected to meet current and future demands for teachers within South Carolina, taking into account numbers of students enrolled (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016).

One of the reasons for the shortfall is that the number of students graduating with bachelor's degrees from South Carolina teacher certification programs fell by 30% in the four years preceding the 2017-2018 school year (CERRA, 2018). Statistics issued by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education show that there were fewer than 1,700 teacher education graduates in SC during the 2016-17 academic year, compared with more than 2,400 in the 2012-13 school year (CERRA, 2018). The findings of a 2016 survey of deans of teacher education programs from 30 South Carolina public and independent colleges and universities indicated that low levels of student interest in pursuing a teacher career is the main reason for the decline in teaching majors and that colleges have the capacity to enroll more students should demand increase. Overall, respondents reported that their college/university could enroll between one and ten new students in each program area, with most of the institutions that offer programs in mathematics, sciences social studies and special education having the capacity to take on at least 20 new students each year (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). Math, sciences, social studies, and special education are the main fields in which the biggest declines in interest in

teaching as a career have been reported, and in which South Carolina faces the greatest demand for new teachers (CERRA, 2018). The College of Education Deans survey data suggested that these fields also account for the majority of teacher education programs in the state, with lower provision in areas such as the arts, business/marketing/computer technology, and Spanish (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016).

Based on the CERRA data, teacher attrition appears to be a significant problem facing South Carolina's public schools. It was reported that, of the 6,705 individuals who left teaching jobs in public school districts at the end of the 2016-2017 academic year, around three quarters or 4,900 teachers are no longer teaching in any South Carolina public school district (CERRA, 2018). Of the first-year teachers recruited for the 2016-2017 school year, just under a quarter (22%) reportedly left public school teaching in South Carolina during or at the end of that year (CERRA, 2018). Data relating to the characteristics of all public school teachers who left their roles at the end of 2016-2017 shows that more than a third (38%) had five years or less of teaching experience and 12% had a year or less. When those who moved to a different school district within the state were excluded, the respective figures were 35% and 12%, a slight improvement on the 2015-2016 statistics when 37% of leavers had five or less years of teaching experience and 13% had a year or less (CERRA, 2018).

While significant numbers of teachers are being lost through attrition from South Carolina public school districts, the overall number of teaching positions in the state has increased slightly in the past year. In the 2017-2018 school year, more than 53,000 full- and part-time certified teaching positions were allocated. This was an increase of approximately 4% or around 1,900 additional positions compared with the previous year; however, the 51,768.25 positions recorded in 2016-2017 represented a decrease of 576.57 positions from 2015-2016.

Overall, six subject fields consistently account for around 71% of all certified teaching positions: early childhood/elementary (35.5 percent), special education (9.2 percent), English/language arts (7.5 percent), mathematics (7.3 percent), sciences (5.9 percent), and social studies (5.8 percent), with around 10% accounted for collectively by guidance counselor, physical education, and music teacher roles (CERRA, 2018). The distribution of positions across elementary, middle and high school levels has also remained consistent over time, at around 50 percent, 21 percent, and 28 percent of all FTEs respectively. The 2017-2018 statistics record a slight decline in the percentages of male and minority teachers recruited by South Carolina public schools. Both groups accounted for 20% of new recruits, compared with 21% and 22% in 2016-2017 (CERRA, 2018).

The Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive is designed to offer a range of incentives to attract students within South Carolina into teaching and to teaching roles within the state, and to encourage the retention of existing teachers (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). For example, in the case of subject areas deemed critical, such as special education, mathematics, and science, or for teachers who wish to undertake graduate study to understand the needs of children in high poverty areas, tuition reimbursement may be offered. Garrett and Von Nesson (2016) observe that such teachers are important in helping South Carolina to address the challenges of filling critical subject vacancies and developing tools and strategies to support the needs of students, while also gaining higher levels of job satisfaction and being retained in their roles for longer periods (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016).

CERRA's Supply and Demand surveys, conducted annually since 2001, have highlighted variations by geographic area within South Carolina (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). The survey findings are based on the submission of data by districts on certified teacher and administrator

positions, hires, vacancies, and departures, and are used by CERRA to create a statewide report. They confirm that the Pee Dee Region and the Low Country Region account for more than half (54%) of all teacher vacancies in South Carolina. At the start of the 2017-2018 school year, a third of all South Carolina teaching vacancies were in the Pee Dee Region, which accounts for around 17% of all teaching positions in the state overall. Like other regions, Pee Dee includes many rural and high poverty districts and has high rates of teacher attrition and turnover. A community is defined as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau if it has less than 2,500 residents or meets specified low-density population criteria (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Together, South Carolina's Low Country Region and Pee Dee Region include the majority of the 20 public school districts that the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive identified as having excessively high levels of teacher turnover (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016). This reflects the situation in many other rural districts of the U.S., where factors such as the sparseness and remoteness of settlements, high poverty levels, housing shortages and distance from facilities such as stores, hospitals and banks often have a negative impact on teacher recruitment and retention (Barton, 2012; Monk, 2007)

Factors Influencing Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Research has demonstrated that financial incentives are not sufficient to attract and retain high quality teachers to disadvantaged schools (Berry, 2008). There has been a tendency in the past to rely heavily on short-term financial rewards and penalties linked to student performance outcomes in these schools. In order to improve the effectiveness of recruitment and retention initiatives and achieve longer-term sustainable improvements, however, it is also crucial to ensure that the right working conditions are in place (Johnson, 2006). The important role that school administrators and leaders play in this has been highlighted (Boyd et al., 2011). Johnson

(2006) stressed that this group must acknowledge the important links between a supportive workplace, effective instruction and teacher retention (Johnson, 2006).

Other researchers have demonstrated that effective leadership on the part of principals is a strong predictor of the intentions of teachers to remain in teaching or to leave the profession or move from their current role or school (Ndoye, Imig, & Parker, 2010). This is particularly true in the case of first year teachers, who rely heavily on the support they receive from principals especially when dealing with disciplinary and parental matters (Anhorn, 2008). In one survey of new teachers in public schools, around 80% of respondents indicated that they received regular support and communications from their principal, departmental chair or other administrators (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Guin (2004) recommends that school districts should focus on teacher turnover rates as an indicator of school health when identifying schools for improvement.

The perceived importance of leadership was also identified by Amrein-Beardsley (2007), who examined the factors that teachers take into account when considering whether to accept a position in hard-to-staff schools. These were found to include having a well-qualified, caring, and supportive principal, who is open-minded and has a strong focus on student learning. The perceived quality of other teachers and being offered a better salary, promotion, or improved benefits were also considered important by teachers when deciding whether to accept a job offer in a school of this type.

According to Charlton and Kritsonis (2009) the servant leadership style, which acknowledges that teachers are fellow professionals and experts in instruction and provides them with the necessary resources to promote learning, is the most effective approach to school leadership. Haar (2007) found that the support of principals is more important for retaining leaders in rural areas than additional financial resources or professional development

opportunities. The types of support found to be important included addressing the needs of teachers, having a trusting and supportive school culture, and providing professional development opportunities for teaching staff. Based on the findings of this study, it was argued that schools benefit when their principals take into account the views of their more experienced and effective teachers, and when they provide opportunities for teaching staff to share their expertise with one another (Haar, 2007). Another study has shown that principals are more effective in retaining new teachers when they are proactive in addressing the issues and concerns that these teachers often face, and when they are highly focused on personal and professional growth and achieving standards of excellence for all the school stakeholders (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Berry (2008) identified that the types of working conditions important in helping teachers to ensure that their students achieve high standards of academic performance include access to supportive principals and skilled colleagues, smaller class sizes, good classroom resources, and the provision of professional development opportunities (Berry, 2008).

The Challenges of Rural and High Poverty Schools

In rural areas and those with high levels of minority and low-income students, schools often experience particularly acute problems with regard to the recruitment and retention of teachers (Hanushek et al., 2004; Monk, 2007). Many rural school districts have particular types of characteristics which make it difficult for them to attract high quality teachers. These include, for example, having relatively high numbers of students with special needs, weak English language skills, or low levels of academic achievement (Monk, 2007). In the case of rural public schools, though poverty rates among students are below average they are often still substantial (Barton, 2012).

There are also significantly higher rates of attrition of teachers from low performing schools and those with high numbers of minorities in their student populations (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Monk, 2007). Hanushek et al. (2004) found that the probability of leaving a school is increased when an individual is responsible for teaching low-achieving students and is also increased among white teachers in schools with a high rate of minority enrollment. Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) observed an ongoing shift of teachers from high-poverty to low-poverty schools, from schools with high percentages of minority students to those with few minority students, and from schools in urban areas to those in the suburbs. Within the public school sector, high poverty schools experience 50% higher turnover of teachers than do low poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2011).

Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) also found evidence of high rates of teacher turnover in schools with large numbers of low performing students and noted that, as a result, a high percentage of teachers in these schools are typically inexperienced and unprepared to deal with the challenges of increasing student performance. Many teachers leave these schools before they have gained sufficient experience to become fully effective, and the schools are often unable to find experienced teachers to replace them (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Other researchers have also reported that children from minority and low-income families are less likely than other children to be taught by good quality teachers (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Berry, 2008). It has been highlighted that when poorly prepared teachers are recruited to teach the most at-risk students, this can hinder the achievement of equal opportunities for students in the public education system (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) found evidence that, at least within the field of mathematics, first, second and third year teachers perform worse than more experienced teachers, although improvements in performance are

minimal after the first three years of teaching. Poorer performance among teachers in the early stages of their career is attributed to the need to adjust to the school setting and gain experience of teaching in practice (Hanushek et al., 2004).

High rates of teacher attrition and turnover are especially problematic for low-performing schools which “rarely close the student achievement gap because they never close the teaching quality gap – they are constantly rebuilding their staff” (Barnes et al., 2007, p.4). One of the difficulties is that schools in rural and high poverty areas are often unable to offer good teacher salaries due to budgetary constraints, making it harder for them to compete for teaching staff with schools in more affluent locations (Monk, 2007). These problems are exacerbated because at-risk schools have to allocate large amounts of scarce resources to teacher recruitment and addressing turnover problems, drawing these away from areas in which they might more directly help improve teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Barnes et al., 2007).

Hanushek et al. (2004) stressed the importance of well targeted recruitment and retention initiatives that are designed to improve the overall quality of the teaching force in low-performing schools. These authors note that simply increasing salaries may have the effect of reducing turnover between both high and low performing teachers, with few overall improvements to the effectiveness of teaching. Guin (2004) also recommended that school districts should develop incentive programs designed to attract and retain high quality teachers in low-performing schools. Hanushek et al. (2004) suggest that offering attractive working conditions may help to compensate for lower salaries and improve the ability of schools in rural areas to attract and retain high quality teaching staff. Such measures should initially address any specific problem areas experienced by a school, such as disciplinary issues, high levels of student turnover, weak leadership, overly-bureaucratic management, or safety problems (Hanushek et

al., 2004). Darling-Hammond (2003) concurs that although competitive salaries can be important tools in teacher recruitment and retention tools, good working conditions are also crucial. These are defined as including, for example, opportunities for teachers to participate in school decision making, professional development opportunities including peer learning, and supportive leadership (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Ronfeldt et al. (2013) argue that, in schools with high proportions of minority and low-performing students, which tend to suffer most from high levels of teacher turnover, there is a need to proactively promote team-based working. Similarly, Chenoweth (2009) also recommends that more collaborative working can help raise the overall quality of education in at-risk schools while also providing good levels of support to individual teachers. This is not just confined to teachers; Anhorn (2008) highlighted the role of other school staff, such as secretaries and custodians, paraprofessionals, and school lunch assistants, in contributing to the creation of a supportive school environment for teachers as well as students. Goodwin (2012) identified unsupportive school environments as one of the main challenges frequently faced by new teachers, while Donaldson (2011) found evidence that overall teacher quality often increases within districts or schools with an open and collaborative working culture. Fry (2007) suggests that an important measure is the provision of well-designed induction programs, to help ensure that new recruits do not feel isolated from the outset in dealing with classroom management, curriculum-related issues, and other challenges often faced by new teachers.

It was reported by Smith and Ingersoll (2004) that around four-fifths of first year teachers across the U.S. had taken part in an induction or mentoring program, an increase of around 40% over the previous decade. Those schools and districts which do not offer such programs are failing to prepare teachers for their roles and thereby contributing to the attrition problem,

wasting valuable resources and failing to provide the best education to their students, according to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003). Induction and mentoring programs are important in helping new hires to become high quality teachers, and to develop attributes such as enthusiasm, perseverance, concern for others and a flexible approach, in addition to more formal teaching skills and subject matter expertise (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). However, such initiatives should not be introduced without good planning; Colborn (2008) stresses, for example, that it is crucial to ensure that mentors for new teachers are well selected and have received appropriate training. Supportive working conditions have been demonstrated to reduce attrition among new teachers: Anderson (2011) found evidence of lower turnover among first year teacher in schools providing induction and mentoring programs, and in those in which principals allowed teachers good levels of autonomy but also administrative support. Charlton and Kritsonis (2009) observe that, although the needs of individual teachers may vary, people will generally be attracted to those working environments in which they feel comfortable.

At the district level, it is important to have labor market strategies for teacher recruitment and retention, Hanushek et al. (2004) argue. Monk (2007) suggests that, in order to make best use of resources, policies should focus primarily on low-performing schools or those which have historically faced recruitment difficulties. As possible indicators of these (Monk, 2007) recommended the use of criteria such as having less qualified or experienced teachers, or those teaching in fields different to their main qualification, as well as other factors such as hiring difficulties, high teacher turnover rates, a lack of diversity among teachers, and characteristics of the student population such as the children of migrant farm workers (Monk, 2007).

Chapter Summary

Based on the literature related to teacher retention in rural, high poverty districts, South Carolina researchers are predicting a major shortage of teachers based on the number of college students enrolled in education majors and have expressed concerns about the retention of teachers in high poverty districts and schools. Researchers have also identified various factors influencing teacher recruitment and retention and have documented the significant challenges facing teachers in rural and high poverty schools. The following chapter sets out the methods used in the current qualitative study in order to investigate the factors influencing retention among long-serving teachers in a rural South Carolina District.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative methods, the researcher explored the factors and circumstances relevant to twelve teachers who elected to remain in the same rural South Carolina district for at least four consecutive years. The twelve selected teachers were interviewed, and data collected from these interviews were analyzed. Chapters 1 and 2 provided an overview of the study and a review of literature and research relating to the need for and importance of teacher retention due to a shrinking pool of education majors and those electing to continue in the profession. This chapter discusses the research question, approach and design, sampling, data collection, and strategies for analyzing data that were used in the present study.

Research Questions

In an effort to gain a deep understanding of why teachers continue employment in rural, high poverty South Carolina districts after four years, a qualitative research design was developed and used. The overarching question in this study is why teachers remain in the same rural, high poverty South Carolina districts after four years. Three guiding questions were used to collect data are as follows:

1. What factors do teachers describe as important for making the decision to remain in rural, high poverty districts?
2. What incentives do teachers cite as influential for the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty districts?
3. What incentives could be added in order to positively impact the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty, districts?

Studying the phenomenon of teacher retention including the perceived importance of intrinsic factors (e.g. interesting work, job satisfaction, addressing personal values) versus extrinsic factors (e.g. salaries, conditions, equipment, school culture) in rural, high poverty districts provides insights in to how district and school administrators might retain teachers in similar districts.

Ethical Protocol

The researcher did not conduct any research without the prior approval of the dissertation committee in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department at East Tennessee State University. After the dissertation committee's approval, the researcher requested and received approval from the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). All American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct were adhered to during the study. Permission was given by superintendents in three South Carolina districts to interview teachers, and the superintendents notified school administrators about the study. Teachers were in turn notified about the study by school administrators. It was stressed to all parties that participation was voluntary and not required, and the teachers were notified that their names and identifiers would not be used in published findings. All participants were required to sign informed consent forms before the interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted in rooms with doors to provide privacy and ensure that shared information could be kept confidential if required by the participants. District or school administrators and other personnel were not present during the interview.

All information obtained in this study is being treated in strict confidence unless disclosure should be required by law, and only presented in anonymized form in the findings chapter. Subject to IRB and standard data use policies, the researcher will protect the anonymity

of individuals, districts, and schools. All transcripts and digital recordings will remain secure on the researcher's password protected computer or in locked file cabinets and preserved for six years as required under IRB regulations.

Research Approach and Design

A phenomenological approach was used to investigate why teachers remain in the same rural, high poverty districts after four years. Creswell (1994) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. This contrasts with quantitative research in which the objective is to quantify particular types of experiences or views and identify relationships or associations between variables. Phenomenology is one form of qualitative research that examines the lived experiences of individuals (Byrne, 2001). According to Byrne (2001), phenomenological researchers hope to gain understanding of these experiences based on the research participants' personal accounts of them. Creswell (2009) defines phenomenology as "a research strategy of enquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants." In line with the phenomenological approach, interviews were the main method of data collection. The research design consisted of individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a sample of twelve teachers.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used for this study, in order to identify and collect data from teachers who have taught in rural, high poverty districts for at least four consecutive years. The target sample consisted of twelve teachers from three South Carolina school districts. To generate the sample, three South Carolina districts with attrition rates greater than 11 percent and

designated as RRI districts were first identified. The district superintendents were emailed with a request to participate in the study and to grant permission for interviews with four teachers who have been employed in his or her respective district for at least four consecutive years (Appendix C). After the superintendents gave consent for schools and teachers within their district to participate in the study, the relevant school principals were contacted requesting that he or she identify four teachers who met the criteria of being employed in the district for four consecutive years. Teacher interview dates and times were coordinated by the superintendents and school principals. If a selected teacher refused to participate in the study, the school principal was asked to identify additional, eligible teachers to replace them in the sample.

