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Andrea D. Beesley

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Kim Atwill

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Pamela Blair

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Zoe A. Barley

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

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Cover Page Footnote

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This study sought to identify differences in strategies used for teacher recruitment and retention by successful and non-successful rural high schools. According to data from the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), small towns and rural areas in the central U.S. states did have relatively more difficulty in recruiting teachers than did larger communities. However, when the successful and unsuccessful school districts were compared on the strategies and benefits included in the SASS, the only difference was with signing bonuses, which were offered significantly more often in the unsuccessful group than the successful group. The researchers also interviewed seven principals identified as successful by their state agencies. Their responses also revealed minimal reliance on the strategies addressed in the SASS. However, there was some alignment between many of the strategies they did use and the three approaches investigated in previous research: grow-your-own, using federal funding opportunities, and using targeted incentives.

One of the underlying tenets of *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) is that students learn more effectively and efficiently in classrooms taught by highly qualified teachers. This increased focus on teacher quality has emphasized the need for effective teacher recruitment and retention, both nationally and regionally. In successful *recruitment*, certified teachers accept teaching positions; in successful *retention*, teachers not only stay in the profession but remain at one location for an extended period of time. Teacher recruiting and retention seem to be related; analyses of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) have consistently shown a high correlation between difficulties with recruiting and with retention, meaning that schools reporting recruiting difficulties are nearly twice as likely to have above-average turnover rates as well (Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006).

Recruiting and Retaining Faculty Present Challenges to Rural High Schools

While many schools have been struggling to meet the highly qualified teacher component of NCLB, the need to attract and retain teachers presents unique challenges to rural districts in particular (Elfers & Plecki, 2006). Although national-level data revealed that rural schools had a lower

teacher turnover rate (14.0%) than urban (15.2%) and suburban (15.6%) schools (Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens et al., 2004) and a lower percentage of teaching vacancies (66.6% compared to 71.9% for all public schools), these vacancies may negatively impact a small or rural school more than a larger school. According to the SASS data, rural high schools average nearly half as many full-time teachers per school as compared to schools in larger, less isolated communities (27.6 teachers, as compared to 47.7 for urban fringe and 53.8 for large/mid-size city). If a math teacher leaves, for example, there may be no math department until another teacher is hired.

Rural schools experience many of the same challenges as urban schools, such as high concentrations of children in poverty, but often face additional obstacles to teacher recruitment and retention. These include lower salaries, small school population, and remote locations, which can serve to further hinder the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995). In fact, in acknowledgement that the standard teacher-quality reforms enacted by NCLB were not easily achieved in rural schools, a 2004 amendment to NCLB gave rural teachers who are highly qualified in at least one subject area three additional years to become highly qualified in the other subjects they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Although teacher recruitment and retention have always been a challenge, NCLB's *highly qualified* teacher mandate has increased qualification requirements so that multi-subject teaching positions common to small rural schools demand more teacher training than typical single-subject positions, effectively creating disincentives to teach in small rural schools. A theoretical argument has been made that this, in turn, has made recruitment and retention more challenging for small rural schools and districts throughout the nation (Reeves, 2003).

In small rural schools, it is common for a single teacher to be responsible for a broad discipline in its entirety and therefore required to teach multiple subjects, regardless of certification (e.g., a science teacher may teach physics, chemistry, and biology but may only be certified in one of these subjects). Barrow & Burchett (2000) surveyed Missouri science teachers and found that 49% had more than four course preparations, and that 29.9% were not certified in at least one of the courses they were teaching. Given the multiple subject areas often required of rural teachers, finding teacher candidates that are highly qualified in each subject to be taught is, and will continue to be, a challenge. As a case in point, a recent survey of all 331 Minnesota school districts found that, compared to non-rural teachers, nearly twice as many rural teachers were teaching out of their field of licensure or under a waiver (Lazarus, 2003). Similarly, Ingersoll (2003) studied the teacher quality issue from the perspective of teachers that were teaching out-of-field—teachers assigned to teach subjects for which they were not certified. This study reported on a decade of work on out-of-field teaching utilizing four cycles of the SASS data. Despite national and local reforms to reduce out-of-field teaching, Ingersoll found a slight increase in its occurrence. He pointed out that securing a qualified teaching staff was more difficult for rural districts with smaller faculties where teaching multiple subjects was common.

The difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers is particularly acute for rural schools that were also small. At the national level, Ingersoll & Rossi (1995; see also Boe, et al., 1997) found that school size was a significant factor in retention; in fact, schools with fewer than 300 students had higher turnover rates than those with 300 students or more. The most recent SASS survey results also substantiate the negative relationship between school size and teacher recruitment, as a higher percentage of small rural schools (less than 200 students) reported that filling teaching vacancies was either "very difficult" or they were "not able to fill," compared to the percentage reported by all public schools (Strizek, et al., 2006).

The Central Region Is Intensely Rural

The Central Region of the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program (Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Missouri) is

home to a large percentage of the nation's rural students. While national data shows that a little over one-fifth of U.S. student attend rural schools, more than one fourth (26.6%) of the Central Region's students go to rural schools (Johnson & Strange, 2005; Provasnik et al., 2007). Further, one-half to three-fourths of Central Region schools are located in rural locales. The percentage of public schools in rural areas for five of the seven states in the region is among the top eleven highest in the nation: South Dakota (1st, 78%), North Dakota (3rd, 72%), Nebraska (6th, 60%), Wyoming (9th, 53%), and Kansas (11th, 50%; Johnson & Strange, 2005).

The impact of school size on recruitment and retention is especially relevant to the Central Region, where both *rural* and *small* schools are common. In fact, the Central Region includes the two states with the highest percentage of public school students attending *small rural* schools: North Dakota (41.3%) and South Dakota (39.1%; Johnson & Strange, 2005).

Although the recruitment and retention challenges that affect the nation also affect the Central Region, there have been no studies of teacher recruitment and retention targeted to the region's high percentage of rural settings to confirm whether the challenges identified in national trends exist at the regional or local level. National reports do not provide disaggregated teacher recruitment or retention rates at local levels, nor do they provide detailed information regarding successful strategies for recruiting and retaining rural teachers (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens, et al., 2004; Strizek, et al., 2006).

In response, this study investigated recruitment and retention approaches among rural high schools in the Central Region. First, we provide an analysis of teacher recruitment and retention rates in the Central Region from 2003-2004 SASS data, disaggregated by locale codes (e.g., large/mid-size city, urban fringe/large town, small town, rural, and isolated rural), school size, and subject area. We then identify groups of rural high schools in the Central Region that, based on the SASS data, were either successful or unsuccessful in 2003-2004 in hiring teachers for vacant positions, and we compare the two groups on the recruiting strategies and benefits reported in the SASS District Questionnaire. Finally, we describe a sample of rural principals' perceptions about their success in teacher recruitment and retention.

Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Areas

While researchers have investigated rural teacher recruitment and retention, there is limited empirical research on what strategies are best for recruiting and retaining teachers, especially research that is rural-specific (Allen, 2005; Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005; Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005). Hare and Nathan (1999) conducted one of the few empirical studies

investigating issues of recruitment and retention that included data on the success of strategies utilized. They surveyed all 1,583 principals in Minnesota's public school system. Principals at small rural schools utilized three common strategies to fill high needs positions: alternative licensure, training paraprofessionals, and placement above entry on salary scale. This survey also included a question asking the principals to rate the success potential for several additional strategies. The principals of small rural schools agreed or strongly agreed to the potential benefits of scholarships and/or loan forgiveness for students willing to teach in high needs areas, funding for mentorship programs, and early recruitment programs.

More recently, the Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2004) surveyed rural and non-rural superintendents about strategies used in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Significantly fewer superintendents from small rural districts (28%) established partnerships with higher education institutions, as compared to those in larger rural districts (48%); further, fewer superintendents from small rural districts encouraged paraprofessionals to complete the coursework required to achieve certification (45% for small rural and 69% for large rural). Several of the small rural school superintendents remarked in follow-up interviews that the travel distances reduced the potential efficacy of these strategies.

The findings of this research, and of extant research reviews promising strategies for recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, can be aggregated into three approaches: *grow-your-own* teachers, use *targeted incentives* in recruiting, and maximize *federal funding opportunities*.

