The Rural Educator

Volume 34 | Number 2 Article 2

3-15-2013

If We Get You, How Can We Keep You? Problems with Recruiting and Retaining Rural Administrators

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Problems with Recruiting and Retaining Rural Administrators

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The focus on instructional leadership has reached a crescendo with the waivers for No Child Left Behind (2002). The leadership of the principal is known to be a key factor in supporting student achievement; however, recruitment and retention of administrators in rural areas of the Midwest is very difficult. This survey research study explored the recruitment and retention strategies, as well as factors influencing the loss or retention of quality administrators reported by Midwest superintendents. The themes that emerged as successful recruitment strategies included 'growing your own' as the number one method of recruiting and retaining rural school administrators, salaries/benefits depending on location, emphasizing positive working conditions and climate/culture, and providing quality professional development. Retention strategies that worked well for rural schools were an emphasis on a positive school culture and climate, investment in professional development, and use of technology for mentoring along with increased benefits.

Key Words: Rural administrator, rural recruitment strategies, rural retention strategies, instructional leadership, grow your own.

The school principal plays a central role in education. This person is seen as a building manager, administrator, politician, change agent, and instructional leader. During the recent past, the most sought-after type of principal is an instructional leader who can create an atmosphere focused on teaching and learning to improve student achievement. According to Supovitz, Sirinides, & May (2010), research on the influence of the school principal on student achievement spans over 40 years, and as reported by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), "[t]he data from our meta-analysis demonstrates that there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement" (p.3). In 2006, the Wallace Foundation report highlighted the connection between achievement and instructional leadership by saying,

> behind excellent teaching and excellent schools is excellent leadership—the kind that ensures that effective teaching practices don't remain isolated and unshared in single classrooms…with our national commitment to make every single child a successful learner, the importance of having such a high-quality leader in every school is greater than ever. (p. 3)

According to Van Roekel (2008), principals shape the environment for teaching and learning by creating vibrant learning communities where collaboration among the adults helps every student fulfill his or her potential. Not only have studies considered the role of the principal important, but the requirements of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2001) have linked principals' instructional leadership skills to academic achievement (National Education Association, 2008).

With principal accountability in the area of student achievement ever increasing, it is crucial principals lead schools in directions that positively impact student achievement. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated, given the perceived importance of leadership, "it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition of an effective school" (p. 5). Considering the importance of the role of the principal, the selection of effective school principals is extremely relevant to schools' success because districts are currently evaluated on student achievement. Therefore, it is not only a matter of the selection of effective principals; rather it is the retention of effective principals who can articulate a vision that will engage teachers, parents, the district,

and the larger community in the long term. Through administrative retention and school success, on-going student achievement can be better ensured. However,

> throughout the Western world, fallout from the standards/standardization agenda has resulted in potential leaders questioning educational leadership as a career path. Moreover, the aging of the baby boom generation has created a shortage of qualified principals in many educational jurisdictions. (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 62)

According to Young, Petersen, and Short (2002), filling vacant principalships has become problematic because the pool of candidates is growing smaller. Over the next few decades, as retirement rates of current principals increase, the problem will become compounded. Based on the findings of Cruzeiro and Boone (2009), "at a time when public schools in the US need new and dynamic leadership, finding those leaders will become increasingly difficult" (p.1). Nowhere is this a more urgent situation than in rural areas.

When attempting to staff rural schools with effective principals, school boards of education often find themselves at a disadvantage in recruiting and retaining administrators. This issue is one of importance for leadership and student learning in the United States because 10,000,000 students are served by rural schools (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). Rural schools are at a disadvantage when searching for new school leaders (Pjanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). Pjanowski et al. (2009) reported "Administrative openings in rural schools draw on average significantly fewer applications (14.6 in larger districts, compared with 6.8 in neighboring small districts), and this disparity appears consistent over time" (p. 91). Rural areas may not be as attractive as urban areas to principal applicants because "rural areas have experienced shrinking tax bases, shifting local economics, and brain drain among young people who move to more urban areas after high school graduation" (Ayers, 2011, p. 1-2).