Twelve teachers voluntarily participated in the study and signed written informed consent forms (Appendix B) before their interviews. Participants were also notified that they had the right not to answer questions or end the interview at any time. In addition, participants were notified that they could request that any comments and/or data collected be withdrawn and destroyed at any time during the study.

Data Collection

The researcher met with each teacher at his or her respective school and conducted a face to face interview in a private conference room or a private professional development classroom/area where the participants would feel comfortable being interviewed. All interviewees allowed the researcher to audio record their interview using a digital voice recorder. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide the interview (Appendix D). This guide helped ensure that the interview covered the main issues necessary to address the research questions, and that the experiences and views of different participants could be broadly compared in the analysis. However, in keeping with the phenomenological research approach,

the researcher did not follow the protocol rigidly or use exactly the same wording or order of questions for each participant. It was important to the researcher to adopt a flexible approach in order to capture the unique experiences and views of each participant. At times, the researcher used follow-up questions to ensure that full understanding of the participants' responses was achieved. During the interviews, notes on the participants' nonverbal communications such as facial expressions and body language were sometimes made by the researcher. These paper-based notes provided additional information and context for the data analysis.

The recorded interview data was transcribed and returned to participants for their review and approval before the data analysis process. All participants had the opportunity to edit and provide changes to the transcripts as needed to ensure the integrity of the data. In addition, participants were notified that they were allowed to withdraw any or all comments during at any time, but none took up this option.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed and approved by the teachers, the researcher reviewed the data multiple times to gain better insight and understanding. Data coding was then completed using a thematic analysis approach, facilitated by use of the NVivo qualitative analysis software, with the objective of identifying and labelling common themes and patterns in the data. In this stage, key themes relevant to the research questions of the study were identified inductively from the research data itself and not predetermined. According to Charmaz (2006), initial qualitative codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data. Further, the researcher must define what is happening and grapple with what it means (Charmaz, 2006).

During a second review, the researcher created and coded secondary themes. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure that teachers' comments were accurately coded and

presented in the findings. The findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 4 by the main and secondary themes identified in the analysis, with illustrative verbatim quotes. This procedure safeguards that the participants' lived experiences and views are captured as accurately as possible, in line with the phenomenological approach to the study. Codes and themes were also compared between the twelve interviews, noting similarities and differences in the perspectives and experiences of the participants.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher outlined procedures for the research approach and design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis, and ethical protocol. The findings of the research are presented and discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the researcher provides recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of why teachers continue with employment in rural, high poverty South Carolina districts after four consecutive years, a qualitative phenomenological research design was created and used. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data, a process in which key themes and sub-themes relevant to the research questions of the study are identified inductively from the research data itself and not pre-determined. After reviewing the data multiple times to gain better insight and understanding, main and secondary themes were identified and labeled as codes, and relevant data allocated to these codes. In a second main stage of coding, the allocation of data across main and secondary themes was reviewed and the overall coding tree was revised and modified. The purpose of this was to ensure that the categorization of themes and the allocation of data to them most accurately reflected the interviewees' actual experiences and views.

In this chapter, the research findings are presented and discussed by the main and secondary themes identified in the analysis, with illustrative verbatim quotes. This helps ensure that the participants' lived experiences and views are captured as accurately as possible, in line with the phenomenological approach to the study. The distribution of main themes and sub-themes, along with the approximate numbers of participants citing each of these, is also included in tabular form in Appendix E.

Characteristics of Participants

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with twelve teachers drawn from three South Carolina school districts located in eastern South Carolina. These interviews were

held onsite in each district during the month of April 2018. Teachers were purposively selected to include only those who had been in their current school districts for at least four consecutive years.

Participant Profiles

The twelve participants in this study are employed in three South Carolina districts, and assigned to six schools between them within these three districts. Two male and ten female teachers were interviewed. Seven of the participants are Caucasian and five are non-Caucasian. Ten teach early childhood and elementary grade levels and two teach high school grade levels. The participants' length of teaching experience ranges from four years to thirty-two years. All teachers were employed in a Title 1 eligible school.

Interview Results

Principals were asked to set up the interview dates and locations for the participants. The twelve participants were provided with informed consent forms before their interviews and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. The participants granted the researcher permission to record the interview. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and used to develop the themes and sub-themes that relate to the findings of this study.

Research Question 1

What factors do teachers describe as important for making the decision to remain in rural, high poverty districts?

Theme 1: Reasons for Choosing to Teach in High Poverty/Rural Community.

The literature and available statistical information (Garrett & Von Nessen, 2016) indicates that many rural and high poverty districts in South Carolina, as in other parts of the U.S., experience high rates of teacher turnover and difficulties in filling vacancies. To help

provide insights into how rural and high poverty schools and districts might overcome recruitment challenges, the research first examined the reasons why this sample of experienced teachers originally chose to accept positions in schools in rural or high poverty areas of South Carolina. The main themes that emerged in their responses were:

Pre-existing community ties

When asked where they had originally envisioned teaching, four of the participants indicated that they had themselves grown up in the communities in which they work and had always intended to return to them. Of these, three had grown up in the South Carolina communities in which they now teach. Teacher 12 stated that:

I always wanted to be a teacher as a child. Being from a small town, I have always thought I could make a difference in children's lives. I went to this primary school as a child, and I just always wanted to come back in and be a teacher.

Teacher 8 similarly explained that:

Growing up in this small, rural area, I was always a babysitter for everybody in the area, I knew the teachers from this area. So when I graduated high school and started college, I knew I wanted to go into teaching, and this primary school was just always the school of choice... Like I said, everybody I knew and babysat for taught the school. I would go up there to pick up kids and different things, so I was very comfortable with the school, and I was also a product of the school. I just knew. I wasn't sure about what grade at the school I wanted to teach, but I knew I wanted to be there.

Teacher 9 indicated that she had originally envisioned that she would teach in the county where she was born. She explained:

I always envisioned that I would teach in this county. I am from the county. I enjoy working with the kids here and I know some of the parents here, we went to school together. Now, I am teaching some of their grandkids and their great grandkids.

Four of the teachers interviewed indicated that they had grown up in the communities in which they were now teaching. Teacher 2 replied that she knew the principal and many of the faculty and staff before she became employed at the school. She stated that “the principal of the elementary school at that time was the principal when I was here. I knew many of the people working here.” Teacher 3 stated that she lives in the community and goes to church and supports recreation activities in the community and district where she works. She stated:

I started here as an assistant almost 30 years ago. I worked as an assistant for a few years and then I became a bus driver and assistant. I went back to college at night to get my teaching degree and I felt like people at this school helped me so much. It was like a home, like a family. It’s like we were just a team. We depend on each other. I got my roots here.

I have been connected to a church in the community all of my life and I know just about everybody in the community. In addition, my kids grew up in the community and graduated from community schools. I was also over at the recreation park. I was over all the games and scheduling the games.

Teacher 8 explained that she grew in the community and always knew she wanted to be a teacher at the elementary school in her town:

I grew up in this town. The town is a very small, rural area, so everybody knows everybody. And being a babysitter for the community, for everybody, I got to know the teachers and the kids, teachers’ kids.

Two participants were familiar with the community because they had taught there earlier in their careers but had not grown up there. There was evidence of becoming established in the close-knit communities over time. Teacher 10 explained:

I taught in the district for 17 consecutive years. I left for half a year to work as a staffer for a state agency. I had to come back. I miss my children so much. I missed the community and children as I had already established close links here.

Selected to work in this community

Of the seven teachers who were not familiar with the community, two had been selected to work there via a program to recruit international teachers from other countries. Teacher 5 explained that:

I got a call from an agency who hired teachers to South Carolina, and then they interviewed me with the assistant superintendent of school district. She spoke to me on the phone and she selected me to come over to teach. We had a kind of seminar that they just outlined what the school looks like and what kind of things you expected when you came here because that was the first time coming all the way from Asia to here. But other than that, I didn't have a clue.

Teacher 7 similarly indicated:

I'm not at all familiar with the community. This is a new community and this is a new country for me, so I am totally a diverse personality for this country. So after coming here with a lot of support from teachers here, and they came and they taught me; I was going around asking for information, and the teachers came forward and they helped me in understanding their community.

Other teachers came from other areas of the state or the United States and had little or no pre-existing familiarity of the community: they had just applied for or been selected for a teaching post there. Teacher 1 shared that:

I came from a small district, thinking of our graduating class, I only had maybe 98 in my graduating class. A small school. I knew I wanted to teach at a small school because coming from a small community myself, I didn't want to go to a school that people didn't know people. I like the family ties, that if somebody was cutting up the mommas and the daddies, and the grandparents, and everybody really gets involved more in a smaller community. I knew the district was right up the road; but as far as having any ties to this community, I didn't. But when I got here, I kind of fell in love.