Grow-Your-Own

This approach refers to training local people who are most likely to return to the area and fill a need. Some examples of this approach include: a) providing additional training to local paraprofessionals; b) retraining service-oriented people (e.g., military and Peace Corps); and c) partnering with teacher preparation programs (Crews, 2002) and institutions of higher education to provide alternative access to coursework. In 2000, Clewell, Darke, Davis-Google, Forcier, and Manes created a summary report for the Department of Education Planning and Evaluation Service of various recruitment and retention strategies utilized in school districts throughout the U.S. Results from four programs with sufficient evaluative information reflect what other empirical research has consistently found: there is a strong positive correlation between location of current teaching position and location of hometown, high school or college (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Boylan, et al., 1993; Davis, 2002; Monk, 2007; Yeager, Marshall, & Madsen, 2003). These studies also reveal that those who enjoyed their rural lifestyle as children and young adults value the benefits smaller rural schools and communities

offer: strong student-teacher relationships, fewer discipline problems, increased individual instruction, increased parental involvement, and lack of crime.

Targeted Incentives

This approach includes overlapping strategies: salary increases and scholarship programs, as well as location-specific incentives (affordable housing, transportation, and access to professional development). For support, see Ingersoll, 2001; for opposition, see Holloway, 2002. Critical to the understanding of targeted incentives, particularly increased salary, is that while research has consistently shown that salary increases prolong teachers' tenure in the field, adequate salary is necessary but not sufficient for teacher retention. Evaluating the teacher incentives program utilized in two school districts, Heneman (1998) and Heneman and Milanowski (1999) found that while monetary incentives were valued by teachers, feeling empowered that they could make a difference in children's lives was a more powerful motivator.

Maximizing Federal Funding Opportunities

This approach supports the two previously mentioned approaches by using additional funding available to rural schools to address the provisions of NCLB. For example, some small rural schools reported using Title I funds to pay for teacher professional development (GAO, 2004). Title II funds have been used to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in rural districts as well. In addition, some rural schools have used Title VIII funds to cover tuition costs for paraprofessionals seeking teacher certification. One more recently approved source of supplemental funding for rural schools was implemented in 2004, the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP). The rural administrators surveyed by the GAO reported using REAP funds to help teachers and paraprofessionals meet the highly qualified teacher provision of NCLB, and also to recruit highly qualified teachers (an additional source of incentive funds discussed above). Another federal program was created in conjunction with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the E-Rate program. Rural districts reported using E-Rate funds to support the creation of distance learning opportunities for teachers and students—teachers to meet the requirements of the *highly qualified* teacher component of NCLB and students to be provided advanced high school coursework options.

In addition to these three approaches, researchers have also recently studied comprehensive and on-going teacher induction programs (Harris, Holdman, Clark, & Harris, 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) and their relationship to teacher retention. Typical induction programs pair a new teacher with an experienced mentor, and include extended planning time, mentor coaching, and social activities to establish and enhance new employees' connectedness. The

studies of induction programs conducted in non-rural schools have uniformly reported induction as successful in retaining new teachers when the mentor teaches the same subject (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). A recent study evaluating the success of an induction program introduced to both rural and non-rural schools reported similar results, even though more of the rural teachers moved to a different district after the first year (Harris, Holdman, Clark, & Harris, 2005). The researchers hypothesized that this increase was a result of teacher-mentor mismatch—rural first-year teachers were more likely to be mentored by teachers from different subject areas or grade levels. Results from the 2003-2004 SASS reveal that, compared to non-rural teachers, a smaller percentage of rural teachers reported involvement in an induction program during their first year of teaching (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). The value of induction programs to support new teachers' transitions into the ethos of the rural education system and community has yet to be documented.

Methods

This study is descriptive in nature. Through the analysis of SASS data, supplemented with seven interviews of principals from schools who have been successful in recruiting and retaining teachers, the study describes ways in which rural high schools in the Central Region have attempted to recruit and retain teachers. The project included the following phases: (1) a descriptive analysis of the SASS data on recruiting for rural and non-rural locales in the Central Region; (2) categorizing rural high schools into two groups based on their success or lack of success in recruiting and retaining teachers and then comparing the groups on indicators of recruiting strategies and benefits included in the SASS data; (3) follow-up telephone interviews with principals from seven schools who reported being successful in rural teacher recruitment and retention.