Nevertheless, according to Beeson and Strange (2000), "there is a persistent attitude that if we close our eyes, sooner or later, one way or another, the 'rural problem' will just go away" (p. 63). However, this problem will not go away without significant investigation by districts so that they understand how to meet their unique needs and challenges. Rural leadership is more demanding because many districts have no middle management and depend on their administrators to carry additional responsibilities. Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) noted expectations of rural principals include such things as helping on the playground, managing the Title I program, driving the school bus, working with special needs students and their families, and helping lead the curriculum revision efforts - not to mention cutting the lawn and assisting with banquets and graduation, sometimes in a short period of time. According to Cruzeiro and Boone (2009), "interruptions happen throughout the day and candidates need to know how to juggle many different tasks at the same time" (p. 6). Rural principals are often called upon to help make operational decisions for their districts in addition to serving both as a manager and an instructional leader (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012). To recruit and retain teachers, principals, and administrators in rural schools is even more difficult because of the lower salaries and increased isolation of many districts (Beeson & Strange, 2000). Research has demonstrated administrators associate their working conditions with job satisfaction (Graham & Messner, 1998). When considering the working conditions in small, rural schools, many factors may play a part in the challenge of recruitment and retention of administrators. Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) cited factors such as lower pay, work without support of assistant principals and central office personnel, isolation from colleagues, as well as "poverty, underemployment, and most of the social problems that are found in urban centers" (p. 8).

Another area presenting significant need in rural regions is professional learning for leaders. "Principals influence learning, both for students and teachers. They are key to any reform focused on teaching and learning" (Killion, 2012, p. 3). However, principals can only provide this type of leadership if they themselves have received the appropriate training. "Successful principals shape the culture of schools, set clear expectations, and share leadership with others to create productive learning environments for students and staff" (Killion, 2012, p. 4). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty's (2003) research indicated that schools with highly effective principals performed ten percentage points higher than similar schools led by average principals. Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2009) concluded schools led by highly effective principals improve student achievement from the 50^{th} percentile to between the 54^{th} and 58^{th} percentile in just one year. Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) noted "The main underlying assumption is that instruction will improve if leaders provide detailed feedback to teacher, including suggestions for change. It follows that leaders must have the time, the knowledge, and the consultative skills needed to provide teachers support" (p.11).

However, the fact remains that in rural areas access to training to prepare principals to provide this leadership is often lacking. One way to overcome

this shortfall may be through the use of technology to develop learning networks for principals. At this time, "fewer [districts] are exploring the use of digital media for professional development communication, including interaction with colleagues beyond their schools and districts" (MetLife, 2008, p. 111). According to Pertride (as cited in Von Frank, 2009), to move teaching and learning into the 21st Century educators must have access to a variety of communication media if they do not want to become stagnant; social learning is a means to learn from others in a way that is "just-in-time." Utilizing technology can allow integration of professional learning and support when it is needed, how it is needed, and from people who are involved in similar activities. Almost all rural schools are currently integrating technology for distance learning; however, providing increased networking capabilities for professional learning could enhance the draw for new potential principals.

Going forward, rural districts must ensure professional development for administrators who feel a tie to the district and a commitment to both the school and the area students. Facing the escalating requirements of NCLB (2001), principals require both professional development and interactive technology to remain knowledgeable and up-to-date and to maintain the title of instructional leader. As Grimmett and Echols (2000) stated,

> We suggest that to avoid this situation, it will be important to reconfigure the roles and responsibilities associated with leadership of schools. . .vital that district administrators find viable ways to support and challenge school administrators in a changing social, political, and cultural context . . . necessary to focus on nurturing leadership capacity in administrators and teachers, emphasizing vision, purpose, and relationships, not rules, rigid procedures, and mandates; emphasizing covenant, not contract. . .building norms of collegiality, openness, and trust. It is crucial that districts actively mentor a cadre of future administrators. (p. 341)

