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# Examination of Practices Used by Rural Georgia School Principals in Hiring Highly Qualified Teachers Art

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AN EXAMINATION OF PRACTICES USED BY RURAL GEORGIA  
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN HIRING HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

by

STEVEN DALE RHODES

(Under the direction of Barbara Mallory)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to understand hiring practices used by rural high performance Georgia school principals. The study used a qualitative design. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews and reviews of documents related to hiring to understand hiring practices currently being used by rural Georgia school principals, hiring practices perceived to be working best to attract teachers, hiring practices most influential to the final selection of the teacher, and principals' suggested improvements to the hiring process.

Each of the three participants was purposefully chosen for the study, was assured confidentiality, and was given a fictitious name. The accounts of personal experiences of each of the rural principals were presented through direct quotes to provide richness in detailing experiences.

Findings revealed that principals involved in the study had little formal training on hiring teachers and employed traditional hiring methods. With an understanding of the benefits of rural life and the need to communicate these benefits to attract potential new hires, the principals relied heavily on word-of-mouth. There were varying perceptions as to which element of the hiring process was essential to the final selection of the teacher, but rural principals indicated that each element was important. According

to rural school principals, improvements to the hiring process could be made by increasing compensation for teachers, conducting district level recruitment fairs, and providing training to personnel on hiring practices. The rural school principals suggested that novice principals hire only the best teachers, use their gut intuition, and ask difficult questions of potential hires.

Colleges of education, professional organizations, and local Boards of Education may wish to explore the findings of this research study to provide training on best hiring practices. The training will enable school leaders a better understanding of the hiring process. Clearly, finding the best teacher is a critical element of the school's success and the success of the principal.

**INDEX WORDS:** Georgia, Hiring Practices, Rural, Dissertation

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IN HIRING HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University  
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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2008

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## DEDICATION

To my mom, for always being there to support me through life's journeys, I dedicate this dissertation. Your tremendous encouragement, support, and gift of time have made me the motivated person I am today. Thank you for always being there for me, for loving me, and for inspiring me to set high goals in life. Please know that this degree is to honor you.

To Mychele, who is my heart, loving wife, and best friend, I dedicate to you this dissertation. Thank you for believing in me, for supporting and encouraging me, for understanding my need to work long hours, and for your unconditional love.

To Emma, my beautiful six year old daughter, I dedicate this dissertation. I hope that this project one day inspires you. You can accomplish anything in life! I pledge to you my love, support, and time to play and learn together. You and I have a lot to teach Reagan. I love you dingle-berry!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important decisions made by school administrators involves hiring highly qualified teachers for teacher vacancies at their schools (Citarelli, 2006). The decision to hire a certain person has a tremendous effect on students because that chosen teachers' actions and attitudes about student learning can either positively or negatively impact student achievement (Pillsbury, 2005). In districts where budgets emphasize curricular initiatives, human resource budgets are often left bare, suggested Pillsbury (2005), making the task of finding the best teachers more difficult. At a time in our nation when increased expectations and the implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 require schools to increase the achievement of all students, school principals are left with the challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers capable of raising student achievement (Salinas, Kritsonis, and Herrington, 2006). Moreover, according to Murphy, DeArmond, and Guinn (2003), rural school leaders find themselves in schools with reduced per-capita populations, coupled with geographic isolation, which adversely impacts resources such as the number of potential job applicants, financial resources to offer competitive salaries to applicants, and necessary support programs to retain new staff. Consequently, school principals of rural, impoverished schools face a greater staffing challenge (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007).

#### Background of the Study

The challenge of high retirement and attrition rates among teachers, soaring and shifting student populations nationwide, and greater staffing challenges among rural and

impoverished regions, leaves school leaders with the tremendous task of filling teacher vacancies with highly qualified teachers (*Innovations in Education: Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification*, 2004).

According to published findings from Provasnik and Dorfman (2005), at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, new hires made up 17 percent of the overall teacher workforce in the United States, and 9 percent left teaching at the end of the 2000-2001 school year. In the state of Georgia in 1999, due to a decrease in higher education programs graduating teachers, districts hired nearly 50 percent of new personnel from out of state. Ingersoll (2003) suggested that despite increasing student populations and increased attrition rates, over a million United States public school teachers are approaching retirement. The need to expand the education workforce, in short, is the challenge to the profession, proposes the report (*Innovations in Education: Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification*, 2004). Moreover, school principals of rural, impoverished schools face a greater challenge in filling teacher vacancies in that few qualified teachers live in the area, or find the commute difficult (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007).

According to Citarelli (2006), the four essential elements required of administrators to meet the challenge of hiring more personnel involves: the recruitment process; the screening process; the interview process; and, the final selection process. Citarelli suggested that school leaders understand these four components before starting the hiring process. O'Laughlin (1999) explained that when it comes to providing a valuable education to children, no factor contributes more than the quality of the teacher

in the classroom. Therefore, the ability of school administrators to recruit and hire highly qualified teachers is crucial (O'Laughlin).

The first element of the hiring process involves the recruitment of personnel (Citarelli, 2006). Koch (1995) suggested that since recruitment and selection policies determine the criteria and policies for who will and will not be hired, recruitment and selection ultimately determine the population of the workforce.

Gatewood and Field (1987) described the three purposes of recruiting staff as:

1. To increase the pool of job applicants with a minimum cost;
2. To meet the organizations legal and social obligations regarding the demographic composition of its workplace;
3. To help increase the success rate of the selection process by reducing the number of applicants who are either poorly qualified or have the wrong skills.

(p. 8)

According to Rebore (2004), one of the best sources for referrals for potential job candidates comes from information from current employees. While many of these daily insights and referrals are of a personal nature, according to Rebore, most referrals from teachers and principals are professional and not social. Rebore suggested that districts set specific guidelines which encourage employees to recommend potential candidates.

Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) found that being proactive during the recruitment process involves administrators analyzing needs, creating plans for addressing needs, and deciding on a course of action. However, Murphy and DeArmond (2003) examined data from the U.S. Department of Education's 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and discovered that such strategic approaches to recruitment by districts

are rare. According to research by Liu (2003), building-level administrators should have a role in interacting with potential new employees; however, during the recruitment process, there are rare occasions for job candidates and principals to interact.

Following the recruitment of applicants, the next step involves the screening process (Citarelli, 2006). A study by Dineen, Noe, and Wang (2004) described the screening process as eliminating less desirable candidates from the entire pool of applicants prior to contacting applicants for more in-depth investigations. Clement (2006) suggested that administrators create a checklist to rate applications, and then rate the desired components found on applications prior to the interview. Research by McKinney, Carlson, Mecham, D'Angelo, and Connerly (2003) discovered that while Grade Point Average (GPA) is a common criterion used to screen applications during the recruitment process, it is often not held in the highest regard during the selection process. Further, McKinney et al. (2003) contended that GPA is often viewed in different ways based upon whether grades represent in-major courses, or overall GPA.

Another tool used by employers to screen applicants includes the Counterproductive Behavior Index (CBI). Lanyon and Goodstein (2004) described the CBI as a 120-item, true-false assessment used to measure five components of counterproductive workplace behavior: Dependability Concerns, Aggression, Substance Abuse, Honesty Concerns, and Computer Abuse, with an additional composite rating of Total Concerns. According to research by Lanyon and Goodstein, the CBI provides a valid foundation for employers to screen potential job candidates. However, research by Rynes, Colbert, and Brown (2002), discovered that human resource administrators place little faith on tests of intelligence and personality as viable predictors of job performance.

Once the screening of applicants is complete, the administrator then has the role of setting the stage for the interviewing of potential hires (Citarelli, 2006). Beatty (1994) stated that the essential role of the interviewer during the interview and selection process involves the interviewer being able to discover and collect evidence that the candidate will be able to perform well in areas known to be key to the vacant position. Two universal interview types described by Blackman and Funder (2002) as commonly used by organizations include the structured interview and unstructured interview. Structured interviews are done with pre-established questions which are job-related and generally employ a scoring guide for rating candidates; unstructured interviewing has fewer constraints, in that there are no set questions or open-ended questions, which afford more open dialogue and free-flowing exchanges. When validity for success in predicting job performance is required, structured interviewing is best (Blackman & Funder).

According to studies by Wendel and Breed (1988), school districts rarely have set policies and protocols for interviewing teachers. Moreover, the most common approach used by districts involves unstructured interviews, driven by the intuition of untrained interviewers (Wendel & Breed). However, in a study of 29 principals, Mertz and McNeely (2001) discovered that principals were confident that the process of interviewing was a good way to get information on applicants. Sixteen of the 29 principals interviewed by Mertz and McNeely felt they knew if the person being interviewed was right for the job immediately, or almost immediately.

A principal's gut feeling was the overwhelming perspective given on why the principal chose a particular teacher applicant (Mertz & McNeely, 2001). In search of this intuitive feeling, Roberts (1987) concluded that questions should focus not only on



teacher's conveying their knowledge of teaching skills, but also on the teacher's ability to apply those skills in the classroom. McConney, Ayres, Hansen, and Cuthbertson (2003), in a study of teacher workforce quality, discovered that principals were more satisfied with the performance of teachers if the principals themselves interviewed and hired the teacher.

The final element of the hiring process involves the selection of employees (Citarelli, 2006). According to Rebore (2004), hiring individuals who best meet the qualifications of the job is the priority of the selection process. Further, Rebore added that not making the correct choice when hiring, in addition to initial hiring expenses, could lead to drastic costs, including inadequate job performance, and time and resources devoted to termination of the deficient employee.

Collins (2001) reported that organizational leaders not only need to get the "right people on the bus," but also ensure that the "right people on the bus are in the right seat on the bus" (p. 41). Norris and Richburg (1997) suggested that interviewing and screening are not enough. An essential element of the hiring process should include an observation of the finalists teaching lessons (Norris & Richburg). Ediger (2002) agreed, suggesting that districts should implement a program in the hiring process wherein potential teachers teach actual lessons in the school prior to being considered for a teaching position. Once the interviewer feels comfortable about potential candidates, Beatty (1994) suggests that the important reference checks of the potential hire be conducted. This essential duty of checking references, made at the close of the hiring process, may lead to confirmation of the behavioral tasks observed during the initial stages of the hiring process (Beatty).

Research by Mertz and McNeely (2001) suggested that minimal empirical data exists relative to principals' selection of teachers. According to Mertz and McNeely, investigations about the selection process principals use to hire teachers would be of great value and insight to practitioners. Citarelli (2006) suggested that the hiring process is not only complicated in scope, but also involves a thorough, involved process. Moreover, a gap is often evident in what researchers say are effective practices involved during the process of hiring teachers and what school leaders actually employ in hiring teachers (Citarelli).

Clearly, there is a need to hire high quality teachers, with added challenges in rural settings. According to Collins and a report from ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (1999), the growing challenge has been for rural districts to be able to effectively recruit and retain teachers in rural settings—reporting that in 1999, the issue surrounded equal distribution of quality teachers in the United States as much as it did with training appropriate numbers of teachers to address district teacher shortages. Schwartzbeck (2003), in a study of rural superintendents in the United States, found that lower salaries, social isolation, and isolation due to geographic location were the top three factors which made attracting and retaining teachers to rural locations difficult for school leaders. Ingersoll (2002), reported that a huge number of studies, commissions, and national reports have identified that our nation approaches a severe shortage of teachers for our schools; the issue, describes Ingersoll, relates to increased enrollment of students and the approaching retirement of a graying baby-boomer work force.

The challenge of hiring and keeping effective teachers increases as teacher preparation and accountability standards rise. Across the nation, school districts face the

tremendous task of increasing the teacher workforce. In schools, the task of getting the right person in the classroom is an essential role of principals. As principals use the hiring process to learn about job candidates and gather information to make decisions about the final selection, the task to select the right person for the job continues to grow in importance. Furthermore, the challenge to hire and retain high quality teachers is greater in rural school settings.

#### Statement of the Problem

Hiring teachers is a fundamental task of school principals. The ability to find high quality teachers who are prepared for the challenge of increasing student achievement has grown in importance. Research on the hiring process necessary to meet the challenge of staffing quality schools includes employment of: the recruitment process; the screening process; the interviewing process; and, the final selection process. The job of the school principal in understanding and implementing key elements of the hiring process identified in the research increases in importance as schools face increased public scrutiny and accountability. As identified in the research, rural school principals face a greater staffing challenge.

Although researchers have defined four components of the hiring process, the literature was less clear on how principals actually engaged in the hiring process to fill teacher vacancies. There were no clear findings in the research relative to what methods current rural Georgia principals employ during the hiring process, nor have specific studies examined the perceptions of rural Georgia school principals with regard to the most influential components of the hiring process in actual teacher selection. There were no specific studies that addressed practices used by rural Georgia school principals with

regard to hiring highly qualified teachers. In addition, what was lesser known was how influential the hiring practices are in the principal's selection of the most highly qualified teacher candidate.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand hiring practices used by rural Georgia school principals. The study investigated both hiring practices employed by principals and how the hiring practices were perceived by the principals in relation to teacher selection. Specifically, the researcher sought to examine common hiring practices used by high performance rural Georgia school principals in rural Georgia to understand how the principal's hiring practices influence teacher selection.

### Research Questions

The researcher examined the following questions:

1. What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals?
2. What hiring practices do principals perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools?
3. What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?
4. What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process?

### Significance of the Study

Researchers have conducted many studies related to the hiring of teachers in America. A majority of the studies focused on the challenge of school leaders to hire quality teachers in an increasingly accountable environment. The four overarching tasks researchers identified relative to hiring highly qualified teachers involved the process of recruiting, screening, interviewing, and the final selection of potential job candidates.

The researchers' findings were based on national governmental studies and private studies, involved some regional and state studies, but none were specific to the state of Georgia. Further, the current research literature had no specific Georgia studies addressing the hiring practices of principals in rural Georgia. As a result, information on the practices associated with hiring highly qualified teachers in the state of Georgia in rural areas was not available in the research literature. Therefore, the findings of this study added to the professional literature.

Within the state of Georgia, many groups can benefit from this research study. Research on teacher hiring practices in the state of Georgia would be of great benefit to current and aspiring school principals, local boards of education, institutions of higher learning, and professional educational organizations. Further, the findings could have policy implications for human resource directors who seek to improve the hiring process in Georgia school districts.

Over the past several years, the researcher has realized that hiring decisions greatly impact the success of an organization. From the start of his career in education, this researcher realized that many daily challenges faced by school leaders result from a few teachers in the school building. After observations and countless discussions with other school leaders, including the researcher's wife who is also a Georgia elementary school principal, the researcher realized that staffing the school with high quality teachers would lead to a better school environment for all school stakeholders. Further, increased accountability and scrutiny from federal and state mandates led this researcher to understand that school principals must be able to staff classrooms with teachers capable of meeting high expectations.

Personally, this researcher realizes the importance of staffing schools with highly qualified teachers. Having been born and raised in rural Georgia, having attended public schools in rural Georgia, and while currently working as an elementary school principal in public education in the state of Georgia, this researcher had a sincere interest in hiring quality teachers for Georgia public schools. A career goal of the researcher involves the ability of the researcher to be able to hire the best teachers for his school. The acquisition of greater knowledge related to teacher hiring practices will assist this researcher in preparing for, and attainment of, this career goal.

#### Procedures

The researcher's purpose for this study was to understand hiring practices used by rural Georgia school principals in Georgia. The researcher utilized a qualitative design. Multiple sources of information were used to gather data for case studies. The researcher gathered data from in-depth interviews of three rural Georgia elementary school principals and reviews of district policy documents associated with hiring teachers with regard to recruitment, screening, interviewing, and final selection. A case study investigation enabled this researcher to understand the perceptions of rural Georgia school principals with regard to hiring teachers (Stake, 1995).

The population for this study was rural Georgia school principals on the 2007 High Performance List. Principals chosen as High Performance by Georgia met two criteria established by Georgia Senate Bill 468. Principals were employed in a chosen school for at least five years, and the school made significant improvement with regard to student achievement over the past five years.

The principals who were interviewed during the study were three rural high performance Georgia school principals. The three principals included one rural elementary school principal, one rural middle school principal, and one rural high school principal from Georgia.

The instruments for this qualitative study consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with each school principal and thorough reviews of district policy on hiring teachers. Research questions were used to guide the study.

The interviews were held at each of the principal's school campuses to enable a sense of calmness for interviewees. Participants were involved in the study after granting permission and being told that their involvement in the study was completely confidential.

According to Creswell (1994), data analysis of case studies consists of the researcher developing a detailed description of the cases and settings. Therefore, the researcher wrote rich, detailed descriptions of each case. To enable the researcher to build aggregated categories of information, taped interviews were transcribed and read several times to identify common themes and trends (Creswell). Coding of common themes and trends were the researcher's primary representation of analytic thinking (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). An open coding technique was used to determine common themes and trends found in the participants' responses (Glesne, 2006).

The researcher employed frequency charts to profile rural school settings. In addition to utilizing coding of common themes, the researcher read interviews and hiring documents associated with hiring teachers several times to examine patterns in hiring practices.

### Limitations

1. All participants responded voluntarily; as a result, the sample may not be representative of all rural elementary, middle, and high school principals.
2. The use of only high performance principals limits the ability to generalize conclusions to all rural principals in Georgia.
3. The study may be limited in that the researcher may be unintentionally biased in seeking themes and patterns among the data.

### Delimitations

1. The research realizes that the results of this study are not generalizable. By selecting high performance principals in successful schools, the researcher understands hiring practices from the perspective of successful principals. Hiring practices in schools that are not making adequate yearly progress may vary.



## Summary

This study sought to examine rural Georgia school principals' hiring practices in a growing era of accountability. The role of the school principal in understanding and implementing essential elements of the hiring process increases in importance as schools face greater accountability standards. However, little was known from the literature related to hiring practices of current school principals with regard to what hiring practices they actually employ in attracting and selecting high quality teachers. Research indicated that rural school principals face a greater staffing challenge in hiring high quality teachers. Therefore, this study focused specifically on hiring practices of current school principals in rural schools.