Phase One

To clarify the issues related to recruiting and retaining teachers in the Central Region, a descriptive analysis was conducted using the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS). The SASS and the associated Teacher Follow-up Surveys (TFS) are the largest and most comprehensive data sets available on the staffing, occupational, and organizational characteristics of schools. In Phase One, the School Questionnaire data on ease of filling teaching vacancies (Item 38b) was analyzed. The comparisons were between means calculated for all public high or combined (K-12, 7-12) schools in the Central Region and these same Central Region schools disaggregated by locale and by school size. This data has not been presented elsewhere at the regional or national level.

As presented in the review of existing research, we categorized the strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers into three approaches. While not developed for this purpose, some SASS items do reflect the strategies that form the underpinnings of these approaches. Responses to SASS School District Questionnaire items 14a, c-d (signing bonuses, relocation assistance, and finder's fee) and 28a-d, g, and h (medical, dental, and life insurance; retirement plan; and subsidized housing, meals, and transportation) reflect strategies that administrators utilize to support a *targeted incentive* approach. Responses to SASS School District Questionnaire items 14b (student loan forgiveness) and 28e (tuition reimbursement) can be categorized as strategies administrators utilize to support either a *grow-your-own* and/or *maximize federal funding opportunities* approach (for example, administrators can use federal REAP dollars to fund teacher certification coursework for aides). For the current study, these items were placed in both categories for analysis.

Phase Two

In order to form the groups of high schools that had either been successful or unsuccessful with teacher recruiting and retention, we first obtained the restricted data set of the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey, which included information on 88,113 schools and 43,244 teachers. From the complete data set, teachers in rural (locale codes 7 and 8) high and combined schools in Central Region states (1454 teachers in 280 schools) were selected from the Teacher Questionnaire, and their survey data was matched to their schools in the School Questionnaire. Schools that had reported teacher vacancies that year ($n = 210$) were identified. Those that were not able to fill the vacancy or reported that they had managed the vacancy by means other than hiring a teacher were placed in the unsuccessful group. All others were coded successful because they had been able to hire teachers to fill their vacancies.

To ensure that schools in both groups were employing highly qualified teachers, a variable from the Teacher Questionnaire was created for each teacher describing whether or not they held a certification for the subject(s) they were teaching (the best measure available for *highly qualified*). Schools were then ranked within their groups according to their proportion of teachers certified in-area. The schools in the bottom quartile in both the successful and unsuccessful groups were eliminated from the study, leaving 158 schools. By including only those schools in both groups that had some portion of qualified teachers, the comparison could focus primarily on teacher recruitment and retention of fully qualified teachers.

Next, a variable was created to capture teacher retention for each school, based on the number of years the participating teachers had reported teaching there. Previous research has consistently shown a high positive correlation between difficulties with recruiting and with retention

(Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens et al., 2004; Strizek et al., 2006). Therefore, the current study sought to create two disparate groups: one with schools *successful* in both recruiting and retaining teachers, and one with schools *unsuccessful* in both recruiting and retaining teachers. In order to maximize the contrasts that could be found in the planned group comparisons, median splits were conducted such that the lower-retention schools were excluded from the successful recruiting group, and higher-retention schools were dropped

from the unsuccessful recruiting group. This left schools ranking in the top 50 percent on retention in the successful group, and schools ranking in the bottom 50 percent on retention in the unsuccessful group. Therefore, the final two groups were: 1) successful recruitment AND successful retention (275 teachers from 51 schools) and 2) unsuccessful recruitment AND unsuccessful retention (157 teachers from 29 schools). See Table 1 for a state breakdown of the districts included.

Table 1

Districts from SASS Data Represented in Analysis

	<u>Successful districts</u>			<u>Unsuccessful districts</u>		
	<u>Locale 7</u>	<u>Locale 8</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Locale 7</u>	<u>Locale 8</u>	<u>Total</u>
Colorado	4	0	4	1	0	1
Kansas	4	2	6	2	0	2
Missouri	2	0	2	2	0	2
Nebraska	10	0	10	4	0	4
N. Dakota	9	0	9	5	0	5
S. Dakota	9	3	12	2	2	4
Wyoming	4	0	4	4	1	5

The successful and unsuccessful school districts were compared on the SASS School District Questionnaire items that aligned with the three approaches to recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. Chi-square tests of association were utilized to determine whether the two groups differed in using recruiting and retention strategies addressed in the SASS.