Teacher 6 was not familiar with the community. She had moved from another state after the district superintendent contact her college's placement office. Teacher 6 shared her experience in the following way:

When I graduated, I really envisioned myself teaching in my home state because that's where I'm from. I graduated in May. Before I could ever even really put in many applications, the district superintendent in South Carolina called me and offered me a position. I never really did apply to this district. He met me at the airport, put me in his car, interviewed me on the way to the district office, took me into his office, gave me the papers, contract to sign, and that was it. Not familiar at all. I came on the plane and I flew back home to get my things, and my father signed for me to get a car, and I drove down here from my home state by myself with minimal directions and by the grace of God, I got here.

Teacher 10 shared that her connection to the community and school district was her husband's family. She stated:

I just interviewed with the schools here. I really didn't know anything about it. My husband's family is from here, but we've been living in my home town for a long time. I actually interviewed with two of the different principals in the county and got offers for two of the different schools. Both of them appealed to them and I've had a really hard time deciding which one. I'm really happy and have been happy with my decision because it's very close to home too.

Personal preference for rural or high poverty area

Teacher 4 reported that she started "looking for positions in large cities" but she prefers to teach in rural area.

When I first graduated, it took me a while to get into the teaching field. I wanted to travel to South Korea actually to teach for two years and it didn't quite work out the way. And then life happened and a few years went by before I actually started teaching, and then I was looking everywhere for a teaching position. I like that rural setting because that's what I grew up in."

Teacher 3 explained that she prefers to give back to her community. She explained:

It's a poverty area and I love them. I want to help the people in my community. I know it's low pay. I could go somewhere else. I'm 20 minutes away from a large system but I liked it here and I stayed here ... I want to help the kids here in this community.

Teacher 11 offered that she wanted to assist the stakeholders in the county where she is employed:

This was a county that needed help, and I look more at it where if I help the children, then you can help the community. It is the community I actually think that does need help. So, if the children will learn, it will help better their lives.

Research Question 2

What incentives do teachers cite as influential for the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty districts?

Theme 2: Positive Aspects of Current Position

Gaining insights into what the interviews perceive to be the main rewards or what they value about their current position provides one way of understanding the reasons why these teachers stay in these positions. This was explored in various ways: whether their current position is felt to be one of their top choices for employment; what the specific perceived rewards are, and by asking about the factors that have influenced these teachers' decisions to stay at their current schools.

Whether in preferred teaching position

Nine of the participants indicated that their current position would be their first choice of employment. Most teachers explained this preference based this on the grade level they were teaching.

Teacher 8 stated that she “absolutely love kindergarten ... Kindergarten is my favorite because that’s where you get all those fresh kids and you get to make the biggest impact.”

Teacher 9 shared that “My passion for teaching is second and third grade. I am a second grade teacher. I was teaching second grade for some years now and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

For Teacher 11, grade level was clearly a factor that had influenced her decision to remain at their current school. She stated that:

It was my only choice. I actually stayed once I got here. There were a couple of years I've had other schools that gave me a call. But because I was over here, I didn't really want to just go somewhere else and start over.

Perceived rewards of current position

Four main themes emerged when asked about ways in which they feel rewarded in their current position: a second level theme was impacts on learning. Teacher 11 explained that:

When I first meet them in September, I go, "Oh my dear, how am I going to get these students to learn?" But at the end of the year, they did it. It's usually the majority of my children leave kindergarten reading and they really almost are prepared for 1st grade once they leave.

In a similar vein, Teacher 4 described the perceived rewards of her current position and how these make her feel in the following terms:

That light bulb moment that the children have, especially when you have those children and some are lower level, when they finally get that light bulb moment, it makes me feel like I have accomplished something, I have done something.

Likewise, Teacher 6 shared that: "Working with the children is very rewarding. Seeing how they grow, the progress they make, how they move, developmentally, through all the stages, and seeing the product at the end of the year is the rewarding part."

Another secondary theme for perceived rewards of current position is longer term impacts on students' lives. Teacher 3 stated:

When you walk down the street and you see people that's graduated from college or people that's been out of high school, and then they come up, they hug you and tell you

what you meant to them and all this ... I've seen kids graduate from this little poverty school and become engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, do well in life.

In a similar way to Teacher 3, Teacher 5 commented that:

With a community like this, the kids have very little hope and they do not know what they exactly need to do when they get out of school. So when they come back, 'hey, I'm in the Army, and I work here, and I make this much money, and I have a family,' then it's really rewarding for me.

A third secondary theme which emerged is the building of relationships with students and families. Teacher 10 shared that:

The most rewarding thing is the relationships that I have with my children. I do feel like I make a huge difference in their lives, but they make a tremendous difference in my life too. So, that has to be the most rewarding, is to know that you are making a difference, and when you can see it in your classroom, in your children.

Teacher 3 shared her perceptions of and her approach to relationship-building in the following way:

I am a strict teacher, but at the same time, my kids know that I love them. I tell them I love them, and not just tell them. Kids know when you care about them ... And you cannot teach, you cannot treat or talk to every student the same way because they're all different.

A final secondary theme that emerged in relation to Research Question 2 is enjoyment of the specific activities involved in the participants' role as teachers. For example, Teacher 11 she enjoys helping others. She shared that "reading was always something that I enjoyed doing. I enjoyed helping people learn how to read."

Relationships with colleagues

When asked about relationships with their colleagues at school, all 12 of the participants were extremely positive about these peer relationships, and all referred in some way to the school community being like a ‘family’. Teacher 10 shared:

I have a really good relationship with my coworkers. We share all the same visions about how children learn, our morals and values. She’s like family. We talk to each other outside of the school too.

Similarly, Teacher 1 explained:

The teachers are kind of like my family now and we have that bond ... If you have a problem - it doesn’t have to be just with school - believe me, I’ve been in other teacher’s classrooms crying about my own personal children. This is truly a community that you feel like you are part of the family.

Teacher 7 stated that “... we always help foster a relationship. We have peer-learning communities, PLC meetings, we have a learning that any teachers that need help, come to me, and I try to help them.”

Participants often shared how strong peer relationships were inside and outside the school where he or she was employed. Many of the teachers knew one another personally outside of the school and taught each other’s children. Teacher 1 shared that “some of them I’ve known since I was a child. Many of them, I’ve taught their children. They have taught my child. It’s like if I’m not related to them, it’s like another kind of family.” Teacher 8 also explained that some of her peers were like close family members. She stated:

There are some that are like my sister. I mean, the one beside me is like my sister. The two down from me, I take her child to dancing while she's taking a class. So we are a family, and it's easy to do when you work so closely with teachers.

Several teachers mentioned that a supportive environment was a significant factor influencing them to stay at their current school. The sense of "family" was used by some but several teachers referenced how close they were to teachers who taught the same grade level.

Teacher 10 stated:

A few teachers, as far as 4K, in fact we don't really get to be around a lot of the other ones as far as they're planning and stuff. But there are some that have been here with me since the beginning when we were at the other school too. We are just like a tight family.

Others teachers felt the sense of family across the whole school. Teacher 1 shared that:

I have a wonderful team. It doesn't matter who we're with ... I've been switched all around. I've been in 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, technology. It doesn't matter where they switch you. You always can form a bond whoever you're with.

Teacher 4 shared "I have gained several relationships throughout all of the grades. It's been awesome working with these different teams." Like Teacher 4, Teacher 9 provided that:

Whatever they have, they go on the internet and they find a cute little activity that they think I will like, then we share. The entire school is like that; not only just speaking for the second grade but third grade, first grade, all of them share and they work together.

When discussing relationships with colleagues, two of the teachers specifically mentioned the supportive and effective school principal and administrators in their schools.

Teacher 1 shared, "I enjoy our principal. She's here to support us." Teacher 3 mentioned that:

We've had many meetings with our administration, with our principal. When she goes to a meeting, she comes back. The reading coach goes, she comes back and says, they're doing their job. They're keeping up with everything. They're on top of everything. And they come back and they just trickle it down to us and expect us to put it in play, and we do.

Factors influencing decision to stay at the school

Two main factors emerged when teachers explained reasons influencing their decision to stay at the school for four consecutive years: the feeling of being supported by administration and colleagues, and having ties to the community.

Seven of the participants said that getting along well with their colleagues and feeling supported influenced their decision to stay in their current school. Teacher 3 shared that:

"I love my administration and I love my team. They're hard workers" while Teacher 4 provided that:

It's more like a family community type thing. Everyone is close. You know you can talk to people if you have problems, and everybody's willing to work together. I like that. If I have a question, I don't want to feel scared to ask someone.