A qualitative case study investigation was used to examine hiring practices currently being used by rural Georgia school principals and the perceptions of these principals with regard to which of these current hiring practices were most influential in the selection of the teacher. The researcher used a qualitative design to examine multiple data sources including interviews with rural principals and reviews of district policy documents related to hiring. Data from these sources were coded and studied by the researcher to allow the researcher to discover the data. Findings could prove helpful to current and future principals as they meet the demand of filling each classroom with a highly qualified teacher.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

The ability of school administrators to select the best teachers for teacher vacancies at their schools has become an increasingly important element to the overall success of the school (Citarelli, 2006). Research by Pillsbury (2005) found that once a chosen teacher enters the classroom, the teacher's attitudes about student learning, as well as actions related to implementing the curriculum, can either positively or negatively impact the achievement of students. In districts where budgets emphasize curricular initiatives, human resource budgets are often left bare, suggested Pillsbury (2005), making the task of finding the best teachers more difficult. At a time in our nation when increased expectations and the implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 require schools to increase the achievement of all students, school principals are left with the challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers capable of raising student achievement (Salinas, Kritsonis, and Herrington 2006). Under guidelines of NCLB from the *United States Department of Education: Promoting Educational Excellence for all Americans*, the following is used to define an elementary school teacher highly qualified:

1. A highly qualified teacher has obtained full state certification or licensure;
2. A highly qualified teacher holds at least a bachelors degree; and,
3. A highly qualified teacher has demonstrated by passing a rigorous state test, subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum (which may consist of passing a state-required certification or licensing test or tests in reading, writing, mathematics, and others areas of basic elementary school curriculum). (p. 9)

The department details the following definition for middle and secondary school teachers being highly qualified:

A highly qualified teacher has obtained full state certification or licensure, holds at least a bachelors degree, and has demonstrated a high level of competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches by: passing a rigorous state academic subject test in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches; or successful completion, in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches, of an academic major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an undergraduate academic major, or advanced certification or credentialing.

(p.10)

Literature on the teacher shortage reported that within the next decade, our nation's school leaders will need to hire over two million new teachers for our public schools (*Teacher Recruitment: Staffing Classrooms with Quality Teachers, 2001*). Further, the report's authors detailed that in areas with isolated rural schools, the dilemma of finding high quality teachers is most prevalent (*Teacher Recruitment: Staffing Classrooms with Quality Teachers, 2001*). The report's authors suggested that there are four general elements which contribute to the pending teacher shortage in our nation: the low number of prospects involved in teacher preparation programs; the continued growth in student enrollments; an aging teacher population approaching retirement; and, attrition rates among licensed teachers in K-12 classrooms (*Teacher Recruitment: Staffing Classrooms with Quality Teachers, 2001*).

The United States Department of Education's recent report, *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing: 1990-1991 thru 2006-2007* (2007), indicated that during the school year 2004-2005, Georgia reported 20 teacher shortage area listings; in 2006-2007, Georgia reported 53 teacher shortage area listings—an increase of 23 position areas in just two years. According to Feistritz (1999), during the nineties, there was increased interest among college students to enter the teaching profession; however, after completing college programs and after obtaining licensure to teach, many decide not to apply for jobs teaching, or once offered teaching positions by administrators, the potential teachers do not accept positions. Teachers who do accept positions in schools, according to Ingersoll and Smith (2003), leave the teaching profession at a rate of 40 to 50 percent during the first years of their teaching careers.

The reasons these new teachers leave the teaching profession, according to a survey of teachers who left after one year in the classroom, are expansive: nineteen percent report leaving due to staffing issues such as cutbacks or layoffs; forty-two percent cited personal family issues as reasons for leaving such as pregnancy and child rearing; thirty-nine percent of those who left reported they left to explore other career opportunities; and, twenty-nine percent reported general dissatisfaction with their current teaching assignment as their reason for leaving (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Ingersoll and Smith suggested that job dissatisfaction and the exploration of other career possibilities together contribute greatly to the growing problem. Among the twenty-nine percent of surveyed teachers who left after only one year of service, more than seventy-five percent linked low salaries as their reason to leave (Ingersoll & Smith). Moreover, other top

cited reasons for leaving included student disciplinary problems, poor administrative support, and a lack of student motivation (Ingersoll & Smith).

A report from the United States Department of Education entitled *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-2005 Teacher Follow-up Survey* (2007) indicated that the fifty-five percent of public school teachers who left the teaching profession in 2005, reported they have more work autonomy in their new job roles; further, sixty-five percent who now work outside of the field of education, indicated a lighter workload which provides greater balance between their personal and work life.

Working conditions were cited in many research studies as a primary reason teachers report leaving the teaching profession (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007). The report's findings included teachers having a lack of basic resources and materials to fulfill their job duties; a lack of a pervasive professional community, ineffective leadership, and issues with school discipline; large class sizes, coupled with inadequate facilities which impair engagement of learning; time restraints due to excessive paperwork; and, inadequate time to collaborate and plan instruction. Jimerson (2004) reported that the rural teacher often finds herself with a greater workload, teaching multiple subjects due to lower student enrollment which forces administrators to assign multiple teaching roles. According to Johnson (2005), the rural administrator must meet the challenge of staffing schools by becoming actively engaged in all aspects of hiring teachers for their schools.

Other reasons which become barriers for teachers actually entering the profession, suggested Snell (2003), include cumbersome requirements to obtain certification which are not in balance with the benefits of those who become teachers; moreover, Snell cited

a lack of importance of skill development of teachers during their teacher preparation programs when principals interview them for teaching positions. A study by Liu (2003) found that only 7.5 percent of new teachers, among the pool of 486 teachers from California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan involved in the research, were required to teach a lesson during the hiring process, which suggests that few hiring decisions are linked to real-life presentations of one's ability to teach. Further findings of Liu's study include only twenty-five percent of teachers were required to share standardized test scores or writing samples; teachers were generally hired late in the hiring season with thirty-three percent being hired after the school year had begun; and only fifty-percent of new teachers were interviewed with future teacher colleagues involved in the hiring.

In an effort to combat the level of preparation teachers have as they prepare for interviews, many teacher preparation programs are taking steps such as involving teacher candidates in mock interviews prior to a real job interview (Sullivan, 2007). Sullivan suggested that students preparing for interviews prepare via a mock interview a month ahead of time with the following expectations in place: dress as if you are attending a true interview at a school; contemplate a specific area for which to prepare to interview; prepare a resume; plan responses to potential questions; and, think of three specific questions to ask the interviewers which are linked to the district and school. A mock interview can benefit the profession in two ways—teachers have an opportunity to prepare for real interviews, and school administrators have a unique opportunity to meet potential new hires (Sullivan).

Another facet of preparing for the interview which is quickly growing among teacher preparation programs is the use of teacher portfolios (Reese, 2004). The portfolio

can be used to convey a potential teacher's beliefs, knowledge of pedagogy, and associated skills (Reese). The portfolio, contends Reese, provides a forum to demonstrate artifacts gained through real life experiences in the classroom; teachers have the ability to develop a valuable selling tool from which to showcase their own talents. A teacher prepared for an interview with a detailed, three-dimensional résumé, as Reese explained, will be ready to tackle an interview during an era of increased personal and professional accountability.

The ability of school leaders to find the right teacher for every vacancy, regardless of the area, will have a tremendous impact on the achievement of the school's students (Citarelli, 2006). As O'Laughlin (1999) reported, the quality of the classroom teacher is the greatest factor contributing to a valuable education for all children. The school principal has the task of finding the best teacher available for every teacher vacancy which arises at his or her school (Citarelli).

As the challenge for school leaders to hire the best teacher for every vacancy grows in importance, states such as Georgia and Texas are changing preparation requirements for aspiring school leaders suggests a report for the *National Council on Teacher Quality*, 2008. The report suggested that while Georgia is now requiring an additional degree beyond the masters degree to better prepare school leaders for the role, Texas policy makers are looking at Houston's Rice University's research on the need for school leaders to earn a masters in business administration to go beyond education courses and student learning, to better prepare school leaders on the management of adults, to include training on recruiting effective teachers and removing ineffective teachers (*National Council of Teacher Quality*).

### The Principal's Role in Hiring Teachers

The challenge of high retirement and attrition rates among teachers, coupled with soaring student populations nationwide and the need to find highly qualified teachers, leaves school leaders with the tremendous task of filling teacher vacancies (*Innovations in Education: Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification*, 2004). According to research by Hoerr (2006), a school's quality is largely dependent upon its teachers, and with that holding true, few tasks of school building principals are more important than hiring the right teachers. Ingersoll (2003) suggested that as school leaders face increasing student populations and increased attrition rates, these leaders face the challenge of finding the right teacher for every classroom; furthermore, over a million United States public school teachers are approaching retirement. The need to expand the education workforce, in short, is the challenge to the profession, proposed the report (*Innovations in Education: Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification*, 2004). School principals of rural, impoverished schools face a greater challenge in filling teacher vacancies in that few qualified teachers live in the area, or find the commute difficult (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007). Further, according to *Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, there are four specific elements to recruiting and sustaining teachers in rural areas which make the role of the principal in getting highly qualified teachers in rural areas a greater challenge:

1. lower pay;
2. geographic and social isolation;



3. difficult working conditions, such as having to teach classes in multiple subject areas; and,
4. NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers (e.g., many rural teachers will need certification in multiple subject areas, and professional development opportunities can sometimes be scarce in rural communities). (p. vii)

Research studies by Hare and Heap (2001), Ingersoll (2001), and Voke (2002), indicated that the greatest problem in rural areas involves finding teachers who are fully qualified and willing to teach in rural settings. Building level administrators in rural schools face the challenge of hiring teachers when the Educational Research Service (2004) reports that, on average, staff in rural schools received less pay in every category of employment reviewed. Further, research by Jimerson (2003), reported that across our nation, rural states pay less to teachers than more populated, industrialized states; moreover, among states, schools and districts in rural settings pay teachers less than their counterparts in urban and suburban areas. According to a report, *Status of Education in Rural America: Measuring Rural Education* (2007), teachers in rural public schools were paid lower salaries in 2003-3004 than teaching peers in towns, suburbs, and cities, despite making cost adjustments for geographic regions—making the role of the administrator in attracting high quality teachers a greater challenge.

In contrast, a report, *Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools* (2007), indicated that in more affluent areas with schools with exceptional reputations for success and in areas with low crime rates, building level leaders find themselves in schools where potential candidates flock to the school when teacher vacancies arise. Conversely, according to Murphy, DeArmond, and Guinn

(2003), rural school leaders find themselves in schools with reduced per-capita populations, coupled with geographic isolation, which adversely impacts resources such as the number of potential job applicants, financial resources to offer competitive salaries to applicants, and necessary support programs to retain new staff.

Schools within districts which are geographically isolated have the tremendous challenge of attracting and retaining teachers, whereas rural schools and districts within or near the boundaries of suburban areas face a greater challenge in keeping teachers once they are hired (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007). A study by Proffit, Sale, Alexander, and Andrews (2002), found that new teachers, at the start of their career, reported rural isolation as a major concern in applying for rural teacher vacancies. Harris (2001) theorized that when new teachers do accept positions and remain teaching in rural settings, they are likely to have roots in small towns. In marketing their schools to attract high quality teachers, today's skilled principals are key leaders in providing building-level support to teachers and sustaining a positive reputation for their schools in the community, suggested authors of *Principals in the Public: Engaging Community Support* (2000).

According to data collected by Common Core of Data (CCD) from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2004), the number of rural districts in America totaled 7,824 including 24,350 schools serving 7,618,077 students—or 49% of all of the nation's public schools. Ingersoll (2001) reported that the shortage of teachers in rural areas is the result of teachers leaving the profession as much as it is the lack of teachers entering the profession. In fact, Ingersoll's research suggested that during the first three years of employment, nearly one third of teachers leave the profession; further, over the next two

years, nearly one half have left teaching. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003), in rural settings, the problem of teachers leaving the profession is even greater.

A review of the literature related to rural teacher recruitment and selection shows that administrators in rural settings have a challenge of not only hiring qualified teachers who fit in with the school and community, but also in finding teachers who will remain in the position once hired, according to the National Education Association (NEA, 1998).

#### *Best Practices in Recruiting in Rural Areas*

A research study by Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005), involving 597 superintendents from rural districts nationwide, found that districts near urban areas reported that the greatest challenge involving recruiting and retaining teachers involved geographic and social isolation, and close proximity with districts with greater pay. Further, the authors reported that successful recruitment methods involve utilization of building-level staff during the selection process, communicating the benefits of rural living, and districts offering competitive salaries. Hammer et al. suggested that the most successful recruitment methods cited by superintendents involved statewide, local, and internet advertising, personal contacts, and networking among colleagues—to include building-level staff members.

A distinguishing element of effective recruitment of teachers and their subsequent retention in a rural district is strongly linked to the teacher having roots in the rural community, according to Bornfield, Hall, Hall, and Hoover (1997). Moreover, Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) reported that rural teachers who remain in their teaching positions are believed to do so as a result of fulfillment in the position, the

school, and community, and as a result of money, job benefits, permanence, and the overall ease of rural life. Research findings by Collins (2000) concluded a teacher's decision to remain in a teaching position is greatly related to the teacher's involvement in cultural aspects of the community; consequently, school leaders should select the job role of a new teacher carefully and elicit community support and involvement to alleviate the teacher's feelings of isolation.

According to McClure and Reeves (2004), after investigating rural-specific research and general studies from ERIC database documents between the years 1993 and 2003, literature on recruitment and retention practices are most effective when strategies used by administrators are strategic, specific, and sustained. According to McClure and Reeves, being strategic during the process involves conducting needs assessments, developing action plans, and making decisions about what characteristics are key to the ideal job candidate; further, the recruiter should collaborate as appropriate with state, district, and local entities to ensure all resources are capitalized.

Murphy and DeArmond (2003) suggested that districts remove communication barriers between other districts, ally with other districts, and create regional human resource agencies with partner districts as a staffing solution. Murphy and DeArmond investigated data from the U.S. Department of Education's 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey, and report that only 4% of districts reported using intradistrict incentives to attract teachers and only 10% of the responders reported subject-area incentives to motivate potential teachers to apply. Out of 110 human resource directors surveyed and reported in the study, approximately 75% preferred across-the-board increases in salaries as a recruitment strategy (Murphy and DeArmond).

With regard to the approach district personnel must take in getting the desired results during recruitment and retention, Murphy and DeArmond (2003) suggested being specific—both with schools and subjects that are difficult to staff. Efforts should be made to involve building-level staff, such as the principal, so that potential teachers may have an opportunity to meet potential future colleagues (Liu, 2003). Other important elements to promote, suggested the authors of a report from The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, *Things to Remember During the Teacher Hiring Season* (2005), are compensation, community, colleagues, and curriculum (4Cs). When highlighting these areas, suggested the report's authors, detail one teacher's profile as to why that one person continuously returns to the district (*Things to Remember During the Teacher Hiring Season*, 2005).

The goal for maximum results in optimal recruitment is to continuously examine and assess teacher recruitment efforts for sustained results; and, an added aspect of recruitment is to ensure new teachers are able to share a positive experience of being new to a district with other potential new teachers (McClure & Reeves, 2004). Formalizing the recruitment process to ensure that intake programs become second nature—a part of the district's and school's culture, is essential to success (McClure & Reeves). However, according to Ingersoll (2001) and Lemke (1994), the ability of school-level administrators to fully support teachers during the teacher's initial career and to optimally create professional learning communities to retain these faculty members once they are on board may require training for school leaders. According to Citarelli (2006), once the

essential elements of the recruitment process are in place, the second element of the hiring process is set to begin, screening potential candidates who come forth during recruitment efforts.

#### *Best Practices in Screening in Rural Areas*

Following the recruitment of applicants, the next step involves the screening process (Citarelli, 2006). A study by Dineen, Noe, and Wang (2004) described the screening process as eliminating less desirable candidates from the entire pool of applicants prior to contacting applicants for more in-depth investigations. Clement (2006) suggested that administrators create a checklist to rate applications, and then rate the desired components found on applications prior to the interview. Research by McKinney, Carlson, Mecham, D'Angelo, and Connerly (2003) discovered that while Grade Point Average (GPA) is a common criterion used to screen applications during the recruitment process, GPA is often not held in the highest regard during the selection process. Further, McKinney et al. (2003) contended that GPA is often viewed in different ways based upon whether grades represent in-major courses, or overall GPA.

According to research by Stronge and Hindman (2003), there are prerequisites to effective teaching that school administrators should be prepared to identify. Stronge and Hindman indicated the following as essential elements of the high quality teacher: a caring and fair person; a person well-versed in classroom and organizational skills; one who sets priorities, plans for instruction, allocates time, and holds high expectations for all students; a person who differentiates instruction to meet the learning needs of diverse students; one who appropriately monitors progress of students; and, one who

continuously engages in lifelong professional learning. School leaders should be in search of these qualifications during the screening process, suggested Stronge and Hindman.

Another tool used by employers to screen applicants includes the Counterproductive Behavior Index (CBI). Lanyon and Goodstein (2004) described the CBI as a 120-item, true-false assessment used to measure five components of counterproductive workplace behavior: Dependability Concerns, Aggression, Substance Abuse, Honesty Concerns, and Computer Abuse, with an additional composite rating of Total Concerns. According to research by Lanyon and Goodstein, the CBI provides a valid foundation for employers to screen potential job candidates. However, research by Rynes, Colbert, and Brown (2002), discovered that human resource administrators place little faith on tests of intelligence and personality as viable predictors of job performance.

#### *Best Practices in Interviewing in Rural Areas*

Once the screening of applicants is complete, the administrator then has the role of setting the stage for the interviewing of potential hires (Citarelli, 2006). Beatty (1994) stated that the essential role of the interviewer during the interview and selection process surrounds the interviewer being able to discover and collect evidence that the candidate will be able to perform well in areas known to be key to the vacant position. Two common interview types described by Blackman and Funder (2002) as commonly used by organizations included the structured interview and unstructured interview. Structured interviews are done with pre-established questions which are job-related and generally employ a scoring guide for rating candidates; unstructured interviewing has fewer constraints in that there are no set questions, or open-ended questions which afford more

open dialogue and free-flowing exchanges. When validity for success in predicting job performance is required, structured interviewing is best and should be timely (Blackman & Funder).

According to a recent report from The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, *Things to Remember During the Teacher Hiring Season* (2005), school systems must be prepared to hire earlier, suggesting May 1 as a deadline. The report suggested that attainment of that goal may be accomplished by school leaders doing the following: encouraging early resignations; restructuring bargaining procedures so that decisions may be made fast; establishing budgets in advance; and, reforming personnel departments to increase productivity (*Things to Remember During the Teacher Hiring Season*, 2005). School leaders must be succinct and detailed in identifying staffing needs and requirements.

Hobby, Crabtree, and Ibbetson (2004) suggested a particular structured process for interviewing, the Critical Incident Interview (CII). The Critical Incident Interview uses a prescribed set of tactics to elicit responses from a past event in candidates' careers which must be discussed in first person singular, concrete, and specific (Hobby, Crabtree, and Ibbetson). When done well, school administrators are able to elicit candid responses which reveal what job candidates actually do on a habitual basis, and not get the exaggerated responses which often are enabled during traditional, open-ended interviewing (Hobby et al).

Research by Keller (2004) suggested that school leaders employ innovative approaches to interviewing, such as an online application process which includes an initial interview. In Pennsylvania's Lower Merion district, job candidates complete



applications online, and are required to take a preliminary screening interview wherein applicants answer questions about educational experience, and beliefs and judgments (Keller). The negative implications around this tool relate to the potential teacher's comfort level with such pre-tests; however, early reports from administrators indicate positive results in that the process quickens the hiring process (Keller).