Phase Three

Interviews with rural high school principals were then conducted to obtain descriptive information from schools that have been successful at recruiting and retaining teachers. As we were not allowed to re-contact the principals in the SASS restricted data sample, we contacted state education administrators who would be familiar with rural teacher recruitment and retention in high schools in their state. These state-level administrators were contacted via e-mail and/or phone and were asked to nominate five rural high or combined (7-12) schools each would consider to be consistently successful in recruiting and retaining teachers. These lists were obtained in six of the seven states, and researchers attempted a contact with one principal in each state from the list selecting the initial principal and

subsequent attempts in random order until an interview was completed for that state.¹ After the interview was complete, the researcher started with the list for the next state. In the seventh state, online database information from the state education agency was used to identify seven rural high schools with high teacher retention, and then the principal was contacted by telephone in the same way as in the other states. The seven interviews were conducted in November and December, 2007.

The principals were asked the same questions by one researcher in each structured interview regarding 1) their use of the strategies and benefits addressed in the SASS questionnaires, 2) their own recruiting strategies, 3) their beliefs about factors affecting secondary teacher retention in their district, and 4) their perceptions of reasons for success. Based on information in the review of literature, the principals were also asked whether their school offered a new teacher induction program and whether they considered themselves to be in an isolated location.

The descriptive information collected in the interviews and the principals' responses to the questions reflecting the 12 SASS strategies and benefits were tabulated in a spreadsheet by a different researcher. The principals' responses to open-ended questions about success with

recruitment and retention were examined, and four categories emerged: recruitment strategies, retention strategies, school and district factors, and community factors. The principals' responses to the open-ended question about isolation made up another category. Individual statements from each principal interview were organized under the five category headings. All of the statements fell into at least one of the categories. Once the statements were categorized, the researchers looked for commonalities among the statements placed in each category. For example, one principal said he was able to recruit his own former students, another said that students come back to teach there since "it's home," and a third said that two of five new hires were former students. Therefore, three principals were considered to recruit, in part, by attracting back their own former students. The information in each category was summarized in this way by emphasizing topics mentioned by more than one principal.

Results

The findings begin with a descriptive analysis of SASS data on recruiting in different locales in the Central Region, then describe the results of dividing the schools into successful and unsuccessful groups and comparing them on strategies and benefits, and then present the outcomes of the follow-up principal interviews.

Phase One

For the schools in large or mid-size cities, recruiting difficulties were found primarily in special education, while schools in urban fringe areas and large towns reported difficulties with English/language arts (although the percentage reporting those recruiting problems was small at 13.2%). However, schools in small towns reported having recruiting trouble with all subjects except for music, and the two rural locales (locale codes 7 and 8) together reported recruiting difficulties in all subjects except vocational/technical education and special education. Also, in the two rural locales, smaller schools had more recruiting difficulty than larger schools, with small isolated schools (fewer than 200 students, outside CBSA) reporting the greatest recruiting difficulties. Therefore, rural schools and small towns, particularly small rural schools, did report greater recruiting difficulties than did other locations.

Phase Two

Chi-square tests of association were conducted on School District Questionnaire items 14a-d and on items 28a-h. There was a different pattern of response between successful and unsuccessful schools on Item 14a, signing bonuses—significantly more unsuccessful locations reported giving signing bonuses, $\chi^2(1) = 9.85, p < .01$. Responses were not significantly different for Items 14b (loan forgiveness) or

14c (relocation assistance). For Item 14d (finder's fee), all respondents from both groups answered "no" to the item, so no chi-square result was produced. Responses to School District Questionnaire Items 28a-28h were not significantly different between the groups for any of the items, indicating that benefits offered were not related to schools' success in recruiting and retaining teachers as measured by these surveys. Of the three approaches (grow-your-own, targeted incentives, and using federal funding opportunities) to recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers results from relevant SASS items revealed that the rural school districts in this sample were seldom using any of these approaches. When they were, the only difference between the two groups was that the unsuccessful group was using one targeted incentive (signing bonuses) more than the successful group. Given these results, the interviews with the principals became a valuable source of detail and insight.