Teacher 8 listed that

"Living in the area, support from administration when it comes to behavior and incentives, having that strong relationship with your coworkers and your administrative team," and I said, "Feeling appreciated and a sense of belonging." When a teacher feels like they belong to that team and that school, more likely, they're going to stay.

Teacher 6 shared how, when recruited to her school 38 years earlier, the principal and other school administrators had provided her with a very high level of personal support, which helped her settle in and contributed to her decision to remain there.

When I first came here, like I said, Dr. xxx met me at the airport, interviewed me in the car, signed the contract in his office, and at that time he said to me, “Think of me as your father. I’m going to sit you down here, I’m going to tell you things to do, and you’re going to be like, ‘What? I’m too young for that.’” He talked about retirement, he talked about saving money, he talked about all those things I really think my retention has a lot to do with that. I think I wasn’t thrown in, and kind of sink or swim type of thing. There was so many adult figures there that guided me through ... it paid off because here I am 38 years later, and I’ve established a lot of friendships, we’ve all supported each other, I’ve had some good principals. It’s been a good experience.

Six of the participants mentioned various kinds of ties to the community. Once they moved there, made friends, established a home or got married, children at school there etc. it became more difficult to move on. Teacher 10 shared that:

One factor, I have to be honest, is I live here. We’ve built a home here. My family’s here. The other factor would be that I have established rapport with the community, with the families. You go to the grocery store, you see them. They are like my second family, honestly.

While Teacher 8 stated:

I live here, so that’s a big one. I have bonded with the staff here. One of my best friends teaches right next door to me. The people here become your family, and when you have strong leadership, it kind of trickles down. From the principal to the curriculum

coordinator, cafeteria staff, you just bond, and it doesn't hurt that you live in the community and you want what's best for the schools in your community.

A personal story was shared by Teacher 2 to explain her reasons for remaining in the local community:

My husband passed away and my child was a baby. I wanted to stay near where family was because I thought the arrangement of her being with grandparents rather than in daycare was very fortunate. Since it was just the two of us, no extended, no more family, I want to keep her near her extended family. Then she would have the examples of nuclear relationship, what it was like... The community was very kind and supportive during our, I guess you'd say, personal tragedy. Even was a subject, I understand, of a school board meeting about what they could do to help out.

Only one teacher also cited financial considerations for staying when the opportunity to move away had arisen:

I was thinking that I would look around counties in North Carolina. But, when they said that I could get my retirement, now that legislation came through and a full salary. I thought I'm going to stay where I know the school.

Theme 3: Challenges of Current Position

Gaining insights into what the interviews perceive to be the main challenges of their current position helps highlight the types of factors that might be addressed by school leaders and district administrators to improve retention of teachers in these types of schools and communities. Teachers were asked to identify challenges they find especially stressful and draining. Interviewed teachers identified six first level sub- themes.

Not in preferred teaching position

Of the three participants who indicated that their current position is not their first choice of employment, two indicated they would rather teach a different grade level, and the third expressed aspirations to move into school leadership. Teacher 1 explained that her current assignment is not her first choice, stating:

To be truthful, fourth grade is not my first priority. I mean it's my first priority this year but I really enjoyed second grade, third grade. But my principal saw differently. I'm in fourth grade currently. This is my third year in fourth grade.

Teacher 5 shared his goal of moving into school leadership. He explained:

Now, I work as a department chair for our department, but I just want to grow myself as a leader to the next level ... I would like to start a school by myself. I mean, I have started a school in India, but I just want to see how the system of a charter school.

Workload pressures/stress

Several different types of challenges including workload pressures/stress were cited by interviewed teachers. Of these challenges, the most commonly mentioned by six participants was workload pressures and the stress associated with these. The challenge of wide range of abilities among students was mentioned by several teachers. Teacher 8 explained that:

I come in at 6:00 in the morning and I don't leave until maybe 4:00 in the afternoon. But that's still, even for me, having that early day, late afternoon, still not enough time to get the planning, all the creative things you want to do, and then also having enough time in the day to have those teachable moments with your kids.

Teacher 4 stated that:

Trying to get having so many kids on different levels within the classroom, try to find time to reach all of them. That's the hardest part. You want to make it so that you can

get the lower ones, but then you have the top ones who are just there. Okay, I want to go a little higher and you're struggling to get the bottom ones.

One teacher explained that due to salary constraints, the pressures on her time and workload were exacerbated by having to take on additional paid work. She explained:

It's stressful. Teaching is not like everybody says - nine months and then you get three months off. It's staying up till 12 o'clock doing lesson plans and grading work at 3 o'clock in the morning and trying to find what's going to work best for certain children in your class, the children we all know, they don't learn the same. It is stressful and it's very draining. And our pay is not where it needs to be, so we try to pick up odd and end things on the side.

Student behaviors

Three teachers expressed student behaviors as a challenge in his/her current position. Teachers 1 stated that, "Behavior is stressful, particularly when I feel like I'm struggling to find a way to help children, but yet not give them an excuse to act out. Teacher 9 explained that,

Sometimes it gets a little bit stressful. I would say some of the behavior is a big factor. That's the only challenge sometimes. With me, I'm a very stern disciplinarian and my kids know that. They know what to expect of me and I know they know what I expect of them. They know I do not like for them to be playing around while you should be getting their education. Sometimes I think a bigger factor is if I have a lot, if I stress education and behavior a lot, and maybe somebody might stress that as much. I think my biggest concern now is trying to get these kids to stay focused not only on their schoolwork but behavior as well. I think the behavior, if they get behavior under control, that would help them with their academics as well. Both of the two go hand-in-hand.

Changing student and parent mindsets

Changing student and parent mindsets is another sub-theme discovered in reviewing the interview data. Teacher 11 shared:

When they come in and all this is a whole new class, you have to change their mindset that you're here to learn I have to let them know that you play and learn. It's learning through play, but not just all play. Just to get them into the mindset of wanting to learn, sometimes it seems like I have to do that also. But that's the most frustrating part for me.

Teacher 11 further explained that:

And then sometimes you have to get the parents to see that you want the best for their children. As far as even with parents coming in, taking part in their education, you want to see them do that. We don't always see that. But that's a hard thing for me to understand.

While Teacher 12 stated that:

Lately, we have a younger generation of parents and grandparents, and that's very challenging because a lot of them don't understand early childhood, and we have to explain to them what early childhood is about and what is expected of their children.

Lack of commitment on the part of some teachers

The lack of commitment on the part of some teachers was shared by two teachers.

Teacher 10 explained that:

I see a lot of teachers that are just stressed and it's almost as if they've just given up. I've always said, if I got to that point, I needed to go. I would hope somebody would come to me and say, it's time to go.

Teacher 6 shared that work ethic was an issue with younger teachers. She stated that:

When our young teachers are coming in, they don't seem to have that. You know, you come to school every day, you work. You don't lay out because you don't want to get out of bed that day. I mean, I've come to school – and it's not a good thing – tired, we've come to school sick. The veteran teachers are going to find that the teachers who are just now coming in, they're going to lay out for every reason they could think of, and it's really a shame.

Principal or teacher turnover

A final first level sub-theme that emerged are high levels of turnover of school leaders and teachers. Teacher 10 shared that:

I feel like that's a hard thing, with keeping teachers and keeping principals. I feel like that's why we can't grow as a district and as a school where we have a hard time growing is because of the turnover rate. If we could – we get so many good people in here and then within 2 or 3 years, they leave.

Teacher 11 stated that she has worked under several principals:

Maybe about five or six. I'm not sure. There were about five. I have been through a lot of leaders within the past 13 years. We have maybe, I think the first I've had, he was here for a while but I only was under him for one year. And then there was another who came here for about two years. And one other maybe a year or so, and then some have served until we found another principal. I think there was another girl about seven years. So, several leaders we've gone under.

Theme 4: Perceived Factors Influencing Decisions to Leave

Of the twelve participants, four specifically noted that they had never considered leaving their current position. One reason they gave was the love they had for their current job and

location. Another reason stated was that they have been raised not to give up whatever the challenges. Teacher 11 shared that, “If they say I have to go to a different school, I wouldn’t have a problem with that. But my passion is right here at this school.” Teacher 4 replied that, “I have been asked why wouldn’t I teach in the district in which I live?” Her reply is that “I would rather teach here.” Teacher 6 explained that:

My parents brought me up to not be a quitter. They instilled in me that you finish what you start, and I consider my career a start and a finish. So, even when things get hard – things are going to be hard – you have to put on your big-girl pants and keep going.

When asked what, if anything, might make them consider leaving their position, the types of factors cited were mainly personal or family related (4) or retirement (2) rather than factors relating to the job or the school. Teacher 3 expressed the view, for example, that:

If I did leave it, I would probably leave it because of my health. It wouldn’t be anything to do – because I tell people now, they’ll say Miss xx when are you going to retire? How many years are you going to work? I’ll say, I hope (when) I die I’ll be working.