According to studies by Wendel and Breed (1988), school districts rarely have set policies and protocols for interviewing teachers. Moreover, the most common approach used by districts involves unstructured interviews, driven by the intuition of untrained interviewers (Wendel & Breed). However, in a qualitative study of 29 Tennessee public school principals from 11 districts, Mertz and McNeely (2001) interviewed 11 elementary principals, 7 middle school principals, and 11 high school principals, and discovered that principals were confident that the process of interviewing teacher candidates was a good way to get information on applicants. Despite more than half of the principals interviewing teachers having no information on the candidate prior to interviewing, such as an application or information on a candidate's educational background, 16 of the 29 principals interviewed by Mertz and McNeely felt they knew if the person being interviewed was right for the job immediately, or almost immediately.

A principal's gut feeling was the overwhelming perspective given on why the principal chose a particular teacher applicant (Mertz & McNeely, 2001). The principals overwhelmingly stated in the study that they know the right person from a gut feeling almost immediately, reporting that they look for candidates who express themselves well and who are enthusiastic; further, the principals indicate that this gut feeling is an internal intuition about the person being the right fit for the job (Mertz & McNeely). In search of

this intuitive feeling, Roberts (1987) concluded that questions should focus not only on teacher's conveying their knowledge of teaching skills, but also on the teacher's ability to apply those skills in the classroom. McConney, Ayres, Hansen, and Cuthbertson (2003), in a study of teacher workforce quality, discovered that principals were more satisfied with the performance of teachers if the principal themselves, interviewed and hired the teacher—making the final selection themselves.

*Best Practices in Final Selection of Teachers in Rural Areas*

The final element of the hiring process involves the selection of employees (Citarelli, 2006). According to Rebores (2004), hiring individuals who best meet the qualifications of the job is the priority of the selection process. Further, Rebores added that not making the correct choice when hiring, in addition to initial hiring expenses, could lead to drastic costs, including inadequate job performance, and time and resources devoted to termination of the deficient employee. Murphy, DeArmond, and Guinn (2003) suggested that the challenge is greater in rural areas, in that rural school leaders find themselves in schools with reduced per-capita populations, coupled with geographic isolation, which adversely impacts resources such as the number of potential job applicants, financial resources to offer competitive salaries to applicants, and necessary support programs to retain new staff.

Collins (2001) reported that organizational leaders not only need to get the “right people on the bus,” but also ensure that the “right people on the bus are in the right seat on the bus” (p. 41). Moreover, a gap is often evident in what researchers say are effective practices involved during the process of hiring teachers and what school leaders actually employ in hiring teachers (Citarelli, 2006). Norris and Richburg (1997) suggested that

interviewing and screening are not enough. An essential element of the hiring process should include an observation of the finalists teaching lessons (Norris & Richburg). Ediger (2002) agreed suggesting that districts should implement a program in the hiring process wherein potential teachers teach actual lessons in the school prior to being considered for a teaching position. Once the interviewer feels comfortable about potential candidates, Beatty (1994) suggested that the important reference checks of the potential hire be conducted. This essential duty of checking references, made at the close of the hiring process, may lead to confirmation of the behavioral tasks observed during the initial stages of the hiring process (Beatty).

Sadetsky and Pell (1980) suggested that the task of assessing a potential candidate's references is essential to verification of information learned during the interview and to gain more information from persons associated with the person during previous jobs. Prior to making the important phone call, Sadetsky and Pell suggest developing an action plan of what will be asked and specifically what information you wish to gather from the reference. Making pertinent notes about candidates during these reference checks will enable the school administrator to evaluate several applicants' information after all calls have been made (Sadetsky & Pell).

Research by Mertz and McNeely (2001) suggested that minimal empirical data exists relative to principals' selection of teachers. Their study which discovered that the principal's gut feeling was a dominant variable in deciding on who was or was not an effective fit for a specific school's teaching position suggests that more in depth investigations would be of great value and insight to practitioners (Mertz & McNeely).

Citarelli (2006) agreed suggesting that the hiring process is not only complicated in scope, but also involves a thorough, involved process.

### *Georgia Public Schools and Rural Hiring*

There is no debate that an essential element of a high quality school is the ability of the school leader to attract and retain a talented teaching pool (*Influx of Teachers from Out-of-State: A Dependable Source of Teachers for Georgia?*, 2003). Overwhelmingly, research demonstrates that the skills and knowledge of a child's classroom teacher are significant links to the academic achievement of the child (Darling-Hammond, 2001). In recent years, in the state of Georgia, school leaders have relied more on out-of-state teachers to hire the working staff of schools (*Influx of Teachers from Out-of-State: A Dependable Source of Teachers for Georgia?*). A 2002 report from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission entitled, *The Georgia Educator Workforce 2002 Executive Summary: A Report of the Supply, Demand, and Utilization of Teachers, Administrative, and Student Services Personnel in Georgia Public Schools*, explained that during the 2001-2002 school year, 32.5% of Georgia's new teachers were from outside the state of Georgia. Georgia Governor, Sonny Perdue (2003), signed Georgia House Bill 590, stating:

Education is Georgia's future and our students deserve an opportunity to learn from the best and most committed teachers. House Bill 590 allows us to remove the unnecessary barriers that made it difficult for qualified education professionals from other states or former Georgia educators that have taken a few years off to return to Georgia's classrooms at a time when they are needed most (Office of the Governor. (p. 1)

An overwhelming challenge within the state of Georgia involves not only the attraction of teachers to the state, but also among specific geographic areas—primarily urban and rural settings (*Influx of Teachers from Out-of-State: A Dependable Source of Teachers for Georgia?*, 2003). A research study by Hirsh, Koppich, and Knapp (2001) reported that urban and rural school systems face two major challenges surrounding teacher employment—the rural settings have a smaller pool of candidates from which to hire; and, secondly, school leaders are forced to hire less qualified applicants.

In the state of Georgia, school districts must follow the guidelines associated with Georgia Senate Bill 281, section 2, which reads:

Each local school system shall have a job description for each certificated professional personnel classification, shall have policies and procedures relative to the recruitment and selection of such personnel, and shall adhere to such recruitment and selection policies and procedures. Such policies and procedures shall assure nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, or national origin. Such policies and procedures shall also include the announcement in writing of the availability of all certificated positions to the appropriate colleges and universities in the state and to the Department of Education and within the local school system. A local board of education may also announce such positions in the legal organ of the county in which the school system is located and to colleges and universities in other states. (p. 1)

Meeting the demand of hiring high quality teachers across the state of Georgia continues to grow in importance, particularly with mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the percentages of new teachers graduating from Georgia public and private colleges on

the decline (*Influx of Teachers from Out-of-State: A Dependable Source of Teachers for Georgia?*, 2003).

A report from the United States Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education Policy and Budget Development entitled, *Teacher Shortage Areas: Nationwide Listing* (2007), lists 53 certification fields in Georgia's list of teacher shortage areas for 2007, compared to 53 reported shortages in 2006, 21 reported shortages in 2005, 19 reported shortages in 2004, and 12 reported shortages in 2003. In Georgia, during the 2007 school year, 72 percent of the state's 13,377 newly hired teachers reported having 0-4 years of teaching experience (*Interim Status Report: The Georgia Educator Workforce, 2007-1 CPI-1 Fall Count*, 2007). As the workforce of teachers in the state of Georgia ages and gains experience, the proportion of teachers with advanced degrees increases (*Status Report: The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006 Executive Summary*, 2006). According to the report, since 2000, the percentage of teachers with graduate degree certifications rose more than 6% from 50.7% having advanced degrees in 2000, to 56.8% having advanced degrees in 2006.

The student population in the state of Georgia rose by 30,284, an increase of nearly 2% from 2006 to 2007 (*Interim Status Report: The Georgia Educator Workforce, 2007-1 CPI-1 Fall Count*). However, in rural school systems in the state of Georgia, such as is reported in *Influx of Teachers from Out-of-State: A Dependable Source of Teachers for Georgia?* (2003), there is often a decline in student populations in outlying rural districts when metropolitan areas experience population growth. The dire consequence of such population shifts is that they often lead to reduced student

populations in rural areas when the reality of needing a high quality teacher in every classroom remains constant (*Influx of Teachers from Out-of-State: A Dependable Source of Teachers for Georgia?*).

As Georgia works to ensure that policy development appropriately leads to a high quality teacher in every classroom, a recent report entitled *Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality* (2007), addressed six specific areas of policy development and rates Georgia in each of the six categories in comparison to other states. In an executive summary report which investigated six areas of policies associated with teachers, Georgia received the following grades: meeting NCLB teacher quality objectives (C), teacher licensure (C), teacher evaluation and compensation (C), state approval of teacher preparation programs (F), alternative routes to certification (B), and preparation of special education teachers (D) (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*). To address the issue of placing a high quality teacher in every classroom across the state, Georgia has performed better than most states in developing alternative routes to certification versus traditional certification, reports *Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality* (2007); however, other areas need improvement.

According to *Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality* (2007), in the area of meeting NCLB's teacher quality objectives, Georgia as a whole, would benefit from the state level improving data policies to address inequities in teacher assignments. Other recommendations from the report included the state requiring teacher preparation programs to better define specific subject matter requirements for early childhood teachers, and continuing to limit the High, Objective,

Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) as an alternative means to justify teachers being highly qualified in their teaching field (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*). The report rates Massachusetts's policy of requiring elementary teacher candidates to complete 36 hours of arts and sciences coursework in the following areas a best practice: composition; American literature; world literature, including British literature; United States history from colonial times to present; world history including European history, from ancient times to present; geography, economics; United States government including founding documents; child development; science laboratory work; and, appropriate math and science coursework (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*).

In the area of teacher licensure, Georgia received an overall grade of C with the following reported reasons for the rating: the professional standards commission has not specifically articulated the content specific knowledge new teachers should have acquired prior to beginning to teach; further, while the state's assessment for teacher licensure does address one's knowledge of reading instruction, one could pass the licensure test despite having deficit areas in the area of reading instruction (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality, 2007*). One positive note is that Georgia has made progress relative to teachers from other states receiving reciprocity for licensure (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality, 2007*).

The report's rating of a C for Georgia policies associated with teacher evaluation and compensation indicates that there are areas which can be improved including the



recommendation that the state make evidence of student achievement the essential criterion in annual evaluations; moreover, the report recommends that Georgia's districts are burdened by a policy which enables teachers to gain tenure after only three years in the classroom; and, with a systemic state salary schedule for teachers based only on degree status and years of experience, with no direct linkage to student achievement, school districts are often left in a quandary (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*, 2007). The state of Florida is rated in the report as having a best practice relative to evaluating teacher effectiveness in that it is the only state to use student learning as a dominant criterion in the evaluation of teachers (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*).

The report, *Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality* (2007), gives the state of Georgia a grade of F in the area of state approval of teacher preparation programs listing the following problems: Georgia, unlike some states, does not require aspiring teachers to pass a basic skills test prior to admission in a teacher preparatory program; the state does not sufficiently hold teacher preparation programs accountable for quality of teachers coming out of programs; moreover, Georgia is not collecting categorical data on the percentage of teachers coming out of teacher preparation programs who do not pass the licensure tests (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*).

The teacher hiring and licensure policy for the state of Georgia which was ranked highest among the six areas scored by *Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality* (2007) is area five, alternate routes to certification, which received a grade of B for the following cited reason: Georgia's

alternate route to teacher certification, Teacher Alternate Preparation Program (TAPP), is one of only a few such programs in the United States to provide a sound alternate route to teacher certification, which makes it a best practice, according to the report. Teachers involved in Georgia's TAPP program must complete 140 teacher preparation clock hours outside of a college degree and be involved in professional learning in the areas of planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*). An absent area of professional learning, suggests the report, involves an appropriate course in early reading instruction (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*).

The final element of policy ratings relative to teacher hiring and licensure scored by *Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality* (2007) involves the preparation of special education teachers, which received a grade of D for the following reported reasons: Georgia does not cap the number of professional education coursework loads for special education teachers which can result in excessive requirements; further, while Georgia does require a significant number of courses in specific core subject areas for special education teachers, this policy does not ensure that teachers will be prepared to teach multiple subject areas (*Georgia State Summary: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Progress on Teacher Quality*).

## Summary

Clearly, there is a need to hire high quality teachers in our nation's public schools. There is a tremendous amount of research and information which indicate that mandates from federal, state, and local agencies require schools to continue to make student achievement gains a top priority. Research on student achievement has significantly linked student progress to the quality of the classroom teacher. Today, school leaders must be able to effectively attract and retain high quality teachers capable of increasing the achievement levels of all students. Research indicated that school principals in rural areas are faced with a greater challenge of hiring high quality teachers for teaching positions at their schools. In the state of Georgia, as student populations grow and shift, there is an additional burden on rural school districts to attract and retain high quality teachers.

In this study, the researcher sought to understand rural Georgia school principals' hiring practices in a growing era of accountability. Increased federal, state, and local accountability, student population shifts, attrition rates among teachers, a decreased pool of candidates, and rural-specific challenges are requiring rural principals to become increasingly responsive by employing best practices in hiring teachers who are highly qualified.

A qualitative case study investigation was used to understand hiring practices currently being used by rural Georgia school principals, hiring practices perceived to be working best to attract teachers, hiring practices most influential to the final selection of the teacher, and principals' suggested improvements to the hiring practices. Findings

could prove helpful to current and future principals as they meet the demand of filling each classroom vacancy with a highly qualified teacher.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The role of the school principal in finding and selecting high quality teachers to fill teaching vacancies is one of most important roles of the educational leader (Citarelli, 2006). Research studies have found that the quality of the teacher is the greatest variable in increasing student achievement in the classroom (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Pillsbury, 2005; Schacter & Thum, 2004). Research studies related to hiring teachers conveyed four overarching themes in finding the best candidates: recruitment, the screening process, interviewing, and the final selection from top applicants (Citarelli, 2006). McClure and Reeves (2004) found that while teacher shortages vary among geographical regions, demographic areas, and content areas, schools in rural areas, especially those serving low-income students, find it hardest to recruit and retain high quality classroom teachers. While studies have addressed the need for principals to hire high quality teachers and have found that this role to be more difficult in rural settings, no studies were specific to rural Georgia schools. Consequently, no specific data had been collected regarding the current hiring practices used by rural Georgia school principals.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand hiring practices used by elementary, middle, and high school principals in high performance rural Georgia schools. The researcher sought to understand hiring practices employed by principals in rural areas and how well the hiring practices are perceived to be working by the principals. Specifically, the researcher sought to examine common hiring practices used by high performance school principals in Georgia's rural schools.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals?
2. What hiring practices do principals perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools?
3. What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?
4. What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process?

### *Research Design*

This study used a qualitative design. Multiple sources of information were used to gather data for case studies. The researcher gathered data from in-depth semi-structured interviews of three rural high performance Georgia school principals—one elementary, one middle, and one high; and, thorough reviews were conducted of district policy documents in each of the districts related to recruiting, screening, interviewing, and the final selection of teachers. According to Creswell (1998), using triangulation will enable a researcher to make use of multiple sources to provide corroborating evidence. While using triangulation in gathering data, the researcher was sure to employ a balanced approach to gather data fully among the data sources. Interviews allowed principals an opportunity to describe hiring practices they employ during the hiring process. Reviews of policies associated with recruitment, screening, interviewing, and final selection enabled the researcher to gather protocols associated with hiring within districts. A case study investigation enabled the researcher to understand the perceptions of rural Georgia school principals with regard to hiring teachers.

Qualitative data, suggested Miles and Huberman (1994), mirrors real life in that well-collected data examines naturally occurring, ordinary things in natural environments. This researcher sought to observe hiring practices used by rural Georgia school principals to discover and understand what principals perceive as essential and working in the hiring of teachers.

### *Population*

According to Gay (1992), a research population is the study group of interest to the researcher, the group to which the researcher would like for research findings to be generalizable. The population for this study was rural Georgia school principals on the 2007 High Performance List. The list of 110 principals from elementary, middle, and high school levels were chosen, in accordance to Senate Bill 468 (2006) which provides that:

The sole criteria for designating and selecting individuals as High Performance Principals shall be data based evidence of the effectiveness of a proposed High Performance Principal in improving a low performing school or in taking an average or excellent performing school to higher achievement within the last five years. (p. 1)

### *Participants*

The principals that were involved in the study are three rural Georgia school principals—one elementary principal, one middle school principal, and one high school principal. The researcher felt that these selected levels would give great insight as the researcher sought to understand hiring practices used by rural school principals. Further, having worked at the elementary and middle school levels, and with a soon-to-be role as

principal of a school with secondary students, the researcher has a great interest in understanding hiring practices among all school levels.

To be considered for the study, the principals were from a rural school in Georgia and appeared on the 2007 list of Georgia High Performance Principals from the Georgia Department of Education's website. The researcher felt that High Performance Principals had a great experience base of which to describe and give perceptions of the hiring process.

According to Patton (1990), the selection of participants for a qualitative research study is generally purposeful. The logic in selecting participants in a purposeful manner, suggests Patton, is that the researcher is able to select information-rich cases (Patton). In this study, the researcher employed purposeful sampling which led the researcher to particular sites and people (Patton). The selected participants were high performance rural school principals in Georgia.

Once the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the participants were called via telephone by the researcher and were asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, the interviews were conducted and audio taped.

### *Instrumentation*

The instrument for this qualitative study consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews of three rural Georgia elementary school principals and reviews of district policy documents associated with recruitment, screening, interviewing, and the final selection of teachers. According to Seidman (1991), a researcher may arrive at the root of in-depth interviewing by taking an interest in the experiences of others and then



gathering meaning from those experiences. Seidman contended that a researcher who uses a three-interview series of building a focused life history of the interviewee, gathering details of the experiences of the interviewee, and allowing reflection on the meaning of the experience of the interviewee, is able to examine the whole situation and set it into context. Therefore, this researcher developed interviews using three-interview phases. The prompts used by the researcher to develop questions during the semi-structured interviews are located in Appendix A.

As part of this qualitative phenomenological design, the researcher himself was also an instrument in the study. He engaged in reflection of hiring practices investigated in the rural setting and in being an observant, became a research instrument.

The final instrumentation element used in this research study was a thorough investigation and review of all district policy documents associated with recruitment, screening, interviewing, and the final selection of teachers. The researcher gathered documents from the district and school level which relate to hiring. These documents were gathered following the participant interview by the researcher. The hiring policy documents were used to gather rich, detailed data from each school district involved in the research study and were essential in answering research questions.