Phase Three

The seven principals were not a representative sample but were identified in order to provide descriptive material about rural recruitment and retention. The seven interviewed principals had faculties ranging from 10 to 33, with a mean of 23.3 ($SD = 7.8$). Vacancies for the 2007-2008 school year ranged from zero to six. The vacancies occurred in various subject areas: mathematics, computer technology, language arts/English, science, music/band, art, agriculture, counseling, social studies, and business. The most common causes for the vacancies were retirement ($n = 4$) and leaving for another position in the same school or district ($n = 4$). In this sample of schools successful in recruiting, all of the vacancies were filled, although three principals reported that mathematics and science vacancies were the most difficult. Three of the seven schools had one teacher, a new hire for that year, who was not yet highly qualified in the subject they taught: one each in music, art, and business.

Six of the twelve strategies captured in the SASS surveys were not used by these principals: 1) signing bonuses, 2) relocation assistance, 3) a finder's fee for new teacher referrals, or subsidies for 4) housing, 5) meals, or 6) transportation. With reference to the *grow-your-own* and *use of federal funding* approaches, all but one principal mentioned that teachers had access through federal funding to training at no cost to become highly qualified; four schools also offered tuition reimbursement for courses beyond those strictly necessary to become highly qualified. The three principals who mentioned student loan forgiveness said that it was offered through a Department of Education program because their school qualified as high-poverty. With reference to the *targeted incentives* approach, the four principals reporting generous insurance benefits and three principals reporting generous retirement benefits said that their districts covered more of the costs of these benefits than did other districts in their state. Although few of the

principals mentioned using half of the recruiting strategies addressed in the SASS, some principals were aware that other schools did use those techniques out of necessity. One principal said, "In my last school, they had signing bonuses and they paid for your tuition, up to \$45 a credit hour....We don't have to do that here because we aren't that desperate yet."

Although several of the schools did use the strategies and offer the benefits addressed in the SASS School District Questionnaire, none of the principals perceived that their success in teacher recruiting and retention was related to any of these aforementioned strategies. In response to this, principals were then asked to describe their recruiting and retention strategies, and explain the other factors that they perceived were helpful to their success. Two over-riding themes appeared in the principals' open responses: targeting teachers from rural areas and promoting the school and community assets.

Recruiting Teachers from Rural Areas

The principals described hiring practices focusing on developing and hiring teachers who are from rural areas, as they would be more likely to accept the job and then stay at the school. Specifically, six out of seven principals reported recruiting teachers who were from their surrounding community or a similar rural area, and thus would be comfortable in the rural school setting. Three of those six principals also mentioned hiring their own graduates, although only one said that he specifically recruited former students in cases where positions were hard to fill. One advertised locally for teacher candidates with the needed subject-area degree but no teaching certificate. He then hired the most promising applicants and used NCLB funding to offset the tuition expenses of attending a nearby university to complete coursework to obtain the necessary credential.

Recruiting by Promoting School and Community Assets

All seven of the principals, responding to open-ended questions, mentioned telling recruits about the positive characteristics inherent to their school, district, and state that made their schools attractive places to teach. Some examples were emphasizing to recruits that their teachers experience less stress than those in larger districts due to small class sizes and fewer meetings, and that their schools had very few discipline problems because parents were supportive and believed their children should be well-behaved. Other examples involved financial benefits: one school had a trust available to make grants to teachers to do educational innovations, as well as a trust to help students pay for college, while another school was in a district that was among the highest-paying in the state. Five of the principals mentioned that they promoted local assets such as a pleasant community, or a location near a desirable part of

the state or near a university. One principal reported promoting school assets to recruits by having teachers and students participate in on-site interviews, in order to show the positive school atmosphere to interested applicants. These school and community assets were thought to attract new teachers to the school as well as encourage them to stay.