Teacher 11 stated that, “I guess with the distance too. I travel about 40 minutes every day from the interstate and it’s a long ride. That’s the only thing, distance.” Teacher 6 explained that:

I have not thought about leaving until recently now that it’s getting close to retirement. Still, that decision is so hard because this is part of my life. This is my life. It’s hard to make that decision to finally end it. I was supposed to end it last year and I’m still here and I’m supposed to end it this year and I’m still coming back next year.

Three teachers cited school related factors as possible reasons for considering leaving: one had previously considered leaving due to workload pressures but had decided to stay. Others

indicated they might consider leaving their current position if attracted by a promotion or higher salary. Teachers 8 expressed a concern about pay step increases:

Step increase, that's what I was thinking, the step increase. Our district, when you reach 23 years, it stops. I've contemplated that, and also, in our neighboring district, I know that they base your salary on those last five years for retirement. I know a neighboring district, it's like \$10,000 more a year to teach, so those have been the only two things that have made me think would I want to look somewhere else, and it's simply the financial.

Another teacher indicated that teachers in her school may consider leaving due to the lack of community development and future opportunities for their own children. Teacher 12 explained:

Lately the county has not been growing like I think they should, and I'm hoping we can bring some more industry here. And if we don't bring any more industry, I was thinking about maybe leaving – because I have younger children; I have a 6 year-old and an 8 year-old and I want them to receive the best education possible. So I'm hoping the town can grow some. And if not, that's the only way I would leave, only if the town won't show it in prosperity.

To provide additional insights into the reasons for retention difficulties faced by rural and high poverty schools, the participants were also asked for their perceived reasons as to why other teachers had left their schools. The most commonly cited factor, reported by three teachers, was lack of support from school administration in dealing with challenges such as student behavior, a factor which is at least partially within the control of schools. Interviewed teachers also acknowledged that new or younger teachers often do not have sufficient experience or adequate level of commitment to deal with the challenges. Teacher 8 stated:

Probably (why) some of these other people would want to leave is the behavior. I know they say that behavior is a factor in having that administrative support. Some of them feel lack of support with the heavy issues.

Teacher 6 also reported that there is “No support with behavior,” and stated:

We hear a lot of – if someone goes wrong in our classroom, it’s classroom management, which ... it’s not always the case. There’s a lot of behaviors that have to – when you have a child who’s in second grade and seven years have passed by, it’s hard to change that behavior now, and it’s not always classroom management.

She further explained:

Most veterans that you find, I think, are willing to work with those kind of children. It’s just that the first year teacher has to love teaching before they want to keep doing it, and I’ve seen teachers walk out of this school after their first year and go into something else. They don’t want to teach, they don’t want anything to do with teaching. That can’t be. We can’t do that.

Three of the interviewed teachers indicated either that other teachers had left their schools due to low salaries per se (2) or low salaries combined with workload pressures (1).

Teacher 1 stated:

If the state would pay teachers – we all came into this position for a reason. I feel like everybody that was really good at it has moved out of teaching because of stress and getting underpaid ... And just the stress of day-to-day stuff like paperwork. I mean, when I first started, we had to do paperwork, but it’s nothing like it is now.

Teacher 8 recounted an example of a long-serving teacher known to be leaving for a higher salary:

We have a teacher who was leaving who's been here the whole time. She's leaving for next year to go to the neighboring district because of the salary ... she's going to have, I think, a 45-minute drive, but she wants to base that last five years for her retirement.

Research Question 3

What incentives could be added to impact the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty, districts?

Theme 5: Views on Retention Measures

In order to explore what rural/high poverty schools might do to retain teachers, the participants were asked to identify any retention measures currently used by their schools and for the views of what more could be done to retain good teachers. Many of the current measures identified were non-financial in nature. Half of all the participants (6) noted that their school retains teachers by providing them with good levels of support and constructive feedback to enable them to develop. Teacher 3 explained:

They care about you and they want you to improve. They want to help you improve. It's just not – my principal, in other words, she's very good but she expects the same out of me and she expects out of everybody. She's fair. She's honest. And the thing about it, things that I need to improve on over the years. She might make suggestions like, maybe you need to go observe or maybe you need to go talk to so and so or get so and so... or go to my reading coach.

Teacher 4 referred specifically to the principal's honest and open approach, stating:

They're honest and upfront. I take criticism very well. So, if there's something that I need to work on, I would rather them tell me – and that's what they do, they tell me all the things that I need to work on. And I feel like that makes my teaching better.

Teacher 7 explained the perceived importance of constructive feedback from administrators:

It's not based on personal relationships, so the support that we get are, the evaluations that we get are mostly databased, so that way, we get to know that ... when I improve in that area again, I can get a feedback saying 'okay, you improved. That's good, so keep continuing. So that kind of appreciation, that kind of feedback and evaluation that I get that from my administrators will help me in growing.

Two teachers specifically mentioned the provision of development or teacher leadership opportunities. Teacher 6 shared, "They have faith in you when they're looking for people who need to do certain committees, people that they know have a lot of experience that they can trust."

Three of the participants referred to non-financial incentives or benefits offered within their school. Teacher 12 shared that school administrators provide special program to recognize the teachers' effort. She reported that "We have banquets. The principal offers incentives for teachers, like perfect attendance." Teacher 8 stated that she thought causal dress days would be an incentive for teachers. She explained that "Dress-Down Fridays, we talked about that, having that Dress-Down, a Casual Friday. Those are things that teachers – and you wouldn't think that teachers hold so much value to dress, but they do." Teacher 9 shared the idea of a flexible schedule as a valued benefit which she currently enjoys in her school. She reported, "Being the grade level chair, if I have to leave an extra 30 minutes and they know I'm with my kids, they don't have a problem with me leaving early, 30 minutes or something like that.

Just two teachers offered the suggestion of higher salaries, though it seems likely that the other participants did not do so since they recognized that this incentive is not feasible for schools to introduce. Another teacher suggested alternative financial incentives – referring to an

existing grant scheme run by her district. Teacher 8 stated that, “In a perfect world, increased pay to be competitive with the neighboring districts, the cost of living raise for our teachers, and that step increase. Teacher 7 mentioned that his district gave financial incentives, explaining that:

The district for the past two years, they gave like \$1,500 incentive for the teachers in some areas ... now they [district] have an employment grant that they have on trying to get a master teacher. I applied for it and I attended the interview. So they are trying to give opportunities for teachers to grow.

One teacher mentioned greater support for teachers, especially when they first begin teaching:

These young teachers, they need more support. They need to be constantly pointed out the good things they do. They need to start out their first year with not 10 discipline problems in their classrooms. Yeah, pamper them a little bit. Let them start that first year loving teaching, then let it go from there. But let that first year be such a wonderful experience that they're willing to do the rest, go the rest of the way ... You can't go into a first year teacher's room and strip them down to nothing, do an observation, and if you don't find a thing good...They're just starting. It's like a baby. You're going to tell a baby you can't walk.

Teacher 7 gave the suggestion that administrators should recognize diversity more in order to attract and retain a broader range of teachers, highlighting the ways in which they personally value this:

Administrators, they have to be more diverse than before ... Diversity for me is not just from a different country; even my food I'm a vegetarian. So here when we serve food,

the principal comes here and asks like am I taken care and he's offering an alternate. So this kind of leadership at the district level and at the school level makes us stay here.

When the research asked specifically for the teachers' views on whether salaries are an effective motivator for teachers, the vast majority (9) commented that salaries are not a primary motivator. Most teachers expressed the view that teachers enter the profession because of their love for teaching, despite the relatively low salaries paid. Teacher 11 stressed this point, explaining that:

You really can't decide you want to be a teacher because of the salary. It's something you have to love ... I'm sure the salary is an important part of it, but it can't be the main thing for it. There are a lot of things that we have put money out of our own pockets just to make sure that the children got what they needed for the classroom. I've done that through the years ... I remember when I first started teaching, not at this school but at another school, I actually stocked my entire classroom.

Teacher 1 concurred that salaries are not an effective motivator for many teachers, stressing that:

I think most of us stay because we can bond with each other. I don't think none of us stays just because we're getting paid. We are one of lowest paying districts in the state. So, you have to truly love where you're at and most people, when they go into teaching they know that already. They know that you're not going to make a million dollars from teaching.

Teacher 9 also stated that pay was not the reason she was at her school. She explained that:

Money is good, but I'm not in here for the money ... I'm here to help these kids learn. This is my passion. This is something I like to do. And yes, money, I can't say I wouldn't want no more money, but if I don't have it, I'm still going to be happy about it.

Five teachers stressed the perceived importance of salaries or other financial incentives as recruitment and retention tools, especially for younger or newly qualified teachers, and because salaries are higher in neighboring districts. Teacher 3, for example, responded:

I think it's good, especially for our new teachers. Sign-on bonuses, I think that'd be a good way to get them at your district. And then maybe if you got them there, and they love it and they become a part of that district, they will want to stay. I can understand some people who live so far away from home. Maybe they like the area and one thing I think we got going for us is we're not far from the coast.