Many regions in the U.S. face difficulty in attracting and retaining adequately prepared school leaders (Quinn, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) estimated almost one-fourth of all children live in communities with populations of less than 2,500 residents (Beeson, & Strange, 2000; Browne-Ferrigno, 2007). When considering the numbers of students residing in rural areas and the importance of their intellectual capital to the future of America, the issue of recruiting and retaining effective instructional leadership for these schools becomes even more apparent. These students need instructional leadership in their schools where the focus is on learning and improving student achievement in order for students to be prepared for their future.

Researchers and practitioners have examined how school principals create and maintain effective educational environments, but studies about ways to recruit and retain administrators for rural schools are limited (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). However, Rosenkoetter, Irwin, and Saceda (2004) found when rural preparation required students to do their practicum in rural area it caused them to develop a deeper understanding of the context of this setting. They noted placement in rural areas allowed the development of peer networks among individuals with the same interests that can provide mutual support during times of stress, and thus increase the possibility of retention. Another way districts approach recruiting principals is the "grow your own" approach, which provides opportunities for teachers to engage in authentic leadership experiences with school administrators. Rosa (2003) indicated rural districts should anticipate possible administrative retirements and begin grooming successors several years in advance. Those practitioners already have an allegiance to the district and a tie to the community. Additionally, DeAngelis and O'Connor (2012) found issues related to working conditions presented themselves as issues to be addressed for both recruitment and retention. Among the working condition issues were salary, increased time commitment, paperwork requirements, issues with bureaucracy, and level of stress. All of these issues should be considered as rural school districts attempt to hire new administrators. Rural school districts must be proactive in searching for educational leaders because "the loss of leadership, experience, expertise, knowledge and wisdom has the potential to impact adversely on school quality and student learning" (Chapman, 2005, p. 2). Chapman (2005) advised the process should begin with identification of individuals with leadership capacity within the rural schools where it is in a disadvantaged area, and where there is difficulty in attracting good candidates for administrative positions.

Strong administrative leadership without constant turnover is more conducive to learning for both staff and students. Teachers become more effective with experience, as do principals, especially in their first three years (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009). When a new principal transfers to a new school, research estimates it takes approximately five years to improve instruction and fully implement new policies and procedures to impact student achievement (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Effective principals make improvements in their first few years of leadership, but their effectiveness definitely

increases over time. Therefore, it is more important than ever to examine the unique vulnerabilities such as benefits packages, reducing isolation, increasing involvement in the community, and administrative opportunities for growth in rural districts to reduce the turnover rates of administrators and find ways to address principal-candidate shortages. This requires district leaders in need of new administrative talent to generate non-stop efforts at successful strategies for both recruitment and retention (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). In this era of high-stakes accountability and decreasing numbers of candidates able to meet the challenges of school leadership effectively, nurturing and supportive maintenance of principals becomes particularly relevant for rural communities (Capasso & Daresh, 2001).

In an effort to determine current challenges and practices in recruiting and retaining new administrators as well as the efforts showing positive results for recruiting and retaining principals in rural areas, the researchers surveyed rural Midwestern superintendents. Specifically, this study sought to identify rural school district superintendents' perceptions of the major challenges to recruitment and retention of administrators as well as effective strategies to reduce administrative turnover.

Methodology

This study used survey research. Midwest superintendents were recruited to investigate administrative recruitment and retention strategies as well as the factors impacting the loss or retention of quality administrators. Researchers randomly selected 140 rural Midwestern school districts and obtained the superintendents' e-mail addresses from their school websites. An email was sent to the superintendents inviting them to participate in the study. It detailed study information and provided a link to a self-administered online survey.