A means of establishing reliability in ensuring that all respondents understand the questions in the same way so that responses may be coded with certainty can be achieved through pre-testing interview schedules (Silverman, 2001). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested some ways to address reliability by using the following questions: a) are the research questions clear?; b) is the researcher's role in the study explicitly described?; and, c) were there checks in place by having a colleague review items? As a result, the

reliability of interview items was checked through a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted with a high performance middle school principal in the school district where the researcher currently works, McDuffie County School District, in Thomson, Georgia.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), when researchers seek to ensure that a study has truth value, or validity/verification, the researcher may address some of the following: a) how context-rich and deep are the data descriptions?; does the data account seem convincing and make sense to the reader?; and, are areas of uncertainty identified? Consequently, the researcher remained cognizant of these queries throughout the data collection and analysis proceedings. External validity, suggested Miles and Huberman, may be measured using some of the following queries: a) are the characteristics of the current study explained richly enough to allow equitable comparisons with other samples?; b) does the report of data suggest other settings wherein the findings could be further investigated?; and, c) could replication efforts be conducted with ease? For the purpose of establishing adequate validity, the researcher discussed each of these queries in the study.

### *Data Collection*

The proposed research study was sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia Southern University for approval. A pilot study was used for the researcher to practice interviewing skills and to determine clarity of questions (Glesne, 1999). Glesne recommends a pilot study to address issues of reliability and verification.

Following the pilot study, and after making appropriate changes to interview questions, the researcher scheduled appointments with each of the participants. The interviews and collection of data samples relative to hiring were held at each of the

participant's school campuses to enable ease and to convenience interviewees.

Participants were involved after granting permission and being told that their involvement in the study was confidential. Each of the interviews of participants was taped via audio recording. The researcher collected policy/procedural manuals to gather information on district protocol associated with hiring teachers.

### *Data Analysis*

Taped interviews were transcribed and read several times to identify common themes and trends. Policy/procedural manuals and notes made during the observations of teacher interviews were read several times to identify trends. Coding of common themes and trends were the researcher's primary representation of analytic thinking (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). An open coding technique was used to determine common themes and trends found in the participants' responses, in policy manuals, and in the researcher's observation notes (Glesne, 2006). Miles and Huberman (1994) described coding as a process which allows the researcher to identify meaningful data, and then use the data to begin interpreting the data to draw conclusions. Coffey and Atkinson (1967) suggested that coding is much more than simply assigning categories to data, the researcher must be able to conceptualize the data, raise questions, and then discover the data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined analysis of qualitative data as having three continuous, overlapping phases: the reduction of data, the display of data, and the act of verifying and drawing conclusions about data. As a result, the researcher employed each of the three phases during the study to begin to understand the hiring process used by rural Georgia school principals.

Following the visit with participants, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that the researcher develop a contact summary to begin an overall summation of the main points of the interview. Miles and Huberman contended that the contact summary pages enable the researcher to avoid an inundation of data and afford the researcher a continuous focus on the research questions. In this regard, the researcher utilized contact summaries within three days following each interview.

Using coding categories, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the researcher read through transcribed interviews, reviewed the contact summary, and read policy manuals and field notes several times to ascertain specific words, phrases, and terminology that stand out. Bogdan and Biklen suggested that researchers who wish to gather respondents' views of how the respondents see themselves in the setting, who wish to see how and why respondents do what they do, and who wish to see what respondents view as important, should utilize situation codes during the reduction of data. Consequently, the researcher utilized codes to examine patterns and trends during the study.

## Qualitative Item Analysis

Phase 1	Interview Question	Research Study Associated	Research Question
1.	Work experience	Citarelli, 2006	1
2.	Influences	Citarelli, 2006	2
3.	District career	Citarelli, 2006	1
4.	District description	McClure & Reeves, 2005; Hirsh, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001	2
5.	District challenges	Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005	2
6.	Administrative qualities	Citarelli, 2006	1
7.	Teacher qualities	Collins, 2006; Stronge & Hindman, 2003	2
8.	District positives	Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005	1
9.	School positives	Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005	1
10.	Hiring training	McClure & Reeves, 2005	1
11.	Teacher turnover	McClure & Reeves, 2005	1
Phase 2	Interview Question	Research Study Associated	Research Question
1.	Vacancy identification	McClure & Reeves, 2005; Murphy & DeArmond, 2003	1
2.	Vacancy advertisements	Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005	1
3.	Application process	McClure & Reeves, 2005	1
4.	Number of applicants	McClure & Reeves, 2004	1
5.	Recruitment methods	Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997	2
6.	Working with district	Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997	1
7.	Targeted recruits from current personnel	Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005; Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997	1
8.	Recruitment from other schools	Collins, 2000	1
9.	Adequate pool	Feistritz, 1999	1
10.	Differentiation in recruitment	Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997)	1, 2
11.	Employee roles in recruitment	Collins, 2000	1
12.	Best way to recruit	Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 13.1997)	1, 2

Phase	Interview Question	Research Study Associated	Research Question
2			
13.	Screening application	McClure & Reeves, 2004	1
14.	Important in screening		
15.	Help in screening		
16.	Best thing in screening	Dineen, Noe, & Wang, 2004	1, 2
17.	Who is interviewed	McClure & Reeves, 2004; Dineen, Noe, & Wang, 2004; Stronge & Hindman, 2004	1
18.	Typical interview from principal's view	Blackman & Funder, 2002	1, 3
19.	Interview protocol	Blackman & Funder, 2002	1, 3
20.	Interview team training	Blackman & Funder, 2002	1, 3
21.	Interview questions decided	Blackman & Funder, 2002; Roberts, 1987	1, 3
22.	Candidate portfolios/ratings/video	Stronge & Hindman, 2004; Reese, 2004	1, 3
23.	Protocol following interview	Wendel & Breed, 1988	1, 3
24.	Characteristics identified as key	McKinney, Carlson, Mecham, D'Angelo, & Connerly, 2003	2, 4
25.	End of interview	Blackman & Funder, 2002	1, 3
26.	Number interviewed	Dineen, Noe, & Wang, 2004	1
27.	Selection	McKinney, Carlson, Mecham, D'Angelo, & Connerly, 2003	1
28.	Interview follow-up	Wendel & Breed, 1988; Beatty, 1994; Sadetsky & Pell, 1980	1
29.	Key to interview process	Blackman & Funder, 2002; Ediger, 2002	1, 2, 3
30.	Selection members	Blackman & Funder, 2002; Mertz & McNeely, 2001	1
31.	Best practices	McClure & Reeves	2
32.	Best procedure	Murphy & DeArmond, 2003	1
33.	Person fits	Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005; Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997	1
34.	Most important step in process	Rebore, 2004	4
35.	What in process could be eliminated	Rebore, 2004	4
36.	Barriers to getting best	Ingersoll, 2001; Murphy & DeArmond, 2003; Hirsh, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001	4
37.	How decision is reached	Stronge & Hindman, 2004	1
38.	Unique in rural setting	Hare & Heap, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001; Voke, 2002	1

Phase	Interview Question	Research Study Associated	Research Question
2			
39.	Combat rural isolation	Hare & Heap, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001; Voke, 2002	1
Phase	Interview Question	Research Study Associated	Research Question
3			
1.	Barriers for school	Ingersoll, 2001; Hirsh, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001	4
2.	Barriers for district	Ingersoll, 2001; Hirsh, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001	4
3.	Potential improvements for school	Citarelli, 2006	1
4.	Potential improvements for district	Citarelli, 2006	1
5.	Best practices for hiring for school	McClure & Reeves, 2005; Dineen, Noe, & Wang, 2004	4
6.	Hiring process changes	Collins, 2001; Citarelli, 2006	1
7.	Advice to novice principal	Collins, 2001; Citarelli, 2006	1
8.	Future role	Collins, 2001; Citarelli, 2006	1

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The literature was clear that the ability of school principals to find the best teachers for teacher vacancies at their schools has become increasingly important to the overall success of the school (Citarelli, 2006). Research by Pillsbury (2005) found that once a chosen teacher enters the classroom, the teacher's attitudes about student learning, as well as actions related to implementing the curriculum, can either positively or negatively impact the achievement of students. As legislation, such as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, requires schools to increase the achievement of all students, school principals are left with the challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers capable of raising student achievement (Salinas, Kritsonis, and Herrington 2006). Increasingly, school principals of rural, impoverished schools face a greater challenge in filling teacher vacancies (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007). It is clear that the role of the rural principal in filling every classroom vacancy with a highly qualified teacher is both important and challenging.

#### Introduction

To be successful, principals in rural school settings must be able to meet the challenge of recruiting, screening, interviewing, and selecting high quality teachers for their schools. To establish the full magnitude of this challenge of the rural principal being able to hire high quality teachers for their schools, it is imperative to understand the full context of the setting and the experiences within the lives of rural principals.

In this study, the researcher examined hiring practices of rural elementary, middle, and high school high performance principals in Georgia. The research questions



focused on hiring practices currently being used, hiring practices perceived to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools, hiring practices deemed most influential to the final selection of the teacher, and suggested improvements to the hiring process. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals?
2. What hiring practices do principals perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools?
3. What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?
4. What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process?

Chapter Four details an analysis of the data collected by way of semi-structured interviews with three rural school principals, including one elementary, one middle, and one high school, as well as data collected via a review of documents in the district related to hiring. A qualitative research design was employed, allowing the researcher to gather details for a full, rich understanding of the hiring practices of rural high performance principals in Georgia. Most of the data was collected from responses to interview questions formulated from prompts found in Appendix A.

A Georgia high performance principal was interviewed during the pilot study to assist in reviewing the interview questions and to provide suggestions in establishing question clarity. During the pilot study, the researcher used prompts to formulate questions. As a result, the researcher realized the need to clarify several questions so that the principal understood the questions. The researcher understood the need to probe for greater details on some questions.

The principal involved in the pilot study with the researcher was, in fact, a mentor to the researcher over the years having been the principal while the researcher was the assistant principal. Knowing the principal involved in the pilot study prior to the pilot study enabled both the researcher and the pilot participant to remain calm and at ease during the pilot interview.

The researcher learned a great deal during the pilot study. Question clarity was achieved. Moreover, the researcher formulated notes on how to ask the questions which were misunderstood by the pilot principal. The prompts ranged from general to those dealing specifically with recruiting, screening, interviewing, and the final selection of the teacher. The pilot study was very helpful to the researcher.

#### Procedures

In this study, the researcher employed purposeful case sampling which led the researcher to particular sites and people. The selected participants for this study were three rural high performance principals from Georgia: one elementary principal, one middle school principal, and one high school principal. Two of the participants were female and one was male; each of the participants was Caucasian. To have been a participant in the study, each of the participants was assured that participation was confidential. Consequently, each of the principals was given a fictitious name for the purpose of presenting data findings. The elementary principal was referred to as “Janis,” the middle school principal as “Donna,” and the high school principal as “Andy.” To maintain confidentiality among people and locations, the researcher edited the data contents to eliminate any specific details relative to individual’s names and the names of schools, districts, and geographic regions. As necessary, the researcher also edited the

transcribed interviews to remove repetitive information and information which was not relative to the research questions.

The data from the interviews and from the review of district documents related to hiring were sorted in relation to the four research questions. Coded data, trends, and patterns gathered from transcribed interviews and data collected from hiring documents were analyzed by the researcher to develop an understanding of hiring practices used by rural high performance principals. The documents reviewed during the research consisted of hiring papers related to recruitment, screening, interviewing, and final selection of the teacher. To fully understand the hiring practices of the participants, the researcher organized the interview questions and school documents associated with hiring in the format identified in Appendix B.

In addition to interviewing the rural principal, the researcher drove around the district and gathered information by taking pictures so as to gather images and details about the rural setting. Further, following the interview and tour of the district, the researcher did a thorough review of each of the district's hiring documents. Also, the researcher studied the school and district websites to get a sense of available data and to get an understanding of the district by way of the internet website. From each of these investigations, the researcher was able to gather the following personal and professional demographics from the principals, as well as rich, detailed information about the rural settings and district hiring procedures. The following principal and district profiles were established as an introduction to the participants and to portray vivid descriptions of each of the rural settings involved in the study.

*Rural Elementary School, "Janis"*

The rural elementary school setting, upon entering, gave the feel of going back in time. Driving around town, the researcher quickly noticed lots of silos and mill factory beams exposed in the far skyline. A bridge over the center of town enabled a bird's eye view of a rusty metal factory building as the researcher drove across. Around the corner, the streets were filled with shoppers as cars were parked alongside both sides of the narrow city street. In the center of town, four people enjoyed lunch at a park table. A canon on wheels reflected the town's history. A funeral, in session, drew a multitude of cars as white columns out front of the funeral home supported a grand balcony. The day was obviously on hold in this small rural town for an observed funeral. Forty or more cars were awaiting a long procession as mourning funeral attendees paid their last respects.

Reaching the elementary school building, the researcher was impressed by the quality of the structure. The school was constructed in 1987 and appeared upon entrance to be a brand new facility. A mural on the school's wall showed children running and a view of the nearby ocean. A mall feeling was present as the tall ceilings with exposed beams and windows allowed beams of sunlight to infiltrate. A desk at the center of the front of the building nested a welcoming greeter who allowed the researcher to sign in and peel off a visitor's sticker. The atmosphere was hospitable as passersby waved upon entrance to the office and smiled as the researcher waited to meet with the principal. A new student was registering for school and her mother was overheard saying the school looked as new as 10 years prior when she came through. The child was observed

swinging her book bag to and fro with her legs as she sat across from the researcher. The child repeated with excitement that she was going to school.

The principal's office was decorated with beautiful artwork. Pictures by the principal's son of butterflies, flowers, and a bluebird were displayed. The colors displayed in the vivid nature pictures made it clear that the principal's son was an artist. On the office wall, an antique telephone was nestled among vivid pictorial memories. Janis reported to the researcher that the phone had once belonged to her grandmother. A cool office on a hot spring day and the aroma of a lemon air-freshener made the atmosphere calm and welcoming.

The elementary school principal, Janis, a 24-year veteran in education was a Caucasian female who held an Education Specialist degree. Janis had been a kindergarten teacher and had served as principal at the rural elementary school for nine years. Her rural elementary school, with an enrollment of over 1300 students, had over 120 staff members. Eighty percent of the students qualified for free or reduced priced meals. A rural high performance elementary school principal, Janis appeared on the 2007 list of Georgia High Performance Principals from the Georgia Department of Education's website. Janis was named a high performance principal based upon her being employed at the school for at least five years, and having made significant improvements with regard to student achievement over the past five years.

After interviewing Janis, the researcher gathered documents related to hiring. The district hiring documents conveyed limited information relative to the recruitment and hiring of professional employees in the district. The documents suggested that the goal of the board of education is to hire quality employees needed to operate a successful and

productive school setting. The policy associated with recruitment required that the system employees recruit and select based upon “initiative, alertness to good candidates, and proper provisions.” No recruitment pamphlets were available from the district relative to hiring protocol. However, the policy calls for the superintendent’s ability to transfer or reassign employees as necessary. The district suggested that job announcements be posted on the TeachGeorgia website and other Professional Standards Commission approved teacher sites to include Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA) and Colleges of Education.

According to the policy provisions, announcements for positions should contain the date of the announcement, the name, address, and telephone number of the contact person, the degree, certificate, and any special qualifications required, as well as the application deadline. A general hiring statement was included which states the board will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, or disability.

On the TeachGeorgia website and on the district’s local district website, the following positions were advertised: grades 9-12 combination (business); grades 9-12 combination (Mathematics); and, special education (P-12). No elementary or middle school positions were listed on the website.

The elementary school principal, Janis, was a veteran early childhood educator with 24 years of experience. She was employed in the same rural district throughout her career. She was principal at the high poverty school for nine years. Despite being in a rural school with high poverty, Janis led the school to increased student achievement during her tenure which resulted in her being named a high performance school principal.

*Rural Middle School, "Donna"*

A town whose residents boast of its traditions of trail rides, bluegrass festivals, and southern gospel nights, the principal described the rural setting as being back in time by about ten years. A sole traffic light was offset in view by a distant white spherical water tower. The stately courthouse in the center of town was adorned with traditional white antebellum columns and flew flags for the United States and Georgia alongside a black POW-MIA memorial flag. Driving through the center of town, one quickly noticed township pride with a mural of the town's two football coaches, a logo for the local radio station, a football star punting, and an Amoco gas insignia. In the city's historical section, the scenery depicted a time from the 1970s. Store after store was linked together on either side of the road with a large glass window in front for walking view window shopping. A fast food restaurant, Hardees, stood alone alongside the Huddle House restaurant as the only places to get a meal on the go.

Being the only middle school in the district, the rural school was housed in the same building as the district's only high school. The school was located in the center of town, adjacent to a fenced enclosed football field. Tall seating stands were observed by the researcher as he turned his vehicle to enter the school. At the school's entrance, a Title I Distinguished School flag greeted visitors. Inside, gray walls were freshly painted and a new concrete sidewalk had been poured to allow safe walking. The office of the principal was traditional, but housed state of the art technology. A large laser printer was prominent on the back right table. Tones of brown to cherry were observed on the furniture as the researcher sat with the principal during the interview. The principal was upbeat, welcoming, and delighted to offer assistance to the researcher.

The middle school principal, Donna, a 17-year veteran in education, was a Caucasian female and held an Education Specialist degree. Donna had been a business education teacher and had served as principal at the rural middle school for eight years. Her rural middle school, with an enrollment of 341 students, had 29 full time teachers, and had 65 percent of its student body who qualified for free or reduced priced meals. A rural high performance middle school principal, Donna appeared on the 2007 list of Georgia High Performance Principals from the Georgia Department of Education's website. Donna was named a high performance principal based upon her being employed at the school for at least five years, and having made significant improvements with regard to student achievement over the past five years.

Few documents were found associated with hiring teachers. The Board of Education policy, an online application for employment, and advertisements on TeachGeorgia were the only documents available relative to hiring.

The policy associated with personnel hiring requires that all school system personnel must be employed by the system on the recommendation of the superintendent; further, if a position needs to be filled between Board of Education meetings, the Board authorizes the superintendent to fill the position, subject to the approval of the Board at the next scheduled meeting.

For the purposes of recruitment, the Board policy suggests that recruitment may involve: a search of community for available qualified personnel; encouragement of capable high school students and others into the profession; consultation with regional educational agencies; use of college placement services; internet service; university and college recruitment fairs; and, notification of vacancies with local minority agencies.



The district also had a policy which stated that the district would actively recruit and select the best qualified individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, handicap, or disability. The Board also had a policy which required a fingerprinting and criminal records check during the year of renewal of certificates for current employees, and when hired for new employees.

The following teaching positions were posted on the TeachGeorgia or system websites: math teacher 9-12; English teacher 9-12; and speech language pathologist (special education services). The website listed no teacher vacancies for the elementary school or middle school.

The middle school principal, Donna, was a veteran middle school educator with 17 years of experience. She was principal at the high poverty school for seven years. Despite being in a rural school with high poverty, Donna led the school to increased student achievement during her tenure which resulted in her being named a high performance school principal.

*Rural High School, "Andy"*

Driving through town, the researcher quickly noticed that the area, in comparison to others visited, was most rural. One piece of history still was in business in the center of town, a Coca-cola building with a corner four-by-four cubed sign situated on a red metal pole which read, "100 years of refreshment." Alongside the railroad tracks which ran perpendicular to the main highway through town, an old stone depot building jutted forth with an extended galvanized roof. A single fast-food restaurant, McDonalds, served guests and area residents.