Like Teacher 3, Teacher 4 discussed the importance of salaries. She stated that:

It's important because that's your livelihood ... At this point, I'm paid enough to where I'm not living paycheck to paycheck. I'm supported here. But for some, it is important. If they're not getting paid what they feel like they should be getting paid or what they need to be paid, then they would have to go somewhere.

Finally, Teacher 6 reported that she believes salaries to be a great motivator which contributes to teacher retention. Describing her own financial challenges early in her career, she explained:

I think in this day and age it would be a great motivation for the salary to be higher. We're in a poverty district of course ... When I started we were okay. When my husband started losing jobs because of plant closings, things got very difficult. We could not meet our bills on my salary. It was very difficult. So, single teachers, I could understand that it's difficult for them. I think teacher retention would be better if the salaries were higher.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative results of the study were presented in this chapter. The researcher interviewed and transcribed twelve teacher interviews. After completing the data collection, data were analyzed to determine factors and circumstances that influence teacher retention in rural, underserved South Carolina Districts. Several key themes relevant to the research questions emerged from the interview data and multiple reviews of the data took place in an effort to strengthen the credibility of the final categorization of themes and sub-themes that have been used to structure the findings. The findings provide important insights into the factors and circumstances that assist in explaining why teachers remain in these districts after four years. Chapter 5 presents a summary and conclusions to the study, as well as recommendations for school administrators looking to influence teacher retention.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter 1 of the dissertation provided the background to this qualitative study intended to examine the factors and circumstances that contribute to the retention of high quality teachers for more than four years in rural, high poverty districts in South Carolina school districts. It also included the statement of the problem and research questions, gave an overview of the methodological approach and data collection methods, and described the significance of the study. Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature relating to teacher attrition at the national and state level. In Chapter 3, the research methods of the study were described, including information on sampling and participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presented the descriptive narrative of findings, based on the thematic coding and analysis of the interview data. Chapter 5 summarizes the main findings and includes conclusions and recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

The literature of Deci and Ryan (1985; 2000) and Herzberg (1959) contributed to the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. This framework combines Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (1985; 2000) with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. These frameworks have been used in literature on teacher motivation and retention and have been demonstrated to be valuable in the investigation of these issues. Using this framework, the researcher identified key themes and sub-themes, relevant to the research questions that emerged from the qualitative data analysis. The researcher's goal has been to identify relevant findings and draw conclusions from this study that may be used to assist district and school administrators in retaining teachers in rural, high poverty districts.

Study Design

A phenomenological approach was used to research the issue of why teachers remain in the same rural, high poverty districts after four years. The study participants consisted of twelve teachers who teach in rural, high poverty, South Carolina districts. Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with these teachers, and the interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis methods to investigate why these teachers have remained in the same district for at least four years instead of transferring or leaving the district.

Discussion

As discussed earlier, schools in rural or high poverty areas often have little control over extrinsic motivational factors such as location, salaries, the physical infrastructure of the school or available resources, supplies, and equipment. The findings of this study demonstrate that measures that help improve teacher self-efficacy or create more intrinsic opportunities for motivation might be more effective in teacher recruitment and retention in the longer term. Certain forms of extrinsic motivation such as career development and teacher leadership opportunities might also be used to help retain teachers. This qualitative study did not seek to investigate the existence or strength of relationships between these factors and teacher retention, but was conducted within a conceptual framework intended to provide deep insights into the ways in which the factors represented by these concepts influence teacher decisions in practice.

Limitations

The following considerations and limitations should be taken into account when considering the results and/or implications of this research study:

- The regional sample, consisting of three school districts, was limited to a specific region in northeastern South Carolina.

- Another limitation is the relatively small sample size of twelve teachers.
- Finally, teachers were selected for participation in the study by their school principals. There is a possibility that teachers may have modified their responses due to the concern that these may become known to the principal.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study has attempted to answer three key research questions. The first question was intended to identify factors that are important in teachers' decisions to remain in rural, high poverty districts. Question two sought to identify incentives that teachers cite as influential for the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty districts. Question three was intended to identify additional incentives that might have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty, districts. The specific questions are set out in the summary of findings section below.

Study Findings

Research Question 1: What factors do teachers describe as important for making the decision to remain in rural, high poverty districts?

Analysis of this question resulted in three top-level themes:

- Background Information
- Reasons for Choosing to Teach in High Poverty/Rural Community Views on Retention Measures
- Positive Aspects of Current Position/Factors Influencing Decision to Remain

Four first level sub-themes emerged from the teacher interviews as background information relating to current teaching position and reasons for choosing to teach in high poverty/rural. With regard to ties with the community, six out of twelve teachers noted that they

had pre-existing community ties while six teachers reported lack of familiarity with community when taking the teaching position. Four teachers stated they were selected for the district after applying. Two teachers were selected by their district and a placement agency as international teachers.

Four first level sub-themes emerged in reference to the reasons teacher chose to teach in a high poverty/rural community.

- Pre-existing community ties (6 participants)
- Selected for this school or district (4)
- Personal preference to teach in rural or high poverty community (4)
- Other reasons (1)

As for positive aspects of their current position being factors influencing their decision to remain, nine teachers stated that the current position is their top choice of employment. While three did not prefer the grade level placement, the majority indicated that they are satisfied with their employment.

Research Question 2: What incentives do teachers cite as influential for the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty districts?

Three top levels themes were revealed when teachers were asked six interview questions around the types of incentives that are influential in the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty districts. These themes consisted of:

- Positive Aspects of Current Position/Factors Influencing Decision to Remain
- Challenges of Current Position
- Perceived Factors Influencing Decisions to Leave

Three first level sub-themes emerged from the teacher interviews as positive aspects of current position/factors influencing the decisions to remain at the school for more than four years. Themes discovered consisted of:

- Perceived rewards of current position
- Relationships with colleagues
- Factors that have influenced their decision to stay over time

Under each of these three themes were second level sub-themes.

Perceived rewards of current position yielded four second level themes. These secondary themes included impacts on students' learning (4), longer-term impacts on students' lives (5), building relationships with students and families (3) enjoyment of specific activities (3). All four secondary themes were intrinsic in nature.

All 12 teachers cited positive relationships with colleagues as one of the most factors influencing their decision to remain at their current schools. Two secondary themes emerged under this first level theme. Working in a family-like environment was stated by all 12 teachers, while supportive leadership was mentioned by 2. There could be some overlap due to leaders contributing to and leading the family-like culture. Three secondary themes under factors influencing decisions to remain were identified as the support of school leaders and colleagues (7), community ties (6) and financial considerations (1).

Teachers were asked to provide information about challenges they found stressful and draining. Seven secondary themes were discovered when analyzing their responses:

- Current position not first choice of employment (3)
- Workload pressures/stress (5)
- Student behaviors (3)

- Student or parent mindsets (3)
- Lack of commitment on part of some teachers (2)
- Principal or teacher turnover (2)
- Other factors (1)

Most of the teachers interviewed were concerned about workload pressures and stress.

The type of pressures identified included teaching all students to read proficiently by third grade, preparation for state assessments, and other duties assigned by state regulation or principals.

Teachers were asked if they had thoughts about leaving their current position, and if so, what would make them leave. Four teachers stated that they had never considered leaving. Other second-level themes corresponding with factors that might make the teachers consider leaving their current school included: personal or family issues (4), retirement (2), workload pressures/stress (1), lack of community development (1) promotion (1) and higher salary (1). Several teachers interviewed provided perceived reasons why other teachers and peers have left their schools. The identified reasons consisted of a lack of support in dealing with challenges of role (3), workload pressures/salary (1), children no longer in local schools (1), lack of school administrators providing support and helpful feedback (6) and non-financial incentives and rewards (3).

Research Question 3: What incentives could be added to impact the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural, high poverty, districts?

Teachers were asked their thoughts on teacher salaries as motivation to stay at a school. Nine teachers stated that salaries were not a primary motivator. Teachers provided several suggestions for what administrators might do to influence retention. Four measures already being used to influence retention at their school were identified, consisting of: providing support

and feedback (6), non-financial incentives and rewards (3) and teacher leadership and development opportunities (2). The teachers also suggested five additional measures to influence retention: higher salaries (2), more support for new teachers (1), tying teachers into longer contracts (1), other financial incentives (1), and recognizing diversity (1).

Overall, the interviewed did not view teacher salaries as retention tools. Nine teachers stated that salaries were not a primary motivation. Five teachers did identify salaries as important recruitment or retention incentives.