Participants

Of the140 rural superintendents of school districts from Midwestern states randomly selected to participate in the study, a total of 40 superintendents completed the survey. Accordingly, there was an overall response rate of 29%. The Midwestern states included Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. A demographic data sheet gathered information through traditional questions pertaining to participants' gender, race, education, career, and the current district in which they serve. All participants indicated whether their schools were located in a rural district not near an urban area, rural district near an urban area, or a small town community; the enrollment of the school districts ranged from 200 to 5600 students.

Instrument

Permission was obtained to adapt and use the survey instrument "Rural School Districts: Recruitment and Retention Practices" developed by for partnered research between The National Association of State Boards of Education and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005). The survey instrument was adapted and utilized to gather information from participants regarding recruitment and retention strategies for administrative positions within rural school districts[1]. Additional questions related to participants' perceptions of the greatest urgency in their respective districts and invited predictions of superintendent turnover in their respective states. To assess participants' perceptions of factors that contribute to recruiting and retaining administrators, the instrument included items rated on a six-point Likert scale (1= Not at all; 3= Sometimes; 6= A great deal). In addition, the instrument assessed the degree to which certain strategies are used in administrator recruitment and retention efforts, rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3= Frequently).

Recruitment items focused on the extent to which certain factors serve as a challenge for recruiting administrators (e.g., low/competitive salaries, geographic and/or social isolation, social environment and culture, working conditions, and close proximity to higher paying districts), how recruits for administrator positions are found (e.g., job fairs, local ads, statewide ads, out-of-state/national ads, Internet ads, etc.), and the district's reliance on particular methods for administrative recruitment ("grow-your-own," competitive salaries, promoting benefits, etc.). Retention items focused on the extent to which certain factors serve as a challenge for retaining administrators (e.g., low/competitive salaries, geographic and/or social isolation, social environment and culture, working

[1] The Rural School Districts: The Recruitment & Retention Practices instrument is used to gather information about the recruitment and retention challenges and practices in rural school districts specifically regarding teaching positions. Because the purpose of the present study was to focus on administrative challenges of rural school districts, the language of the questions was adapted to reflect recruitment and retention challenges and practices for administrators in rural school districts.

conditions, and close proximity to higher paying districts) and the district's reliance on particular methods for administrative retention (e.g., formal induction programs, mentoring programs, positive school culture, involving communities, etc.). Finally, participants were offered the option of providing written responses regarding effective recruitment and retention strategies, their beliefs regarding why some administrators leave a district, and their beliefs regarding why some administrators stay in a district.

Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics were calculated to gain an understanding of the overall sample of participants. One-way MANOVAs were conducted to examine differences between recruitment and retention challenges among school district community types (i.e., rural district near urban area, rural district not near urban area, and small town), as well as the strategies utilized. In the event that homogeneity of variance existed and the results of the follow-up ANOVAs were significant, Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were conducted to determine where differences exist.

Findings

Descriptive information from the 40 participating superintendents can be found in Table 1. Overall, the sample was primarily Caucasian (97.5%) and male (82.5%). Because sampling was done randomly and the personal demographics of all participants contacted was not known, it is unknown if the race and gender make-up of the present sample is representative of the overall sample that was contacted for participation. However, a demographic analysis of superintendents noted in *The Study of the American School Superintendency,* which surveyed 2,262 superintendents across the nation, revealed that 94.9% of individuals who hold the position of superintendent identified as Caucasian; 86.5% identified as male (Glass, Bjork, Brunner, & American Association of School Administrators, 2000). In the present study, reports also indicated that participants served primarily as a superintendent in a rural district not near an urban area (65%), but participants also worked in rural districts near an urban area (15%), or in small towns (20%). When asked to report on the greatest urgency in their respective districts, the most frequently cited response involved financial concerns (55%), followed by student achievement (25%), collaborative decision-making (5.0%), community support (5.0%), student enrollment (2.5%), adequate facilities (2.5%), quality instruction (2.5%), and a new state department (2.5%). Seventy percent of participants predicted the rate of superintendent turnover in their state would increase, whereas 30% predicted the turnover rate would remain the same. Interestingly, no one predicted a decrease in turnover.