Induction Programs for New Teachers

The team also asked about new teacher induction, as it has been linked to teacher retention. When asked, six of the seven principals said that their school or district offered new teacher induction, although not all of them said that they perceived new teacher induction as specifically helping with retention. Most said that their induction program includes a formal mentor relationship with an experienced teacher; new teachers also receive an additional stipend at the beginning and middle of the first year. Some mentioned more informal peer teacher supervision, such as asking nearby teachers to watch over new teachers. The principals monitored new teachers by walking past classrooms to verify that the children were learning and that the teachers were managing the classroom, and also by talking to students about their learning. One principal mentioned that when he learns of a teacher having difficulties, he recommends that the teacher observe classrooms in other schools to increase instructional expertise.

Overcoming Isolation

Community isolation has been previously linked to recruitment difficulty, so the team asked whether the principals considered their location isolated. Five of the seven principals answered yes, with one asking "Do you consider the edge of the Earth isolated, or what?" Three said that they were at least an hour from a town where there was shopping, and two were also far from the district office and the nearest other school in the district—from 25 to 48 miles away. Two were at least 40 miles from the nearest large highway. One principal said that the area was so sparsely populated that "Unless you're a duck or a goose, you're probably isolated." The areas around the schools tended to be either open farmland or rangeland or have a few businesses, such as a sandwich shop and gas station. Although isolated location has been linked to difficulties with teacher recruitment and retention (Strizek et al., 2006), these five principals found success, they believed, because their teachers were either from the area or enjoyed the isolated setting.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is that the 2003-2004 SASS includes only one year of data, so the "successful" versus "unsuccessful" designations established in this study may

not accurately characterize the schools' performance over time. Also, schools reporting no vacancies for this year were not included in the analysis, which may have suppressed some "successful" schools whose turnover (and thus need for recruiting) was low due to high teacher retention. In addition, the SASS Questionnaires included very limited information about teacher retention, so the retention variable was created from the longevity information of the teachers in each school, even though fewer than six teachers, on average, were surveyed in each school.

The strategies the researchers identified from the SASS analysis, while perhaps contributing to success in recruitment and retention, cannot be said to *cause* school or district successes in recruitment and retention. The principals' descriptions of their recruiting and retention strategies are their perceptions regarding a relationship with success, not based on evidence of a causal relationship. The seven are not a representative sample of rural high school principals and findings from the interviews cannot be generalized to other rural high schools. However, they were included in the study to provide descriptive material and to suggest areas for further study.

Conclusions

According to the data generated by the 2003-2004 SASS Questionnaires, small towns and rural areas in the Central Region did in fact have relatively more difficulty in recruiting teachers than did larger communities. Therefore, rural principals and district administrators are in need of strategies for teacher recruitment and retention. However, when the successful and unsuccessful school districts were compared on the strategies and benefits included in the SASS, the results showed very little difference between the two groups. The only difference was with signing bonuses, which were reported as being offered significantly more often in the unsuccessful group than the successful group. Within the limitations of this one-year look, therefore, neither signing bonuses nor any of the other strategies and benefits examined in this large national data set would seem to lead to successful recruiting.

The responses of the seven interviewed principals were congruent with the outcome of the group comparisons in that they also did not report relying on many of the strategies and benefits addressed in the SASS. All of the principals denied using six of the strategies/benefits (signing bonuses, relocation assistance, finder's fees, or subsidized housing, transportation, or meals). However, there was some alignment between many of the approaches they did use and the three approaches investigated in previous research. Their *grow-your-own* approach involved hiring graduates or other people from the general area who would be comfortable in the rural environment; they focused more on turning rural residents into teachers, rather than turning teachers into rural residents. Their use of *federal funding opportunities* was related to *grow-your-own* in that they used federal money to

enable new and current teachers to become highly qualified. These principals also utilized *targeted incentives* such as higher pay or grant opportunities. Beyond the three approaches synthesized from previous research, the principals of rural school also made a strategic point of promoting to applicants the assets of their particular school or community, such as small class sizes, few discipline problems, a desirable (if often isolated) location,

While overall the approaches for recruiting and retention were in line with those found in previous research, rural principals' unique implementation of the strategies to support the approaches may not have been adequately captured in the SASS data, as they were perceived by the interviewed principals to be minimally responsible for success. It may be that the existing rural-specific challenges in teacher recruitment and retention are most successfully addressed with rural-specific solutions.

Content Footnotes

¹ We chose to complete only one interview per state in order to stay under nine, the limit beyond which OMB (Office of Management and Budget) approval must be sought.

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