Conclusions

Based upon a review of related literature and teacher interviews regarding retention of high quality teachers for more than four years in rural, high poverty districts in South Carolina school district, it is concluded that teachers opted to remain in these districts for both intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. Jessop and Penny (1998) discovered that instrumental teachers are mainly motivated by extrinsic incentives, and relational teachers are motivated by intrinsic factors such as the moral aspects of helping students to overcome their challenges.

The majority of the teachers interviewed could be regarded as relational teachers. All 12 teachers stated that their relationships with colleagues constituted a family-like working environment. This appeared to be a major factor influencing many of the teachers' decisions to remain in their current district. This finding is aligned with the work of Hanushek et al. (2004), which suggested that offering attractive working conditions may help to compensate for lower salaries and improve the ability of schools in rural areas to attract and retain high quality teaching staff. In addition, the finding is supportive of Goodwin (2012) who identified unsupportive school environments as one of the main challenges frequently faced by new teachers, and of Donaldson (2011), who discovered that overall teacher quality often increases

within districts or schools that have an open and collaborative working culture. Seven teachers in the current study stated that the support of school leaders and colleagues has influenced their decision to stay over time at their current schools.

Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) may also help to explain the reasons why some teachers choose to remain in rural and high poverty school districts while others do not. Those motivated by intrinsic factors such as the satisfaction gained from assisting students to learn may be more likely to stay, while those placing high value on extrinsic factors may be more inclined to leave if the favorable working conditions or competitive salaries that they need for motivational purposes are not available. Over half of the teachers interviewed listed intrinsic factors such as the impact on students' learning, longer-term impact on students' lives, building relationships with students and families, and enjoyment of specific activities as main reasons for continuing their current employment.

The concept of teacher self-efficacy, as developed by Bandura (1977), was also helpful as a means of understanding why teachers stay or leave challenging school environments and can have an arbitrating effect on the impact of intrinsic or extrinsic rewards on their decisions. Many of the teachers interviewed indicated that the amount of time and effort they put into tasks and their willingness to take on challenging situations is determined by the expectation of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The themes that arose from the interview analysis were similar to Bandura's (1997) observations that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to have high levels of enthusiasm for and commitment to their roles. They may be more likely to remain in challenging school environments because they believe in their own abilities to succeed and achieve their goals.

As discovered in the literature review, research has demonstrated that financial incentives are not sufficient to attract and retain high quality teachers to disadvantaged schools (Berry, 2008). There has been a tendency in the past to rely heavily on short-term financial rewards and penalties linked to student performance outcomes in these schools. In order to improve the effectiveness of recruitment and retention initiatives and achieve longer-term sustainable improvements, however, it is also crucial to ensure that the right working conditions are in place (Johnson, 2006). Certain forms of extrinsic motivation such as career development and teacher leadership opportunities might also be used to help retain teachers. In research conducted by Herzberg (1966), factors such as interesting work, responsibility, advancement opportunities, and recognition were listed by teachers as more effective long-term motivators than pay and working conditions. As stated by nine teachers in the present study, salaries are not seen as a primary motivation to remain in their current schools. The findings suggest that the likelihood of a teacher remaining in a challenging school environment over time may be influenced directly by the relative priority they place on intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors, but that this might also be mediated by their level of self-efficacy.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the review of literature as well as the interview data analysis, several recommendations are suggested for further study as follows:

1. School administrators should explore and study comprehensive mentoring and support programs for new teachers.
2. Examination of the factors influencing teacher retention in South Carolina districts should be conducted on a larger scale.

3. Study the selection of principals in rural, underserved South Carolina districts and the influence on teacher retention.
4. Future studies should focus on leadership positions and the practices they use to support teachers and retain teachers.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The following recommendations are presented for consideration for school boards, superintendents, and school principals.

1. District and school leaders should work with their boards to ensure components for school culture development is in place to promote and improve teacher retention.
2. School administrators should offer comprehensive mentoring and support programs to new teachers.
3. School administrators should provide teachers with timely feedback and support.
4. Careful selection of principals in rural, underserved South Carolina is essential to teacher retention.
5. District and school administrators should provide teacher and school leadership roles and opportunities for teachers.

Any future study exploring this issue must acknowledge that some attrition may benefit both the school and teachers. District and school administrators should continue to explore factors and circumstances that will lead to reducing attrition and improving retention. State and local leaders should assist by providing funding to principals to assist in implementing strategies to retain high quality teachers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter to Superintendents

Dear Superintendent:

Currently, I am a doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am conducting a qualitative research study of teachers who have taught in South Carolina for at least four consecutive years in rural, high poverty districts.

I would like to conduct informal interviews with four teachers and ask why they have continued in their teaching positions in your district for at least four years. Their responses will be collected and analyzed in hopes of developing a theoretical framework depicting what factors and circumstances lead to retaining teachers in rural, high poverty, South Carolina districts.

Thank you in advance for allowing me the opportunity to increase the research base related to teacher retention in South Carolina. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 843-621-5083 or by e-mail nv08@aol.com or my dissertation committee chair, Dr. William Flora 423-439-7617 or by email floraw@etsu.edu.

I would greatly appreciate confirmation of your permission to contact principals from district schools selected by you to conduct four confidential, informal interviews with teachers teaching in grades K-12. Please return this letter with your signature as approval of this study

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Neal Vincent
Doctoral Candidate
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Appendix B

Distribution of Main Themes and Sub-themes

Top Level Theme	First Level Sub-Theme	Second Level Sub-Theme	Number of participants
A. Background Information	1. Background information relating to current position		n/a
	2. Other background information		n/a
	3. Where they originally envisioned they would teach	a. In home community or similar area	5
		b. Away from home community or area	1
		c. No preference	1
4. Lack of familiarity with community when taking up teaching position		6	
B. Reasons for Choosing to Teach in High Poverty/Rural Community	1. Pre-existing community ties		6
	2. Selected for this school or district		4
	3. Personal preference to teach in rural or high poverty community		4
	4. Other reasons		1
C. Positive Aspects of Current Position/Factors Influencing Decision to Remain	1. Current position is top choice of employment		9
	2. Perceived rewards of current position	a. Impacts on students' learning	4
		b. Longer-term impacts on students' lives	5
		c. Building relationships with students and families	3
		d. Enjoyment of specific activities	3

	3. Relationships with colleagues	a. Family-like working environment	12
		b. Supportive leadership	2
	4. Factors that have influenced their decision to stay over time	a. Support of school leaders and colleagues	7
		b. Community ties	6
		c. Financial considerations	1
D. Challenges of Current Position	1. Current position not first choice of employment		3
	2. Workload pressures / stress		5
	3. Student behaviors		3
	4. Student or parent mindsets		3
	5. Lack of commitment on part of some teachers		2
	6. Principal or teacher turnover		2
	7. Other factors		1
E. Perceived Factors Influencing Decisions to Leave	1. Has never considered leaving		4
	2. What might make them consider leaving	a. Personal or family issues	4
		b. Retirement	2
		c. Workload pressures/stress	1
		d. Lack of community development	1
		e. Promotion	1
		f. Higher salary	1

	3. Perceived reasons why other teachers have left.	a. Lack of support in dealing with challenges of role	3
		b. Workload pressures/salary	1
		c. Children no longer in local schools	1
		d. Providing support and helpful feedback	6
		e. Non-financial incentives and rewards	3
F. Views on Retention Measures	1. Measures currently being taken to influence retention	a. Providing support and feedback	6
		b. Non-financial incentives and rewards	3
		c. Teacher leadership and development opportunities	2
	2. Suggested additional measures to influence retention	a. Higher salaries	2
		b. More support for new teachers	1
		c. Tie into longer contracts	1
		d. Other financial incentives	1
		e. Recognizing diversity	1
	3. Views on teacher salaries as retention tools	a. Salaries not a primary motivation	9
		b. Important recruitment or retention tool	5
G. Miscellaneous comments			n/a

VITA

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Florence School District 1, Florence, SC
- Principal, June 2006 - August 2012
South Florence High School, Florence, SC
- Assistant Principal/Registrar/School Testing Coordinator,
July 2003 - June 2006
Dorman High School, Spartanburg, SC
- Business Education Teacher/Service Learning Instructor,
August 2001 - May 2004
Dorman High School, Spartanburg, SC
- Honors Computer Science Teacher, January 2001 - June
2001
Academic Magnet High School of Charleston County,
Charleston, SC

Honors and Awards: South Carolina Gold School Award, 2007
South Carolina Silver School Award for Closing
Achievement Gap, 2008
South Carolina Red Carpet School Award, 2008
Who's Who Among American Teachers, 2005, 2006, 2007

Professional Licensure: South Carolina Superintendent
South Carolina Secondary Principal
South Carolina Secondary Supervisor
South Carolina Business Education

Professional Organizations: The School Superintendents Association, 2015-Present
South Carolina Association of School Administrators
Superintendents' Affiliate 2015-Present
South Carolina Association of School Administrators
Secondary Principals' Affiliate Executive Committee,
Fifth/Sixth District Representative, 2011-2015