Challenges to Recruitment

Table 2 illustrates the factors participants reported lead to difficulty recruiting administrators in their school districts. While none of the issues assessed were scored very high, geographic isolation had the overall highest reported score (M=3.33), indicating it was the most challenging factor for recruiting administrators as a whole. On the other hand, working conditions (e.g., administrative support) had the lowest score (M= 1.93), indicating it was the least challenging factor for recruiting administrators. However, when these factors were further looked at based on school district community types (i.e., rural district near urban area, rural district not near urban area, and small town) these results were not maintained. For example, while geographic isolation remained the most highly rated challenge in rural districts not near urban areas (M= 3.73) and in small towns (M= 2.88), close proximity to higher paying districts was rated as the most challenging factor in rural districts near urban areas (M= 4.00). Working condition, on the other hand, remained the lowest rated challenge to administration recruitment across school district community types. Within rural districts near urban areas; however, social isolation was equally rated as their least challenging recruitment factor.

When further comparing these factors among school district community types, statistically significant differences occurred in the reported challenges of recruiting administrators based on school district location, F (11, 64) = 2.224, p = .021, Wilk's $\lambda = 0.498$, partial $\varepsilon^2 = .29$. Post-hoc tests revealed rural districts not located near an urban area were more likely to report geographic isolation (p =.017) and social isolation (p =.012) as a challenge for recruiting administrators when compared to rural districts located near an urban area. However, rural districts near urban areas were significantly more likely to report close proximity to higher paying districts as a challenging factor for recruitment when compared to rural districts not near an urban area (p =.029) or districts located in small towns (p =.002). Recruitment challenges reported from school districts located in small towns and those located in rural districts not near urban areas were not statistically significant on any factor.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Demographics	n	%
Gender		
Male	33	82.5
Female	7	17.5
Race		
Caucasian	39	97.5
Native American	1	2.5
Education (highest degree obtained)		
Master's Degree	13	32.5
Doctorate	12	30.0
Education Specialist	15	37.5
School district community		
Rural, not near urban area	26	65.0
Rural, near urban area	6	15.0
Small town	8	20.0
Career path to superintendency		
Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal & Central Office	13	32.5
Teacher and Central Office	1	2.5
Teacher and Principal	23	57.5
Other	3	7.5
Total years of experience in education		
0-3 years	0	0.0
3-5 years	0	0.0
5-10 years	2	5.0
10-15 years	4	10.0
Greater than 15 years	32	80.0
Missing	2	5.0
Total years at current superintendency		
0-3 years	4	10.0
3-5 years	9	22.5
5-10 years	12	30.0
10-15 years	8	20.0
Greater than 15 years	6	15.0
Missing	1	2.5
Years until plan to retire		
0-3 years	11	27.5
3- 5 years	8	20.0
5-10 years	10	25.0
10-15 years	5	12.5
Greater than 15 years	5	12.5
Missing	1	2.5

Table 2
Challenges to Administration Recruitment

Recruitment challenges	Rural, not near urban (n=26)	Rural, near urban area (n=6)	Small town (n=8)	Overall (n=40)
	Mean (SD)			
Low/uncompetitive salaries	3.12 (.95)	2.83 (1.72)	2.13 (.99)	2.88 (1.37)
Geographic isolation	3.73 (1.08)	2.17 (1.33)	2.88 (1.46)	3.33 (1.31)
Social isolation	3.27 (1.22)	1.67 (.82)	2.25 (1.17)	2.83 (1.30)
Social environment and culture	3.19 (1.17)	2.00 (1.10)	2.63 (1.06)	2.90 (1.19)
Working conditions	2.08 (1.13)	1.67 (.82)	1.63 (.74)	1.93 (1.02)
Close proximity to higher paying districts	2.92 (.85)	4.00 (.90)	2.25 (1.04)	2.95 (1.01)