Situated in the middle of small town rural life, this high school was state of the art. The facility, recently remodeled, was approximately 19 years old. However, upon entrance, one would think that the building was completed last year. Inside, fresh paint, doors, counters, furniture, and smiles greeted visitors. The office had light oak finished wood desks and burgundy, high back leather chairs for guests in waiting.

The high school principal, Andy, a 29-year veteran in education, was a Caucasian male and held an Education Specialist degree. Andy had been a high school social studies teacher for 21 years and had served as principal at the rural high school for five years. He also had been a middle school assistant principal and principal. Andy's rural high school, with an enrollment of 470 students, had 38 full time teachers, and had 75 percent of its student body who qualified for free or reduced priced meals. The school staff was recently notified by the Governor's Office that the school had earned a platinum award for making great gains in student achievement. The school was one of only eight high schools in the state to earn this award. A rural high performance high school principal, Andy appeared on the 2007 list of Georgia High Performance Principals from the Georgia Department of Education's website for consistent improvements with regard to student achievement.

Andy's office was clearly well-organized. A conference table to the left was clear of papers and his desk had a stack of papers neatly arranged on the left corner. No pictures or other items were observed hanging on the walls of the principal's office—just fresh paint. In the corner, family pictures were neatly arranged on an angled book shelf. Before leaving Andy's office, the researcher requested district hiring documents.

The district had limited documents related to hiring teachers. The district had a policy which stated that the personnel will actively recruit and select the best qualified individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, handicap, or disability. The Board also had a policy which required a fingerprinting and criminal records check during the year of renewal of certificates for current employees, and when hired for new employees. At the time of gathering data for this research study, no teaching positions were available from the TeachGeorgia website or the district's local website.

The high school principal, Andy, was a former high school social studies teacher and middle school principal with 29 years of experience. He was principal at the high poverty school for five years. Despite being in a rural school with high poverty, Andy led the school to increased student achievement during his tenure which resulted in him being named a high performance school principal.

### Summary of Principals' Personal and Professional Backgrounds

The data gathered from references and inquiries indicate that the high performance rural principals have several similarities and differences. While all of the participants were Caucasian, two of the rural principals were female and one was male. The total years of educational experience ranged from 17 to 29. The participants were in the role of principal from 5-9 years. The experiences of the administrators were similar in that each had taught previously in the schools where they were employed as principals, and each of the three were assistant principals prior to moving into the role of principal. From a professional perspective, each of the three principals held Education Specialist degrees. The participants held undergraduate degrees in the following areas: early childhood, technology education, and history.

### Summary of Rural School Profiles

Each of the schools involved in the research study was rural. Of the schools involved in the research study, each housed a low socio-economic population, with the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced meals ranging from 65 to 80. The size of the schools involved in the study ranged from large to small with the rural elementary school having a student enrollment of 1312 students, the rural middle school having a student enrollment of 341 students, and the rural high school having a student enrollment of 470 students. Each of the schools had principals who ascended from teacher to principal within the same school, and had 5 or more years in the role of principal.

### *The Role of the Principal*

Among the principals, two indicated that their move into the role of principal was somewhat challenging with the associated responsibilities. However, Janis and Donna soon discovered that they worked well in the role of principal:

I went into administration with the plan of being just an assistant. Then, the principal who was here then became superintendent, and I became principal. But now, I am fine with it. I used to drive around town, see these kids in the grocery store, and think, whew, I am responsible for all these kids' education. It was a heavy weight. But, over time, I have learned to deal with that.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 1)

I was hired as the asst. principal to the high school. Then, my first year, that is when Gov. Perdue put in that every middle school had to have a principal and guess what?, "I was it." And, I wasn't quite ready, or feel ready, but I had a great mentor principal and he helped me and got me ready...you know, you basically just jump in the fire. (Donna, 3/12/08, p. 1)

### *Rural Life and Support*

Each of the principals described the rural school setting as a place with tremendous people who, despite poverty situations, were supportive of the school and wanted their children to have better lives. Andy and Donna revealed that the people make rural life positive and enjoyable. The support of the community was tremendous:

People have just done so much for me in this town. After 2 or three years here, it was really difficult to leave. What drew me here was the job; what kept me here was the people. In this county, from a positive perspective, while there is not a lot

of industry, there is a lot of care for one another. While we don't have a lot of industry, everybody knows one another. It is a very appealing thing. It's like, and I am a very big Andy Griffith fan, if I go to the local gas station, it is like seeing Goober. And, for him, it's like, hey Andy, how are you doing?

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 2)

The researcher was amazed at the similarities of the rural setting and the popular television show, *Andy Griffith*. With this similarity came the reality that everyone in the town knew everyone—something that the high school principal, Donna, suggested was a positive for the school community.

Everybody in the county, the community, I guess the school, is the life of the community. I mean, on Friday night, if you want to rob the bank, you could do it because everybody is at the football game. The football pulls the community together and then they support other things. They support academics, they support our band. They support all our other programs. I think it is because of school spirit. They want to be number one. We are a competitive crowd. They want our academics to be number one and they want our sports to be number one. I think that basically is what pulls us together. You don't have that everywhere.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 4)

#### Summary of the Role of the Principal, Rural Life and Support

The three principals moved into the role of principal in various ways; however, each of the participants described the tremendous challenge of the principalship the first couple of years in the role. Mentors were described as essential to the success of each of the principals. The principals indicated that the tremendous support of the rural people

was essential to the overall success of the school. The rural community was described as being supportive of the entire school community—its sports programs, extracurricular activities, and academics.

The principals suggested that the rural setting adds to the lives of those who live there. The small town atmosphere, of everyone knowing everyone and being supportive of one another, was described as making life happy for all. The rural principals described the rural setting as one of tremendous kinship and support of others.

### Hiring Practices

*What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals?* (Research Question 1)

Responses to interview questions were coded and analyzed to address research question one. The principals indicated they used early intent letters from teachers to determine whether or not the teachers planned to return. Additionally, the principals indicated they used similar advertising formats when vacancies did arise, such as Georgia's online vacancy listing, TeachGeorgia, and the local newspaper. Also common in responses were indications from the principals that they attempted to hire hometown, rural residents:

We send out letters of intent and they inform us as to whether they are coming back, or if they are retiring, they'll just tell me. We always advertise on TeachGeorgia. And we sometimes run ads in the local newspaper. (Janis, 3/13/08, p. 6)

Normally, we don't have any. But when, we do, have one that is when the hard part comes in – trying to find quality persons. We put it on the state website,

TeachGeorgia, and we put it in the newspaper here. To be honest with you, word of mouth in this town. We look out for each other. It's you know, somebody will know somebody who maybe worked out of town, and we bring in some good folks. I had one interview, which was a science position where I interviewed outside of the town, and I had two people that I felt were quality folks, but I hired the one from here. And you know, we kind of support our own.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 5)

There is a couple of ways. Obviously if we have a teacher who resigns or tells us on the intent letter, and then also we have situations where you hire someone and they don't exude the qualities you need for them to, and we tell them we are not going to renew their contracts. We tell them early on. If funding allows a new slot, our superintendent will allow us a position for certain things. Occasionally, we have coaches who do not meet expectations, or maybe a philosophical approach. Sometimes that identifies a slot. Or, we have spouses who may move. In this case, we could have a vacancy from this. Then we telephone, telegraph, and tell the people in the town—no, seriously, the number one way is through the internet, the TeachGeorgia website.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 6)

Recruitment of teachers once a vacancy arose in a rural district ranged from visits to job fairs to sending job announcements to local colleges and universities, or directly contacting professors:

You know I don't know if they are still doing this, but we used to go to job fairs, and set out applications and recruit people. Our former assistant superintendent



had a lot of contacts and he would call around to see if anyone had teachers wanting to move. But now, I don't know. I don't know if they are still doing that. I normally let the university professors know what I am looking for. When I am looking for an art teacher, I call the professors and say, who do you have graduating?

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 6)

We go to some of the recruitment fairs. That is something we had never done before this year. They had several openings in the high school. I haven't had to do that. But, the high school had several openings; they went to a fair and collected some applications and that is how they hired.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 5)

Personally, other than the website, I have very little to do with getting teachers. From a county office standpoint, through the internet, through the colleges—the college recruitment, those are the basic ways we recruit.

(Andy, 3/12/08, p. 7)

The respondents identified similar barriers to getting teachers to rural areas. Janis and Andy indicated economics as a primary challenge to getting high quality teachers. Janis indicated that her district was a non-social security school district, which meant social security contributions are not paid by the system or employee:

Our area is a barrier. Even though we are next to a university, our tax base, the fact that we do not have a lot of local money, our superintendent is trying to get the supplement increased. We don't have social security, so that is another drawback.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 13)

I think economics is a barrier in someone actually taking a job. Our standard of living is a little bit lower here, which means the money you make here will probably go further, but by the same token, you know if someone looks at our salary compared to another system, that provides a barrier. I think that even though we have a wonderful community, it is a barrier in that we are so small. You have to want to work in a small, rural area in order to come here.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 19)

When potential job candidates wanted to apply for open teacher vacancies in one of the rural school districts, similarities existed as to how one applied. The common application process of completing a paper application at the local board office or online through TeachGeorgia was discussed by each of the principals—Janis, Donna, and Andy:

They get an application here, or at the board office, or they can apply through TeachGeorgia.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 6)

They fill out an application at the board.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p 5)

They can apply online at TeachGeorgia, or they can get an application here at the county office.

(Andy, 3/13/08, p 7)

The hiring challenges identified by the respondents indicated similarities. The principals reported the desire to try to get teachers from the area with a challenge being able to keep teachers. Another challenge was with specialized areas:

We really try to hire teachers from within the county because they have a personal interest in it. You know, unless you want to be a football coach, we don't have a lot to draw people. It has been a real struggle, but you know, we have been trying to recruit and then work to keep the teachers, that sort of thing. We have been fortunate to get good hometown people. You know, our town, the lake, and the schools are the biggest employers. In fact, the school is the biggest employer in the county. So, a lot of folks who want to live in our town pursue teaching. They come back, and do an extremely good job. The high school struggles more than we do—the specialty areas and the content I guess. It is a struggle.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 2)

The biggest hiring challenge that we have is attracting and keeping good teachers. And the reasons are, most people who come here are not as enamored with the area as I am, if they are single, 21-22, there isn't a lot for them here like, going to the movies, unless they are big into church. If you are a married couple, the schools system would be very appealing, because not only the facility, but the curriculum, the way things are set up. The problem is we get people, new people, who just want to start, or as strange as this may sound, we get people who will use us until something better comes through at another place. So a lot of times, the biggest challenge is to get them here and keep them here.

The researcher, being a person age 35, realized the negative reality that this rural setting could in fact face difficulty in attracting single college graduates looking to find someone to marry to settle down. With such a small population of people in the rural school

district, a larger urban area could certainly appear more attractive to a new teacher looking for a relationship.

You have to be the type who doesn't mind a drive. Let's say you want to go to a movie, you need to be okay with driving, or to go to a big chain restaurant, like an Applebee's; we don't have that. It is not the school that is causing the problem of keeping folks, it is the area. And, I think that is the biggest challenge.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 3)

The principals suggested that the person fitting into the rural community was essential to keeping rural school teachers. This fit was essential as the rural administrator recruited potential hires:

Sometimes it has been hard for people to fit in. They don't stay very long.

Usually, like they hired a brand new teacher out of college at the high school & usually it's like a stepping stone. We have another teacher in PE, but her husband is also a teacher here. The ones that do come in and out are usually stepping stones. We hope that they will stay here, but usually it is for only a short time. They usually have to have some sort of tie to stay here.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p12)

Our standard of living is a little bit lower here, which means the money you make here will probably go further, but by the same token, you know if someone looks at our salary compared to another system, that provides a barrier. I think that even though we have a wonderful community, it is a barrier in that we are so small. You have to want to work in a small, rural area in order to come here.

Now, I think one advantage that we have is that we have had a number of teachers

who have been our former students. I personally taught about 5 or 6 of my staff members who went off to college and came back here. These folks are going to be here. (Andy, 3/14/08, p. 19)

The first common element which took place before the interview was the screening of applicants to be interviewed. Two of the rural principals identified the involvement of others during the screening of applications:

Our former assistant superintendent did, but I don't know about our new asst. superintendent. And sometimes, the secretary who pulls information off the website, sometimes she will screen it if she notices a red flag. She will call me and tell me, "Do you really want me to send you this application?" "They have taught in a different school every year for the last 10 years." And, I'll say "No." (Janis, 3/13/08, p. 9)

My self, the superintendent, and my assistant principal are the biggest ones involved in screening, but when it is a coaching position, we always include our athletic director. When it comes to academics, we let our department heads look at all the applications, we tell them which ones we think would be the best fit, and we say, what do you think? This one looks good, this one doesn't. The department heads really don't play as big of role because by the time it gets to them, we pretty much have a good idea of what we are going to do.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 11)

The researcher gathered a range of responses when the principals were asked what a person who interviewed at the school experienced:

Well, they come in and we talk. And sometimes, if I am really interested in them, I take them on a tour. But if not, I don't waste time with that.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 10)

I want them to get a feel for things. I show them around and let them see the kids; I show them the room... I just don't want them to have any questions as to what they are getting into. I want them to know the kind of kids we have here. I offer to have them even come in and observe if they want to.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 9)

We go through a formal interview at the BOE office. We have a conference room. Those that are doing the interview, we put on one side, like of the board table. The other person, we tell them they are in the hot seat and they sit over there. Normally, the superintendent has a little sheet with who is interviewed, the time, and the position. The superintendent signs off, I sign off, and anyone else signs off on who is conducting the interview. The interview process there is that the superintendent starts off with general interview questions, like work history, where they have been, that kind of thing—just general questions.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 13)

The researcher was amazed at the involvement of the rural superintendent in teacher interviews; however, the involvement of central office personnel proved to be a common theme:

I normally get into their academics. What type of teaching methodologies they use, disciplinary tactics they feel most appealing, what's their educational background. We ask them specific questions. Nothing to trick them, but, are they

familiar with GPS? Are they familiar with a standards-based classroom? Are they familiar with learning-focused strategies? Then the assistant principal will continue with other general questions such as, why are you leaving where you currently work. He would notice and ask why if a person had moved 5 to 6 differently places year after year. Who are some people we can call to ask questions? Then, if we have the department folks, and again that is a rarity, they get into curriculum questions.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 13)

The second half of this stated quote brings to light a remarkable element of Andy's interpretation of an interview. Andy obviously recognizes an interview as one person asking all the questions while the other answers—not free flowing as the researcher expected:

The other part of the interview is the reverse interview. We actually tell them, we are open to any questions you may have. The superintendent talks about the system, particularly if any questions are asked about facilities or salary. A lot of times they'll ask about policy at the school level and I answer those. So, the interview is two-fold. We want to know about them, and we want them to ask questions of us. As for the interview, it is not an exact science, but we try to get a well-rounded view of them.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 13)

When asked to describe the training of others involved in the interviews, Andy gave the following response:

We have never had it. We have never had it. The superintendent, my assistant principal and anyone else involved, we normally go over the application together and talk before the interview.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 13)

The respondents had similar methods of deciding upon questions to ask teachers being interviewed and their use of the questions was generally specific to skills required of the position:

I don't have a set list of questions. I do have a list of things that I always ask. Like, what their weak area is, what their strengths are. One person one time said, "I don't have any weak areas," and I said, "Bye-bye." I like to ask, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" As the interview goes along, sometimes I ask questions based on what they say, but as far as these 10 questions I always ask, I don't do that.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 11)

Used to, I would have a set group of questions that I would ask...but to me, I felt like, you can be trained to answer questions basically. The way that I do it now, I still have those questions. If I feel like the interview isn't going well, I can fall back on those questions.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 9)

Literally, we have done it on our own. The superintendent, he always has a set group of questions. I always have like a basic set of questions that I normally go



through. The assistant principal and I normally go through the questions I have and he makes adjustments on what he asks. We really don't necessarily change the type of questions except when we look at curriculum. There are standard things about teaching, methodology, and discipline that we always ask.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 14)

The respondents seemed reluctant to rely too heavily on an applicant's portfolio during the interview:

I always look at it, even though they only have good things in there, I look at it because they have gone through the trouble to make it. Once a guy brought in three notebooks and I looked at them, but I don't put much credit in viewing it.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 11)

As a current school principal, the researcher understood the participant's views.

Principals have limited time and an eighty page notebook of all things great could take a while to view:

The portfolio, or resume, we compare it to the actual application. There is an emphasis that you put on a resume or a portfolio, but there is an old saying, until the rubber meets the road, until they get in there and really start teaching, you never know. I think you have to let the portfolio stand with regard to it is an example of all good things. They are putting their best foot forward. They are showing you everything positive. They may be showing you a lesson plan that looks great, but they may be leaving out, man, when I presented that lesson, the bottom fell out. They are going to tell you all the great things. The portfolio can mislead you. (Andy, 3/14/08, p. 14)

When the respondents were asked how they knew when a person was the right person, a common gut feeling response was given. Principals indicated they knew quickly if someone was the right person for the job and could identify the intuitive feeling during the interview:

Usually, the minute I interview them, I know—alright, I want this person.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 13)

Normally, you can tell in the first five or ten minutes whether they are going to fit in or not with my children. I look at it like they are my children. You just know. You just know. By how they express themselves when they talk about children. It's the look in their eye when they talk about children.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 10)

For me, it is probably the first impression that the candidate makes. When you first sit down and you first meet them. The first 10 minutes of the interview. I think you can begin to tell whether or not they are genuine. In the first 5 minutes, I think you can begin to tell whether they are interested. You begin to get your first impressions, rightly or wrongly. So, to me first impressions are a big part—the first 5 or 10 minutes, is what sets up the impression. Basically, the feel is that they are interested in you and the school system, they know what they are talking about; they are genuine. From what they say, you begin to get the feel that they really know what they are doing. Or, is this a show that I am hearing? You can tell those that have been rehearsed. They go with these standard answers. You can really get a feel in those first few minutes by listening to what they say; and, how they say it. I expect people to be nervous. They are expected to be on edge.

But, their feel for the job and how they are reacting and how they perform can still come through for you. Then, as the interview goes on, you begin to think, how is their confidence level? Are they pretty strong and confident in what they are saying? That goes along way.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 17)

When asked how the respondents ended the interview, each principal gave a similar response:

I tell them I'll be in touch. I give them my card and tell them to call me if they think of something and always ask if they have any questions for me. If they really want to work here, I expect questions from them...what kind of math and reading programs we have here, do we offer professional learning units. They want to know those things.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 12)

I ask do you have any questions—is there anything they would like to ask. Basically put it in their court. That is normally how it ends.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 10)

We always ask – tell us your greatest strength, weakness? What are your goals for the future? Then, we ask them to ask us to ask us questions. Do you have any questions about supplement, salary, facilities?