Note. Likert Scale range 1-6 (1= "Not at all", 3= "Some", 6= "A great deal")

Recruitment Strategies

Table 3 illustrates the strategies participants reported they use to locate administrative recruits in their school districts. The "Other" category of recruitment strategies allowed participants to enter responses. These responses included "Department of Public Instruction website" and "Growing our own." The overall most frequently used strategies for recruiting administrators included statewide advertising (M= 2.74), personal contacts or networking (M= 2.46), website or Internet advertising (M= 2.55), and references from other districts (M= 2.27), respectively. The least commonly used strategy included job fairs (M= 1.14), with 77.5% of all participants reporting they "never" use this strategy. When these factors were further looked at based on school district community types (i.e., rural district near urban area, rural district not near urban area, and small town) no statistically significant differences occurred among the strategies used for locating administrative recruits based on school district location.

Table 3
Strategies used for locating administrative recruits

Recruitment strategies	Rural, not near urban (n=26)	Rural, near urban area (n=6)	Small town (n=8)	Overall (n=40)
	Mean (SD)			
Job fairs	1.22 (.42)	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.00)	1.14 (.35)
Local advertising	2.04 (.77)	1.83 (.98)	1.88 (.64)	1.97 (.76)
Statewide advertising	2.80 (.50)	3.00 (.00)	2.38 (.74)	2.74 (.55)
Out-of-state advertising	1.57 (.79)	1.50 (.55)	1.25 (.71)	1.49 (.73)
Website/Internet advertising	2.67 (.48)	2.67 (.82)	2.13 (.84)	2.55 (.65)
Job banks	1.65 (.83)	1.67 (1.03)	1.63 (.92)	1.65 (.86)
Personal contacts/networking	2.48 (.51)	2.50 (.55)	2.38 (.52)	2.46 (.51)
References from other districts	2.30 (.56)	2.17 (.75)	2.25 (.71)	2.27 (.61)
Relationships with colleges/universities	1.91 (.60)	1.83 (.75)	1.63 (.74)	1.84 (.65)
Unsolicited resumes/references	1.65 (.65)	1.67 (.82)	1.38 (.52)	1.59 (.64)
Other	1.33 (.58)	1.00 (.00)	2.00 (1.41)	1.43 (.79)

Note. Likert Scale range 1-3 (1= "Never", 2= "Sometimes", 3= "Frequently")

Table 4 illustrates the extent to which participants reported they relied on various recruitment strategies in their school districts. The *Other* category of recruitment strategies allowed participants to enter responses. The one text response that clarified *Other* recruitment strategies was *state-wide searches*. Overall, the highest rated strategies identified were *grow-your-own* (e.g., helping teachers earn administrative certification) (M = 3.62), including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes (M =3.46), offering competitive salaries (M = 3.10), and promoting the advantages of administration and living in the area (M = 3.10), respectively. On the other hand, collecting state/local data on administrator supply and demand (M= 1.59) was the overall least relied upon strategy. When

these factors were further looked at based on school district community types (i.e., rural district near urban area, rural district not near urban area, and small town), the same four recruitment strategies previously noted were endorsed as the most used across school district communities. However, districts in small towns also endorsed promoting benefits (e.g., including insurance, daycare assistance, and/or tuition assistance) equal to their highest rated strategies. When assessing the lowest rated strategies across school district communities, collecting state/local data on supply and demand remained the least used strategy for both rural districts near urban areas (M= 1.00) and small towns (M= 1.00). Offering housing/relocation assistance was the lowest rated strategy for rural districts near urban areas (M= 1.72). Finally, when comparing these strategies among the school district community types, no statistically significant differences occurred based on school district location.