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 16)

According to two respondents, after the interview, the district allowed a follow-up meeting with the superintendent and candidate; and, required the principal to check references following the interview:

I call references. If there is someone that I am interested in, I send them to the superintendent. He knows if I send them, I am interested. If there are two people and I am not sure, I send them to him and then we talk and decide together who is the best one.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 12)

What we usually do is send the person over to interview with the superintendent. It is just a courtesy thing. We introduce them to him & let him talk to them for a few minutes. Of course, I check on their references.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 10)

Two of the three principals indicated that they had no formal training on interviewing other than courses in graduate school. Yet, Janis and Andy identified mentors as being influential to their learning experiences:

We did have an assistant superintendent who was in charge of human resources. And, we would interview together. And, I guess the assistant superintendent was my mentor. He was great. Those people would go out and think, there is no way I am getting this job, but he was good. I learned from him what kind of questions to ask.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 3)

There have been times when the superintendent, especially early in my career, kind of like a mentor, would say, here are some things you might want to do, or here are some questions you might want to use. Or, here are some avenues. It

mainly has been learn on the job as you go. I have never really had any formal training other than back when I took classes during my specialist program.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 5)

When asked questions about what qualities teachers needed to have to be successful in a rural school setting, similar responses were given from participants. Each of the principals, Janis, Donna, and Andy, talked about the need for teachers to have a genuine love for children. Also common in responses was the need for content knowledge and pedagogical skills:

You know they know what they are talking about, or they are willing to learn. They are a team player. They really love children, want teach, and work with children.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 12)

I guess the qualities are do your job, and be professional. Know the content you are teaching. Being proficient in that. And, love the kids. I feel like if they don't love the kids, they are not going to be successful anywhere. You have to love middle school kids.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 3)

I think the teachers have to love kids. They have to enjoy students. Not just a Pollyannaish enjoyment, they need to understand that if they punish a child and the child kind of sulks up on them, they have to understand that they can't take it personal. They can't get angry. They have to understand they are teaching the whole child. They have to keep in mind that these kids know if the teacher is genuinely concerned about them, or putting on an act. And, that is sometimes

hard to identify in an interview. The teachers don't all have to be a cheerleader and jumping up and down, they just have to shine through that they like and know the profession, that they can get over those frustrations, because they are overworked, and yet keep that positive attitude.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 5)

We are looking for a number of things. First of all, you are looking to see if they have a passion and a love for kids. The other thing is of course, do they have the knowledge and do they have what it takes to impart that knowledge. Can they relate to the kids? These are the most important things. Somehow, if you can pull that, then you have a winner. Some of our good folks have been homegrown.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 15)

According to the respondents, each element of the hiring process was essential to hiring highly qualified teachers for vacancies. Janis, Donna, and Andy indicated that no portion of the hiring process could be stopped:

No step in the process could be eliminated.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 13)

I think you need to have all steps of the process in a small school system. Since we don't have a lot of applicants and you don't have anyone screening from the board office, you have to have all the steps.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 11)

From our standpoint, again, it could be refined, but not eliminated. Given our size and all, I think we have to refine the process. It changes from time to time based on the position, but to say you could eliminate something, no. I think we could

always improve. I think we could use some training to be honest with you.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 19)

### Summary of Hiring Practices

The principals from each of the rural districts were very similar in identifying major themes which were involved in the overall hiring process. Similarities were present in responses relative to: how vacancies are identified and advertised; recruitment efforts; barriers present; application procedures; hiring challenges; recruiting to ensure fit; collaborative screening; training on hiring teachers; identification of questions; usage of portfolios; intuition of person being right; ending the interview; what occurs following the interview; formal training; qualities of teachers; and, elements essential to the hiring process. There were differences identified among the rural districts. Interviews were conducted differently in each of the districts. Moreover, there were no common turnover areas among respondents.

The principals identified common barriers to getting teachers to rural schools. Common to two respondents, were money and the area. The tax base was noted as low by respondents which led to decreased local supplements for teachers. Also, respondents indicated that the rural area presented challenges in simply being a small community.

While training for rural principals in hiring highly qualified teachers was generally limited to graduate school personnel courses and in the field with a mentor, the principals, in their own way, recruited, screened applicants, interviewed, and made the final selection. The principals indicated that they had learned to hire on the job with the assistance of a mentor.

### *Recruitment*

When the rural principals sought to discover pending vacancies at their schools, each principal utilized letters of intent. These intent letters enabled teachers to indicate whether or not they planned to return to the school the following school year. Similarly, the principals utilized TeachGeorgia, Georgia's online teacher hiring website, as a means of advertising teacher vacancies. There were limited sources used to advertise vacancies for the district, despite Board policy stating that district may use all approved Professional Standards sites such as Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA).

Recruitment efforts in the rural settings primarily involved district level personnel attending job recruitment fairs, and school principals contacting local colleges and universities to announce vacancies—a traditional approach. The principals indicated their involvement in recruitment was on a limited basis. However, there were common patterns of the rural community being involved in the recruitment. Two common themes were TeachGeorgia and word-of-mouth—alerting teachers, community members, and college professors about teacher vacancies. Another theme which continued to surface in the interviews involved recruiting people who fit the community. The principals identified a need for candidates to have a tie to the community—whether as a former student in the district or other means.

### *Screening*

The application process of applying for teacher vacancies in the rural districts was similar in each of the three settings. Applicants could apply at the board office, or online through the TeachGeorgia website. The applications were similar in that they required



personal data, education background, job experience, references, and written philosophies on education and classroom management.

Applications were screened by several common sources. The school secretary, who pulled applications from TeachGeorgia, was a valuable source to the elementary school principal to weed out less desirable candidates. The screening of applications involved many people other than the school principal. The principals indicated others such as the school secretary, assistant principal, department heads, and the coach as having a role in screening applicants for interviews.

### *Interviewing*

The researcher found many similarities and differences in interviewing techniques used by the rural principals. However, the descriptions of the interview process varied among schools. According to the elementary principal, she was the primary person who interviewed at the school level prior to the candidate meeting the superintendent. The Middle school principal discussed selling the positives of the rural school during the interview with her which involved a tour of the school, meeting the kids, and seeing the classroom prior to meeting the superintendent.

The high school principal described the interview process as a formal interview at the board office in which the superintendent, assistant principal, principal, and department heads were involved. The high school principal indicated that the interview team had no formal training other than conversing about candidates prior to the interview. The high school interview was more structured than the elementary and middle school interview.

The principals indicated that they used similar questions in most interviews; however, in certain situations, questions were tailored to the job with input from appropriate department personnel.

The teaching portfolio, brought in for viewing during the interview, was given little credibility. In fact, one respondent stated that she only looked at the portfolio because the interviewee had gone to the trouble of creating it. The high school respondent indicated that the portfolio was merely a sample of everything positive and indicated that the negatives could be hidden or left out. This finding was of little surprise to the researcher in that the researcher, as principal, also gave little credibility to portfolios as predictors of future teaching success. The researcher understands that the process involved in developing a well-made teaching portfolio is perhaps more important than the finished product. The experiences gained from the portfolio process are helpful, in the opinion of the researcher.

The respondents overwhelmingly described knowing quickly whether a person was right for the job. The respondents indicated that they knew if they wanted to hire the person within the first five or ten minutes. The first impression was noted as an important part of the interview.

The principals ended the interviews similarly. According to respondents, it was important after asking questions of the teacher to allow the teacher an opportunity to ask questions of the district and school. There is an expectation that applicants will have questions of the school, suggested the elementary respondent.

After the interview, the district protocol for checking references was mentioned by two of the three principals. Also, the districts which did not involve the

superintendent in the actual interview required a follow-up meeting with the superintendent and candidates.

#### *Final Selection of the Teacher*

Among the three school principals interviewed, the typical number of applicants varied greatly. The elementary school principal, in a school located near a university, typically had 50 applicants for teacher vacancies. The middle school principal indicated she averaged 10 applicants for most positions. However, the high school principal generally had 3 applicants of which to interview. The high school principal indicated that the small pool number created great challenges for him. Andy suggested that not having an adequate pool made the interview worthless in the hiring process.

Qualities essential to successful teachers were similarly identified among respondents. Each of the three principals noted that teachers must have a love of children. Also common was the need for content and pedagogical knowledge. The principals felt they knew if the teacher had the appropriate love of children, knowledge, and skills appropriate for the job within the first five to ten minutes of the interview.

The principals indicated that each element of the hiring process was essential in a rural setting. The participants suggested that being in a small system and having limited numbers of applicants made it essential to have each part of the hiring process active: the recruitment of teachers to the area, screening applications with the assistance of others, interviewing, and making the final selection of which candidate was the best fit for the school and community. One principal indicated that some of the hiring components could be refined. The high school principal indicated that the school would benefit by refining

the recruitment process to increase the applicant pool. The same respondent indicated a need for training in hiring teachers.

There were no common turnover areas identified among respondents. The elementary respondent indicated that there were no common areas to identify; the middle school participant indicated physical education and art as high turnover areas; and, the high school respondent indicated that special education continued to be a high turnover area at the high school.

District policy documents associated with recruitment, screening, interviewing, and final selection were primarily linked to policy. These policies were general in that policies related to what “may” occur in the district, such as recruitment may involve “a search of community for available qualified personnel; encouragement of capable high school students and others into the profession; consultation with regional educational agencies; use of college placement services; internet service; university and college recruitment fairs; and notification of vacancies with local minority agencies.” The district documents gave rural school principals minimal direction on best hiring practices. The district documents related to hiring were primarily related to legal issues, such as non-discrimination policies.

The following research findings are reported for Research Question 1:

- Common barriers to getting teachers to rural areas included economics and the rural area;
- Rural school principals had little to no formal training on best hiring practices;
- Limited resources were used by rural principals to advertise teacher vacancies;
- Recruitment efforts of rural districts generally involved district level personnel;

- Rural principals utilized word-of-mouth as a means of recruitment;
- Teachers with community ties were reported by principals to be more likely to remain in the rural setting once hired;
- The rural application process is not complex and may be done online through TeachGeorgia, or in hard copy at the local board office;
- Screening of potential applicants was a shared responsibility involving secretaries, coaches, department heads, assistant principals, assistant superintendents, the superintendent, and the principal;
- The rural school interview process varied from involving only the principal, to involving a team of interviewers, including the superintendent;
- Principals indicated the need to market the rural setting during the hiring process;
- Interviews ranged from unstructured (having no set questions) to structured (having set questions for interviewees to answer);
- When interview teams were used for interviewing teachers, no formal training occurred;
- When necessary, job-specific questions were formulated for interviews;
- The teacher portfolio was given little credibility by principals as a predictor of future success in the classroom;
- Principals indicated they knew if a person was a fit for the job within five to ten minutes of interviewing by seeing that the applicant was genuine, confident, and had a passion for teaching and a love for students;
- The first impression was a key element to the interview;
- Interviews ended with questions for the interviewer;

- Rural districts required principals to check references of potential hires;
- District level personnel were heavily involved in the interview process;
- Depending upon external resources, such as colleges and nearby metropolitan areas, the applicant pool varied greatly among rural schools;
- Principals indicated essential qualities of a teacher as having a love for children, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills;
- While principals indicated that the hiring process could be refined and improved, there was agreement that each element of the hiring process was essential;
- No common teacher vacancy turnover rates were identified among the rural schools; and,
- District hiring documents were of little help to the rural principals in learning and utilizing best hiring practices.

#### Best Practices Identified to Attract Teachers

*What hiring practices do principals perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools? (Research Question 2)*

The respondents were asked about recruitment efforts and elements of the recruitment process which were essential to getting high quality teachers to the rural school setting, and commonalities in responses were present. Janis, Donna, and Andy indicated that they relied on the assistance of others to recruit staff:

I listen to my teachers. I had to hire three special education teachers recently and one of my teachers is friends with a teacher from another local county. She told me about this teacher and she had recently married someone from our county and

she was glad to make the move; she was tired of driving to the other county.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 7)

Well our new curriculum director, we called it “courted” a high school teacher.

It was someone he used to know. Someone he once worked with had this person as a student teacher. He brought her on board, talked with her, and made sure she would fit in. He felt like she might fit in. And she did, and she accepted the job.

So we court them a little bit.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 7)

Yes, we do in some regard because a lot of times, they will know someone. A lot of times they can put us on track with a person. Sometimes they have a connection and they may say that person was great over at such and such, or they may suggest that we might want to check that one out because there might be a little bit of baggage. “I can’t tell you what it is.” So we follow up on it, and they do help a bit.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 8)

Another common effective method of recruiting teachers to rural schools identified by the respondents was recruiting effective teachers from other nearby schools:

I called a local principal and told him I had two openings if he knew of anyone –I try to let the principal know before I get someone. So, he went and told his teachers. I try to let the principal know first that I am looking for someone. So they can have an opportunity to try to talk them into staying.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 8)

First of all, I make contact with the principal. I think that is only a common courtesy. I tell them I did have an opening & this is a hometown person who has voiced an interest in the past if we were to have an opening. I wouldn't want to go in and do something unethical—I would extend the common courtesy. Or, if I talked to the person, I tell them to notify their principal.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 6)

Whether it is through the grapevine or whether I go up and say, "Listen, we hear wonderful things about you." "Would you be any way interested," or "Would you at least talk to me about our position?" From that point, I'd want to sell them on what we are doing here. We could throw out those accolades that we recently made, you know, being a platinum school, making the greatest gains in the state. We were a bronze school by U.S. News and World Report. These are things that could possibly draw them in. If they say, "Well, how much money?," well then, we would need to talk to them a bit about money. We are on a very tight budget.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 8)

The respondents indicated in the interviews that an essential component to attracting and keeping teachers was selling the benefits of rural life:

We try to court them. Especially if we don't have anybody, you know that we know, I guess, from this town. If they are totally from outside, I want them to see what we have to offer. I mean we may not have as much to offer as some of the surrounding areas. I mean they may have to take a pay cut. I took a pay cut to come here as an administrator, but it was worth it because I live here. I want them to know what they are getting into. I want them to get a feel for things. I



show them around, let them see the kids; I show them the room... I just don't want them to have any questions as to what they are getting into. I want them to know the kind of kids we have here. I offer to have them even come in and observe if they want to.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 9)

Last year, we had a person I had hired and in May, she called to tell me she had had a change in heart. Well, we had one application, one person left—a kid out of a neighboring town. We called him, brought him in and we got extremely lucky. He is a phenomenal social studies teacher. My biggest fear with him is that he has a fiancé, she lives up north, he said I don't think she is going to want to come down and live here. I told him to get her and go watch the movie, *Doc Hollywood*; I'll be like the mayor and tell her this town needs her.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 9)

The interviews with the principals indicated the importance of effectively screening applications to identify that qualities and skills matched the vacant teaching position:

I look for extracurricular activities—being involved. You can't work in a small system and not be involved, so I look at you know if they have been active in things outside of the classroom. Also, I look for them in how well they did in the content I am going to hire them for—as far as there grades. I am not saying they have to have all As. I just think they need pretty good grades in the subject they are going to teach. You need to do your homework on the front end to make sure they are a fit.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 8)

If we are looking for an academic position, we'll look at years of experience, their last location, and their references. Then, we look at the makeup of that department to see what we are looking for. For example, if I have two thirty-year veterans, that doesn't mean that if someone has been a really good teacher for thirty years, we are not going to hire them. But, we are also going to be looking at somebody that might have been in it for four or five years because they bring something to the table. With a small system like this too, you have to be able to screen because we don't always get a wide variety of applications. We may get 3 or 4 and out of the 3 or 4 you might get one and the others you may think why did they even apply? Then you have to decide, do I want to keep the ad running longer? Or do I want to go a different route? Our goal is to try to commit and get our folks hired as early as we can like everybody does. We just can't always do that.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 11)

#### Summary of Best Practices Identified to Attract Teachers

The respondents shared specific instances relative to what they felt had worked best to attract and keep teachers in the rural school setting. Similarities in responses were noted relative to: involvement of others in recruiting teachers; recruiting from other schools; selling the benefits of rural life; screening applicants for essential qualities; and, ensuring the person fits into the rural community.

Each of the principals indicated that the involvement of others was essential to attracting teachers to the rural school setting. Examples of others being involved included teachers currently employed in the school knowing someone, district personnel

selling positives of the district to a new hire, and reliance on current staff members to share knowledge of potential candidates' backgrounds. The principals indicated the benefits of word-of-mouth—letting the school and community know of vacancies so that the school and community members could help in attracting teachers.

Another valuable tool described by the three principals involved recruiting effective teachers from other nearby schools. Each of the principals suggested that they would first contact the school principal prior to recruiting the potential hire.

Selling the benefits of rural life was an important tool suggested by two of the principals. These principals described the need to court teachers and explain things that the district had to offer when working to attract new teachers.

The screening process of weeding out less desirable job candidates was shared as important to getting people who will stay, according to two participants. The principals suggested ensuring the candidates have content knowledge appropriate for the role, a desire to be involved in extracurricular activities, experiences appropriate for the position, and fit the school's needs. In fact, two respondents indicated two ways to better ensure a person would remain in the position was for the person hired to have a tie to the community, or to be from the area. The researcher understands the rural school principals' views that having a tie to the community brings an element of richness to the school's culture; however, the researcher realizes the benefits of diversity and how diverse cultures can enlighten and provide open views for others.

District hiring documents related to attracting teachers to the rural schools were generally limited to policy. The rural school hiring documents were not supportive of principals in attracting teachers to the rural settings.

The following research findings are reported for Research Question 2:

- The school community such as teachers, community members, college professors, and other nearby principals, had involvement in attracting teachers to vacant rural teaching positions;
- Nearby school settings were used to attract potential teachers;
- Principals indicated the importance of selling the benefits of rural life to potential hires;
- Principals indicated the need of screening applicants to ensure applicants were a school fit—someone who would remain in the position once hired; and,
- Documents related to hiring personnel were not helpful to the rural school principals in attracting teachers for vacant positions.

#### Hiring Practices Most Influential to Final Selection

*What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?* (Research Question 3)

The questions posed to principals as to what practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher yielded different results. The high school principal identified the applicant pool in that he had only a few applicants from which to interview:

For us, I know this probably goes against what tradition would say, but for us, it is having a pool, a pool of good, viable candidates to select from. I am in no means minimizing the interview process and the actual determination of a hire, but given that we are such a small area, for us to have good, quality people to choose from is most important. I mean, our interviews are worthless if we don't have good, quality people to pick their minds to see if they fit. Given our circumstances,

getting that initial pool of applications in is so important. It is so hard to get them here.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 18)

Clearly, the size of the applicant pool is crucial to Andy's hiring abilities. Andy suggested to the researcher that he may only have 2 or 3 applicants for some positions. In such a case, the rural principal could employ best hiring practices related to interviewing and final selection, but without enough viable, quality candidates, the principal's efforts could prove fruitless.

Two respondents, the middle school principal, Donna, and the elementary school principal, Janis, agreed that the interview was influential in getting the right person. However, Janis elaborated on the importance of reference checks for validity, and suggested it was most important:

The interview is most important because that is when you get a feel for the person and you find out exactly what you need to know about the person.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 11)

I would say the interview and then reference checks. What the references say is so important. That is probably the most important thing. If it is someone who is outside of here and there is no connection to the district, a complete stranger, I try to talk to someone other than just who they give me, because the references they give you are going to say good things. I learned this because I got burned with a previous employee.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 13)

### Summary of Hiring Practices Most Influential to Final Selection

Depending on the rural school respondent, opinions varied as to which element of the hiring process was most influential to the final selection of the teacher. The elementary school principal indicated that interviews are important; however, suggested that reference checks, following the interview, were more essential in getting the right teacher. The references of others who have worked with the potential hire, in addition to those listed on the reference list, may be more reliable reference sources, suggested one respondent.

The researcher thinks it is important to point out that the number of applicants Janis, the elementary principal, typically has for a vacant position, ranged from 35 to 50. Having an adequate pool of candidates from which to interview and then check references was of great importance. A nearby teaching university enabled Janis a luxury not observed in the other rural settings. Janis could count on having a large number of teaching applicants.

The middle school principal felt that the interview was the most important element to deciding who should be hired. According to Donna, the interview allows you to get a feel for the person and answers to all of your questions about the person. Donna previously indicated that she generally had 8 persons apply for teacher vacancies. The researcher feels it necessary to again compare the pool size to participant's responses to research question 3.

The high school principal, stating that his view may go against tradition, stated that having an adequate pool of good, viable candidates was most important to him in the selection of the teacher. According to Andy, interviews are worthless if the pool does not

allow you to choose quality people to interview. The pool, suggested Andy, is most essential. Andy indicated that he typically had 2 to 3 teachers apply for teacher vacancies. The researcher realizes a relationship among pool size and rural principal's responses to which element of the hiring process was most influential to the final selection of the teacher.

The following research finding was reported for Research Question 3:

- Rural school principals varied in their identification of the most influential hiring practice to select teachers. The elementary principal selected reference checks as most important; the middle school principal selected interviewing as key; and, the high school principal suggested that an adequate candidate pool was most influential.

#### Improving the Hiring Process

*What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process?* (Research question 4)

The researcher posed several questions to the respondents which enabled the respondents to reflect on hiring practices and to allow the principals to provide advice on improving the hiring process. The principals gave different answers on what could be done in the district and school to improve the hiring process:

A signing bonus would be a good thing, and probably holding our own recruitment fair.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 14)

You know, I don't know that we could really make any improvements, except maybe doing a panel interview. But, I don't know if we have enough folks. Now that we have a curriculum director, we will be adding that person, along with the

superintendent, as a person to meet. I just don't know that we could do it any other way.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 12)

The number one improvement, our personnel department, I think, needs some training. That would be good avenues to take. We need to broaden our base to get more applicants to us. I don't think we do enough college campus recruitments. Money could be a factor, but I think we could broaden our base besides just using the TeachGeorgia site.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 20)

When asked about what changes in the hiring process they have observed during their career, differences were evident in the three districts:

I think we are getting better quality teachers—those ready for the classrooms. I think it is in their preparation. I think the university has tightened up who they are letting get in the education program. I think our partnership with the university is helping. Because we are pointing out things to the university. I think they are stopping some of these kids before they get to student teaching. I see we are getting a much higher quality teacher than we did a few years ago.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 14)

None. I went through the same thing that we put other folks through. I interviewed with the principal, then I went to meet the superintendent. Then, I was recommended and hired.

(Donna, 3/12/08)



When I was interviewed here, they were, I think desperate for a social studies teacher. This was 1979. The superintendent said, “Do you like to hunt?” I said, “No, I really don’t hunt.” So, he said, “Do you like to golf?” I said, “Yes, I like to play golf.” “Do you like to fish?,” he said. “Yes,” I said. “Do you mind living in an apartment or a trailer?,” he said. “No sir,” I said. “Okay, boys,” the superintendent said. And he was out the door. As for the principal’s questions, they had nothing to do with education. He said, “Do you get along with all people?” “Do you get along with people of all races, sexes, and national origins?”—like a TV commercial, and I said “Yes sir.” He said, “Fine with me boys.” “Let’s show him around the school.” And that was it. I thought, “What kind of interview was that?” I guess they just needed a warm body. I have been here and I think I gave them 29 good years. So, our interviews are different than they were back in 1979.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 16)

When the respondents were questioned as to what advice they would give to a novice principal, the participants were different in their advisement:

Hire the very best that you can. It sure is a whole lot easier hiring than getting rid of them after the fact. Don’t hire anyone who is mediocre. If they are mediocre, do your paperwork and don’t renew them that second year. Hire quality people to begin with.

(Janis, 3/13/08, p. 14)

Have your set of questions, but use your gut. I think you learn as you go along basically.

(Donna, 3/12/08, p. 12)

Be honest; ask those questions you know need to be asked. Don't be afraid to have those preliminary talks with the candidates. Don't be scared to ask the superintendent for his opinion and don't be afraid to ask those people who work for you for their opinion. But then, be strong enough to make that call and be confident. You also need to be confident enough that if you do make a bad hire, it is not the end of the world. You do have to sometimes cut your mistakes and admit it.

(Andy, 3/14/08, p. 20)

#### Summary of Improving the Hiring Process

The respondents recommended several improvements to the hiring process. The suggestions for improvement were vastly different. These included the district giving signing bonuses to teachers, holding recruitment fairs within the district to broaden the base by increasing the applicant pool, providing training on hiring practices, and attending more college recruitment fairs.

The changes in hiring over the careers of the interviewed principals ranged from no changes, to a completely different process 29 years before. The elementary school principal reported that during her career, she had noticed a shift to having a better prepared teacher pool. The middle school principal reported no changes to hiring in her district over the past 17 years. The high school principal reported a complete paradigm shift in hiring during his tenure—from questions about hunting and fishing then, to teaching methodology questions now.

Each of the respondents offered advice to novice principals as they work to hire the best teachers. The elementary principal suggested that novice principals hire the best they possibly can. She suggested that principals not settle for mediocre teachers, as they will be costly to deal with later. The middle school principal suggested that novice principals follow their gut and understand that you will learn on the job. The high school principal suggested that novice principals be honest and ask probing questions. He suggested that novice principals seek the input of others, and then make the call and be confident in the hiring decision.

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 4:

- Rural principals identified the following improvements to the hiring process:  
giving teachers signing bonuses; holding district-level recruitment fairs to increase the applicant pool; providing training to personnel involved in hiring; and, attending more recruitment fairs at colleges;
- Rural hiring practices have not changed a great deal over the careers of research participants;
- Novice principals should hire the best teachers possible;
- Principals should follow their intuition when hiring and utilized mentors for input; and,
- To hire the best, principals should seek the input of others, be honest, ask difficult questions, and then make the final decision on who to hire.

### Summary

The data gathered from in-depth interviews with rural school principals and reviews of documents in the districts related to hiring was analyzed to enable the

researcher an understanding of hiring practices currently being used, hiring practices perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools, hiring practices deemed most influential to the final selection of the teacher, and suggested improvements to the hiring process.

The interviews were held in the offices of the principals involved in the study. The district hiring documents were collected from the school principal, or via the school district's website. The interview questions posed by the researcher were developed from research studies related to hiring, and served as a guide for the study. Transcribed tapes, made from audio recordings of the interviews with the principals, as well as field notes and pictures taken of the rural environment, were used to identify common patterns, themes, and hiring practices associated with research questions. To protect the school districts and to ensure confidentiality of the rural school principals, participants were given the fictitious names "Janis," "Donna," and "Andy."

The research findings in the study revealed that Georgia rural school principals involved in the research study indicated a growing challenge in getting high quality teachers for vacancies in their rural schools. Principals understood the need to communicate benefits of rural life to potential hires, and were aware of the economic challenge of offering competitive salaries to teachers seeking employment.

Barriers identified by the rural school principals in this research study include economic challenges and financial woes. Schools of nearby metropolitan areas were able to offer more favorable supplements to teachers. Common challenges discussed by the rural principals include geographic isolation, a reduced number of applicants, and less competitive salaries.

Rural Georgia principals recognized the limitations of what the rural districts could offer prospective teachers, but worked hard to hire the most competent teachers who demonstrated a genuine love for children. Improvements to hiring, suggested the principals, could be made by giving signing bonuses to teachers; holding recruitment fairs within the district; providing training on hiring practices; and, by district representatives attending more college recruitment fairs. The principals indicated that novice principals wanting to hire the best teachers should employ the following—hire the best teachers possible for every vacancy, follow your gut instinct, and be honest and ask probing questions.

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 1:

- Common barriers to getting teachers to rural areas included economics and the rural area;
- Rural school principals had little to no formal training on best hiring practices;
- Limited resources were used by rural principals to advertise teacher vacancies;
- Recruitment efforts of rural districts generally involved district level personnel;
- Rural principals utilized word-of-mouth as a means of recruitment;
- Teachers with community ties were reported by principals to be more likely to remain in the rural setting once hired;
- The rural application process is not complex and may be done online through TeachGeorgia, or in hard copy at the local board office;
- Screening of potential applicants was a shared responsibility involving secretaries, coaches, department heads, assistant principals, assistant superintendents, the superintendent, and the principal;

- The rural school interview process varied from involving only the principal, to involving a team of interviewers, to include the superintendent;
- Principals indicated the need to market the rural setting during the hiring process;
- Interviews ranged from unstructured (having no set questions) to structured (having set questions for interviewees to answer);
- When interview teams were used for interviewing teachers, no formal training occurred;
- When necessary, job-specific questions were formulated for interviews;
- The teacher portfolio was given little credibility by principals as a predictor of future success in the classroom;
- Principals indicated they knew if a person was a fit for the job within five to ten minutes of interviewing by seeing that the applicant was genuine, confident, and had a passion for teaching and a love for students;
- The first impression was a key element to the interview;
- Interviews ended with questions for the interviewer;
- Rural districts required principals to check references of potential hires;
- District level personnel were heavily involved in the interview process;
- Depending upon external resources, such as colleges and nearby metropolitan areas, the applicant pool varied greatly among rural schools;
- Principals indicated essential qualities of a teacher as having a love for children, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills;
- While principals indicated that the hiring process could be refined and improved, there was agreement that each element of the hiring process was essential;

- No common teacher vacancy turnover rates were identified among the rural schools; and,
- District hiring documents were of little help to the rural principals in learning and utilizing best hiring practices.

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 2:

- The school community such as teachers, community members, college professors, and other nearby principals, had involvement in attracting teachers to vacant rural teaching positions;
- Nearby school settings were used to attract potential teachers;
- Principals indicated the importance of selling the benefits of rural life to potential hires;
- Principals indicated the need of screening applicants to ensure applicants were a school fit—someone who would remain in the position once hired; and,
- Documents related to hiring personnel were not helpful to the rural school principals in attracting teachers for vacant positions.

The following research finding was reported for Research Question 3:

- Rural school principals varied in their identification of the most influential hiring practice to select teachers. The elementary principal selected reference checks as most important; the middle school principal selected interviewing as key; and, the high school principal suggested that an adequate candidate pool was most influential.

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 4:

- Rural principals identified the following improvements to the hiring process:  
giving teachers signing bonuses; holding district-level recruitment fairs to increase the applicant pool; providing training to personnel involved in hiring; and, attending more recruitment fairs at colleges;
- Rural hiring practices have not changed a great deal over the careers of research participants;
- Novice principals should hire the best teachers possible;
- Principals should follow their intuition when hiring and utilized mentors for input; and,
- To hire the best, principals should seek the input of others, be honest, ask difficult questions, and then make the final decision on who to hire.



CHAPTER V  
FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, more than ever before, school principals are faced with the challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers for teacher vacancies at their schools. There is a direct link to the quality of the classroom teacher and the level of achievement success of students assigned to the teacher. In an era when political mandates force schools to show achievement gains among all subgroups of students, the school principal has the tremendous role of filling teacher vacancies with candidates capable of continuously increasing the achievement of all students. The soaring populations of students, coupled with high attrition rates among teachers, increases teacher vacancies in our schools. However, no area of the nation faces a greater challenge with placing highly qualified teachers in every classroom than rural school settings.

Introduction

The ability of school leaders to get high quality teachers for teacher vacancies in their schools has grown in importance over the past few years and has become more of a challenge for school leaders (Pillsbury, 2005). In isolated, rural school settings, the dilemma of finding qualified teacher candidates is greater (Teacher Recruitment: Staffing Classrooms with Quality Teachers, 2001). The rural school principal must meet the staffing challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers by becoming fully engaged in all aspects of hiring teachers in their schools (Johnson, 2005).

A school principal in the state of Georgia, this researcher understood the challenge of getting highly qualified teachers for teacher vacancies at his school. The

researcher had a keen interest in understanding how other principals, who also faced the challenge of hiring high quality teachers for their schools, met the challenge. More importantly, the researcher, being from a rural public school in Georgia, understood the greater challenge of recruiting and hiring teachers in rural areas.

The purpose of this study was to understand hiring practices of rural elementary, middle, and high school high performance principals in Georgia. The researcher used a semi-structured interview instrument, reviews of district documents associated with hiring, and observations of the rural environment to guide the study and answer the four research questions. The research study used a qualitative design to fully understand the rural settings and to gather rich, detailed data from the participants.

The research study was done with three rural high performance Georgia school principals: one elementary principal, one middle school principal, and one high school principal. The researcher purposefully selected the participants who were from rural schools, appeared on the 2007 list of Georgia High Performance Principals, and were closest in driving proximity to the researcher's residence. The range of distance from the researcher's home to the schools was from 42 miles to 138 miles. The participants were diverse relative to school setting (elementary, middle, and high), size of school, and gender (two female and one male).

The data were collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with three Georgia high performance principals, reviews of district documents associated with hiring, and observations of the rural environments to answer researcher questions. Data, such as transcribed interviews from audio recordings, were altered as necessary to protect the confidentiality of participants, districts, and schools.

Chapter Five of this research study was used to allow the researcher a forum to reach conclusions about the research, and to summarize implications from the study. The research questions which guided the inquiry and research were:

1. What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals?
2. What hiring practices do principals perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools?
3. What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?
4. What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process?

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 1:

- Common barriers to getting teachers to rural areas included economics and the rural area;
- Rural school principals had little to no formal training on best hiring practices;
- Limited resources were used by rural principals to advertise teacher vacancies;
- Recruitment efforts of rural districts generally involved district level personnel;
- Rural principals utilized word-of-mouth as a means of recruitment;
- Teachers with community ties were reported by principals to be more likely to remain in the rural setting once hired;
- The rural application process is not complex and may be done online through TeachGeorgia, or in hard copy at the local board office;
- Screening of potential applicants was a shared responsibility involving secretaries, coaches, department heads, assistant principals, assistant superintendents, the superintendent, and the principal;

- The rural school interview process varied from involving only the principal, to involving a team of interviewers, including the superintendent;
- Principals indicated the need to market the rural setting during the hiring process;
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- When interview teams were used for interviewing teachers, no formal training occurred;
- When necessary, job-specific questions were formulated for interviews;
- The teacher portfolio was given little credibility by principals as a predictor of future success in the classroom;
- Principals indicated they knew if a person was a fit for the job within five to ten minutes of interviewing by seeing that the applicant was genuine, confident, and had a passion for teaching and a love for students;
- The first impression was a key element to the interview;
- Interviews ended with questions for the interviewer;
- Rural districts required principals to check references of potential hires;
- District level personnel were heavily involved in the interview process;
- Depending upon external resources, such as colleges and nearby metropolitan areas, the applicant pool varied greatly among rural schools;
- Principals indicated essential qualities of a teacher as having a love for children, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills;
- While principals indicated that the hiring process could be refined and improved, there was agreement that each element of the hiring process was essential;

- No common teacher vacancy turnover rates were identified among the rural schools; and,
- District hiring documents were of little help to the rural principals in learning and utilizing best hiring practices.

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 2:

- The school community such as teachers, community members, college professors, and other nearby principals, had involvement in attracting teachers to vacant rural teaching positions;
- Nearby school settings were used to attract potential teachers;
- Principals indicated the importance of selling the benefits of rural life to potential hires;
- Principals indicated the need of screening applicants to ensure applicants were a school fit—someone who would remain in the position once hired; and,
- Documents related to hiring personnel were not helpful to the rural school principals in attracting teachers for vacant positions.

The following research finding was reported for Research Question 3:

- Rural school principals varied in their identification of the most influential hiring practice to select teachers. The elementary principal selected reference checks as most important; the middle school principal selected interviewing as key; and, the high school principal suggested that an adequate candidate pool was most influential.

The following research findings were reported for Research Question 4:

- Rural principals identified the following improvements to the hiring process: giving teachers signing bonuses; holding district-level recruitment fairs to increase the applicant pool; providing training to personnel involved in hiring; and, attending more recruitment fairs at colleges;
- Rural hiring practices have not changed a great deal over the careers of research participants;
- Novice principals should hire the best teachers possible;
- Principals should follow their intuition when hiring and utilize mentors for input; and,
- To hire the best, principals should seek the input of others, be honest, ask difficult questions, and then make the final decision on who to hire.

#### Discussion of Research Findings

The researcher gathered data from three rural high performance Georgia school principals to understand: hiring practices used by rural school principals, what hiring practices principals perceive to be working best to attract teachers; what hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher; and, what rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process. The researcher explored the research questions by analyzing responses of the three rural school principals, reviews of district documents associated with hiring, and observations of the rural environments. The researcher's findings provide current data for hiring practices used by rural school principals for the state of Georgia which was not available. The following discussion of research findings was presented in response to the research questions.

*Role of the Principal, Rural Life and Support*

School principals of rural, impoverished schools face a greater challenge in filling teacher vacancies (*Meeting the Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-staff Schools*, 2007). Research studies by Hare and Heap (2001), Ingersoll (2001), and Voke (2002), indicated that the greatest problem in rural areas involved finding teachers who were fully qualified and willing to teach in rural settings. According to a report, *Status of Education in Rural America: Measuring Rural Education* (2007), teachers in rural public schools were paid lower salaries in 2003-2004 than teaching peers in towns, suburbs, and cities, despite making cost adjustments for geographic regions—which made the role of the administrator in attracting high quality teachers a greater challenge. Georgia rural school principals did not vary from these research studies in that they indicated a growing challenge with attracting highly qualified teachers for vacancies at their schools. The principals in this research study discussed the need of selling rural life to potential hires. The findings of this study support the idea that school principals are faced with offering lower salaries to teachers as the principals market rural life to potential hires.

*What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals?* (Research Question 1)

A distinguishing element of effective recruitment of teachers and their subsequent retention in a rural district was strongly linked to the teacher having roots in the rural community, according to Bornfield, Hall, Hall, and Hoover (1997). Moreover, Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) reported that rural teachers who remained in their teaching positions were believed to do so as a result of fulfillment in the position,

the school, and community, and as a result of money, job benefits, permanence, and the overall ease of rural life. Research findings by Collins (2000) concluded a teacher's decision to remain in a teaching position was greatly related to the teacher's involvement in cultural aspects of the community; consequently, school leaders should select the job role of a new teacher carefully and elicit community support and involvement to alleviate the teacher's feelings of isolation.

Georgia rural school principals identified common barriers to getting teachers to their rural schools. The common two responses from participants in the current research study were money and the area—other districts offered more money to teachers, and the area was simply too small and offered few cultural activities. The Georgia respondents described the need to search for recruits with ties to the community; however, the building principals themselves seldom attended recruitment fairs for the district.

*What Hiring Practices Do Principals Perceive to Be Working Best to Attract High Quality Teachers in Rural Georgia Schools? (Research Question 2)*

Murphy and DeArmond (2003) suggested that school districts ally and collaborate to create regional recruitment agencies; further, these authors reported that out of 110 human resource directors surveyed, 75% preferred across-the-board salary increases as a recruitment strategy. The Georgia school principals in the current study discussed the benefits of collaborating as well—naming current staff members as essential to attracting teachers, and using TeachGeorgia, Georgia's state-wide recruitment tool. Georgia rural principals discussed economic barriers as a challenge, so across-the-board salary increases would benefit their recruitment efforts as well.



Other important elements to promote, suggested authors of a report from The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, *Things to Remember During the Teacher Hiring Season* (2005), are compensation, community, colleagues, and curriculum (4Cs). Georgia's rural school principals discussed the recruitment challenge of compensation being reduced in rural settings. The principals suggested that they must market rural life and limited cultural offerings to potential hires.

Clement (2006) reported that school administrators should develop a checklist to rate applications, and then rate the desired components found on applications prior to the interview. The rural school principals in Georgia described the benefits of screening applications prior to interviewing. The rural respondents indicated a desire to ensure that the potential hires were a proper fit for the school.

According to Murphy, DeArmond, and Guinn (2003), rural school leaders find themselves in schools with reduced per-capita populations, coupled with geographic isolation, which adversely impacts resources such as the number of potential job applicants, financial resources to offer competitive salaries to applicants, and necessary support programs to retain new staff. The Georgia high school principal described having fewer teacher applicants, and social and geographic isolation. The elementary principal respondents, despite a lower population within the rural area, had multiple applicants as a result of a nearby teaching university.

*What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?* (Research Question 3)

Collins (2001) reported that organizational leaders, to achieve success, hire people for appropriate positions within the organization and then ensure that these persons are in

the right position in the organization. Beatty (1994) suggested that employers fully check references to search for confirmation of behavioral tasks observed during the initial stages of the hiring process. According to Georgia rural respondents, the most influential component of the hiring process varies with the school level. Only the elementary school rural respondent indicated reference checks as the most important element to the hiring process.

McConney, Ayres, Hansen, and Cuthbertson (2003), in a study of teacher workforce quality, discovered that principals were more satisfied with the performance of teachers if the principal interviewed and hired the teacher—making the final selection themselves. The Georgia middle school respondent indicated that the interview was the most important part of the hiring process. The respondent reported that the interview allows the principal to get a feel for the person and answers all of your questions about the person.

A study by Dineen, Noe, and Wang (2004) described the screening process as eliminating less desirable candidates from the entire pool of applicants prior to contacting applicants for more in-depth investigations. According to the Georgia high school participant in the current research study, the pool is the most important element of the hiring process. According to the rural principal, having enough good, viable candidates was the most important element in the selection of teachers. According to the respondent, interviews are worthless if the pool does not allow you to choose quality people to interview.

*What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process?* (Research Question 4)

According to Murphy, DeArmond, and Guinn (2003), rural school leaders found themselves in schools with reduced per-capita populations, coupled with geographic isolation, which adversely impact resources such as the number of potential job applicants, financial resources to offer competitive salaries to applicants, and necessary support programs to retain new staff. According to one respondent, the elementary rural principal, one way to improve the hiring process would be to offer signing bonuses, or more pay, which supports DeArmond and Guinn's research findings relative to competitive salaries.

Wendel and Breed (1988) reported that school districts rarely have set protocols for interviewing teachers, which suggested that interviews are generally unstructured and driven by the intuition of untrained interviewers. According to the middle school rural respondent in the current study, one improvement would be to have panel interviews, which would support Wendel and Breed's research relative to set protocols. In concurrence, the high school rural administrator involved in the current study suggested training current personnel on the best hiring practices as a way to improve hiring.

## Conclusions

Conclusions drawn from the results of the study include the following:

1. Georgia rural high performance principals have little formal training on hiring high quality teachers, but rely on mentors to support their role in hiring highly qualified teachers.
2. With an understanding of the need to sell rural life to potential new hires and with an understanding that rural districts afford less competitive salaries, rural school administrators searched for highly qualified teachers who demonstrated a love of children and knowledge of pedagogical skills with heavy reliance on word-of-mouth.
3. Rural school principals understood the benefits of rural life and understood the need to communicate these benefits to potential new hires.
4. Having roots in the rural school community, or having a fondness of rural life, increased the likelihood that a newly hired teacher would remain in the rural area after being hired.
5. The recognition that a teacher has a love of children, content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and a passion for learning is often identified during the first five or ten minutes of the interview, and becomes a critical element of the hiring process.
6. The greater the pool of applicants for a rural teaching position, the greater the opportunity to hire a fit for the rural community, yet rural principals actively recruit for their schools.

7. Rural school principals' beliefs about best practices include increased compensation for teachers in rural areas, district level recruitment fairs, and training personnel on hiring practices.
8. Rural school principals are traditional in their hiring practices in that they do not employ state available resources such as Troops to Teachers, Spouses to Teachers, or TeachAmerica.
9. Rural principals involve central office personnel, such as the superintendent, in hiring teachers for their schools.
10. Documents in the district related to hiring were of little support to rural principals in employing best hiring practices.
11. When the applicant pool was large, the rural principal identified the interview and subsequent reference checks as most influential to the hiring process; when the applicant pool was small, the principal indicated a viable pool of qualified candidates as most influential in hiring the best teacher.
12. The rural school principals suggested that novice principals hire only the best teachers, use their gut intuition, and ask probing questions of potential hires.

#### Implications

The researcher hoped that this research study would add to the body of knowledge relative to hiring practices of rural school principals. Based upon the research findings of the study, considerations should be made of the following:

1. The researcher's findings indicate that economics relative to rural teacher compensation was a significant hiring challenge for school principals. Colleges of education and professional organizations should be interested in the results of

this study to provide courses and professional development opportunities to equip educational leaders with strategies to deal with inadequate funding for rural school districts.

2. Local boards of education, superintendents, colleges of education, and professional organizations should explore opportunities to offer hiring training for educational leaders.

#### Recommendations for Future Study

From the findings of this research study, further studies are warranted related to rural hiring practices:

1. This study should be replicated in other states as the comparative findings may give a clearer understanding of issues associated with hiring highly qualified teachers in rural schools.
2. The researcher's findings were limited to hiring practices of rural high performance Georgia school principals. Further research should be considered involving rural school teachers to determine if teacher perceptions of hiring practices support perceptions of principals.
3. This study should be replicated in several years to determine if any changes have occurred regarding hiring practices used by rural high performance Georgia school principals.
4. Further research to investigate the hiring practices of rural principals who are not in high performance settings would provide an additional level of understanding to practitioners.

5. This study should be expanded in a specific area of education, such as exploring hiring practices of rural high performance elementary school principals.
6. Research on establishing a regional recruitment alliance for rural school districts is worth investigation.

#### Dissemination

Rural Georgia school principals, and those aspiring to the principalship, should have access to the findings of this research study. The participants involved in this research study provided rich, detailed cases of hiring practices used in rural schools in Georgia. The findings of this study would be helpful to other rural school administrators as they face the challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers for teacher vacancies at their schools. Copies of the paper will be on file at the Georgia Southern University Library and will be available electronically through the doctoral dissertations website.

#### Concluding Thoughts

The success of students is largely dependent upon the quality of the classroom teacher. Currently, attrition and retirement rates among teachers, soaring student populations, and political mandates have made the challenge of hiring highly qualified teachers one of the primary responsibilities of school principals. In rural settings, the challenge of filling every vacancy with a quality teacher is even greater. As we prepare tomorrow's school leaders, we must remain cognizant of the need for school principals to not only be aware of hiring challenges, but to be prepared to meet the challenges head-on.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTION PROMPTS

The goal of the first interview phase was to establish the context of the principals' hiring experiences. The first phase of the interview utilized the following prompts:

*General*

1. Personal experiences
2. Administrative aspirations
3. Area
4. District description
5. Hiring challenges
6. Leader success
7. Teacher qualities
8. District positives
9. School positives
10. Hiring training
11. Turnover areas
12. Vacancy identification
13. Vacancy advertisement
14. Apply
15. Application number

The second interview phase afforded the principal an opportunity to elicit details of their own experiences surrounding recruitment, screening, interviewing, and final selection of teachers. The second phase of the interview utilized the following prompts:

*Recruitment*

16. Recruit

17. Principal recruitment
18. Staff recruitment
19. Nearby school
20. Ensure teachers
21. Hard to staff
22. Others being involved
23. Worked best with recruitment

*Screening*

24. Screen applications
25. Important
26. Involvement of others
27. Worked best in screening
28. When to interview

*Interviewing*

29. Interview experience
30. Involvement of others
31. Training of team
32. Formulate questions
33. Portfolios and videos
34. Following interview
35. Looking for
36. End interview
37. Number interviewed

- 38. Hiring decision
- 39. District requirements
- 40. Most important part

*Final Selection*

- 41. Who is involved
- 42. Most value part of process
- 43. Right person
- 44. Step eliminated
- 45. Barriers
- 46. Unique in rural area
- 47. Despite barriers
- 48. Barriers specific to school

The third phase of the interview afforded the principal an opportunity to reflect on the hiring process. The third phase of the interview utilized the following prompts:

*General*

- 49. Improvements at school
- 50. Improvements at district
- 51. Changes observed
- 52. Advice to novice
- 53. Future

APPENDIX B  
RESEARCH QUESTIONS WITH ASSOCIATED  
PROMPTS AND HIRING DOCUMENTS



1. What hiring practices are currently being used by rural high performance Georgia school principals? (Research question 1)
  - a) Hiring challenges (Interview question 5); Recruitment policy documents
  - b) Teacher qualities (Interview question 7); Recruitment policy documents
  - c) Hiring training (Interview question 10)
  - d) Turnover areas (Interview question 11); TeachGeorgia
  - e) Vacancy identification (Interview question 12); TeachGeorgia
  - f) Vacancy advertisement (Interview question 13); TeacherGeorgia; Board hiring policies
  - g) Apply (Interview question 14); District applications
  - h) Application number (Interview question 15)
  - i) Recruit (Interview question 16); Recruitment policy documents
  - j) Principal recruitment (Interview question 17); Recruitment policy documents
  - k) Staff recruitment (Interview question 18); Recruitment policy documents
  - l) Nearby school (Interview question 19); Recruitment policy documents
  - m) Ensure teachers (Interview question 20)
  - n) Hard to staff (Interview question 21); Recruitment Policy Documents

- o) Others being involved (Interview question 22)
- p) Screen applications (Interview question 24); Screening policy documents
- q) Important (Interview question 25)
- r) Involvement of others (Interview question 26)
- s) When to interview (Interview question 28); Screening policy documents
- t) Interview experience (Interview question 29)
- u) Involvement of others (Interview question 30)
- v) Training of team (Interview question 31)
- w) Formulate questions (Interview question 32)
- x) Portfolios and videos (Interview question 33)
- y) Looking for (Interview question 35)
- z) End interview (Interview question 36)
- aa) Number interviewed (Interview question 37)
- bb) District requirements (Interview question 39); Personnel policies
- cc) Step eliminated (Interview question 44)
- dd) Barriers (Interview question 45)
- ee) Unique to rural area (Interview question 46)
- ff) Barriers specific to school (Interview question 48)

2. What hiring practices do principals perceive to be working best to attract high quality teachers in rural Georgia schools? (Research question 2)

- a) Worked best with recruitment (Interview question 23);  
Recruitment Policy Documents
  - b) Worked best with screening (Interview question 27);  
Screening Policy Documents
  - c) Most important part of interview (Interview question 40)
  - d) Most valuable part of process (Interview question 42)
  - e) Despite barriers (Interview question 47)
3. What hiring practices are most influential to the final selection of the teacher?  
(Research question 4)
- a) Who is involved (Interview question 41)
  - b) Most valuable part of process (Interview question 42)
  - c) Right person (Interview question 43)
  - d) Hiring decision (Interview question 38); Personnel policies
  - e) Looking for (Interview question 35)
  - f) Despite barriers (Interview question 47)
4. What do rural principals suggest to improve the hiring process? (Research question 4)
- a) Improvements at school (Interview question 49)
  - b) Improvements at district (Interview question 50)
  - c) Changes observed (Interview question 51)
  - d) Advice to novice (Interview question 52)

To truly understand the full context of the setting and the experiences within the lives of rural principals and to understand hiring practices used, several interview questions posed

by the researcher were related to the principals' personal backgrounds and experiences, and of descriptions of the rural setting. This data was used to provide rich descriptions of the rural school principals and the rural school environments. The researcher utilized the following prompts to gather data relative to principals' personal backgrounds and information relative to the rural settings:

- a) Personal experiences (Interview question 1)
- b) Administrative aspirations (Interview question 2)
- c) Area (Interview question 3)
- d) District description (Interview question 4)
- e) Leader success (Interview question 6)
- f) Teacher qualities (Interview question 7)
- g) District positives (Interview question 8)
- h) School positives (Interview question 9)
- i) Future (Interview question 53)
- j) All district hiring policy documents

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-681-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-681-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Steven D. Rhodes  
1937 Lake Drive  
Thomson, Georgia 30824

Barbara Mallory  
P.O. Box 8131

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Associate Vice President for Research

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

**Date:** March 4, 2008

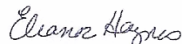
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H08181** and titled "**An Examination of Practices Used by Rural Georgia School Principals in Hiring Highly Qualified Teachers**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

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

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

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX D  
COVER LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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**DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT**

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**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

Dear Principal,

My name is Steven Rhodes and I am the principal of R.L. Norris Elementary School in Thomson, Georgia. I am currently working on my doctorate in Educational Leadership from Georgia Southern University and would greatly appreciate your assistance.

The purpose of my research study is to understand hiring practices used by elementary, middle, and high school principals in high performance rural Georgia schools. Currently, all research findings on rural hiring practices are based on national and regional studies. There is no data available specifically to the state of Georgia. The research study will provide an understanding of current hiring practices used by rural Georgia school principals in hiring highly qualified teachers.

I am asking that you sign the Informed Consent Letter and return the document to me using the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Following receipt of your signed Informed Consent Letter, I will call to schedule an appointment with you to conduct a research interview. On the day of the interview, I will collect data from two sources—an interview with the school principal and a review of district policy and protocol documents relative to recruiting, screening, interviewing, and the final selection of teachers.

Several groups within the state of Georgia will benefit from your participation in this research study. These groups will include current and aspiring school principals, local boards of education, institutions of higher learning, and professional educational organizations. Further, the findings could have policy implications for human resource directors who seek to improve the hiring process in Georgia school districts.

The researcher's findings will allow current and aspiring principals, local boards of education, institutions of higher learning, and professional educational organizations an understanding of hiring practices used by elementary, middle, and high school principals in high performance rural Georgia schools.

There will be minimum risks for participating within this study, no greater risks than encountered in everyday life. The risks for participating involve confidentiality due to the collection of data related to hiring practices used in your school district. Your participation during the study should last no more than one and one-half hours. After receiving the collected research data, I ensure your confidentiality by storing the data, to include audio tapes, in a locked cabinet in my home and by destroying the collected data, to include audio tapes, upon completion of the research study—which will be no later



than August, 2008. No one other than the researcher will have access to the collected data. If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be written. There is no penalty if you decide not to participate in this research study. You can end your participation at any time by contacting the researcher. In addition, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this research study. If you have any questions or would like a copy of the completed research study, please email me at [rhodess@mcduffie.k12.ga.us](mailto:rhodess@mcduffie.k12.ga.us) or call 706-986-4610. To contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs for answers to questions about the rights of research participants please email [oversight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:oversight@georgiasouthern.edu) or call (912) 681-0843.

Title of Project: An Examination of Practices Used by Rural Georgia School Principals in Hiring Highly Qualified Teachers

Investigator: Steven D. Rhodes, 1937 Lake Drive, Thomson, Georgia 30824,  
706-597-8268 (Home) 706-986-4610 (Work) [rhodess@mcduffie.k12.ga.us](mailto:rhodess@mcduffie.k12.ga.us)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Barbara Mallory, P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, Georgia 30460,  
912-871-1428 [bmallory@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:bmallory@georgiasouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

Table I

*Profiles of Participants*

Donna	C	F	6	17	8	341	R
Janis	C	F	6	24	9	1300	R
Andy	C	M	6	29	5	470	R
Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Degree	Years of Education Experience	Years of Principal Experience	School Size	School Location

Ethnicity of Respondent      C indicates Caucasian

Degree of Respondent      6 indicates Education Specialist

School Location      R indicates Rural

Table II

*School Demographics*

Location/Poverty Level/Size	N=3	Percentage
Location		
Rural	3	100.00%
Urban	0	00.00
Suburban	0	00.00
Percentage of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Meals		
65-70	1	33.33%
71-75	1	33.33
76-80	1	33.33
Student Enrollment		
0-350	1	33.33%
351-700	1	33.33
701-1050	0	00.00
1051-1400	1	33.33

APPENDIX F

EXAMPLE OF HIRING DOCUMENTS FROM RURAL DISTRICT

**RECRUITMENT****GDC****03/01/88****Revised: 07/07/92****Reviewed: 10/07/97; 08/01/06****Revised: 08/02/88**

It shall be the policy of the Board of Education to actively recruit and select the best qualified individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, handicap, or disability.

All job announcements must comply with state and local requirements and procedures.

**Legal Ref.: O.C.G.A. 20-2-211(d)****Cross Ref.: GBC, CBC**

**PERSONNEL HIRING****GDD****10/03/78****Reviewed: 07/06/93; 07/14/98; 07/10/03**

All school system personnel must be employed by the Board of Education on the recommendation of the Superintendent.

If a position needs to be filled in the interim between Board of Education meetings, the Superintendent may fill the position, subject to the approval of the Board at its next meeting.

**Ref.: O.C.G.A. 20-2-211, as amended 1987****Cross Ref.: GBD, GCD**