Table 4
Use of Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies	Rural, not near urban (n=26)	Rural, near urban area (n=6)	Small town (n=8)	Overall (n=40)
	Mean (SD)			
"Grow-your-own" initiatives	3.64 (1.11)	3.67 (1.03)	3.50 (1.41)	3.62 (1.14)
Competitive salaries	3.00 (.96)	3.00 (1.10)	3.50 (1.07)	3.10 (1.00)
Promoting benefits	2.88 (1.05)	2.67 (1.37)	3.50 (1.20)	2.97 (1.14)
Offering housing/relocation assistance	1.72 (.98)	1.67 (1.21)	1.75 (1.39)	1.72 (1.08)
Collecting state/local data on supply and demand	1.92 (.95)	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.00)	1.59 (.88)
Using data analysis to guide recruitment	2.04 (.89)	1.50 (.84)	1.50 (.76)	1.85 (.88)
Including partners in recruitment efforts	2.36 (1.04)	1.50 (.84)	2.13 (1.46)	2.18 (1.12)
Regular evaluation of recruitment initiatives	2.04 (.84)	1.50 (.84)	1.75 (.89)	1.90 (.85)
Collaborating with colleges/universities	2.88 (1.05)	2.17 (1.17)	2.00 (.54)	2.59 (1.04)
Including building-level staff in recruitment/hiring processes	3.68 (.85)	3.33 (1.63)	2.88 (1.46)	3.46 (1.14)
Promoting the advantages of superintendency and living in the area	3.32 (.95)	2.83 (1.17)	2.63 (1.60)	3.10 (1.14)
Other	3.00 (2.00)	1.00 (.00)	1.50 (.71)	2.17 (1.60)

Note. Likert Scale range 1-6 (1= "Not at all", **3**= "Some", **6**= "A great deal")

The open-ended questions supported the Likert scale findings. Twelve of the 40 respondents indicated they believe "grow your own" strategy is the most effective for their district. Participant responses that support this strategy included:
Investing in current staff that shows potential;
The board prefers local people who start as teachers in the districts;
Hire good teachers that you can convert to administrators, and
Promoting within district/grow your own. However, unlike the quantitative results, salary was mentioned 10 times, with seven of these statements suggesting *competitive salaries* as being an effective strategy for recruitment. Less commonly mentioned strategies included the need to promote the area (n=3) and the need to include staff in recruitment efforts (n=1).

Challenges to Retention

Table 5 illustrates the factors participants reported led to difficulty retaining administrators in their school districts. Similar to the challenges reported for recruiting administrators, geographic isolation had the overall highest reported score (M= 3.03), indicating it was the most challenging factor for retaining administrators. Also, similar to recruitment challenges, working conditions had the lowest reported score (M= 2.97), indicating it was the overall least challenging retention factor. However, when these factors were further looked at based on school district community types (i.e., rural district near urban area, rural district not near urban area, and small town) differences occurred. Also similar to recruitment challenges, while geographic isolation remained the most highly rated challenge in rural districts not near urban areas (M= 3.42) and in small towns (M= 2.71), close proximity to higher paying districts was rated as the most challenging factor in rural districts near urban areas (M= 4.00). Geographic isolation was reported as the least challenging factor toward administration retention for rural districts near urban areas (M= 1.67). Working conditions, on the other hand, remained the lowest

rated factor for retaining administrators in both rural districts not near urban areas (M= 2.46) and in small towns (M= 1.57).

When further comparing these factors among school district community types, statistically significant differences occurred in the reported challenges of retaining administrators based on school district location, F (11, 64) = 2.33, p = .016; Wilk's $\lambda = 0.475$, partial $\varepsilon^2 = .311$. Post-hoc tests revealed rural districts not located near an urban area were significantly more likely to report geographic isolation (p =.007) and social isolation (p =.021) as a challenge to retaining administrators compared to rural districts located near an urban area. Small towns were also significantly more likely to report social isolation (p = .031) as a retention challenge compared to rural districts located near an urban area. Retention challenges reported from school districts located in small towns and those located in rural districts not near urban areas were not statistically significant on any factor.

Table 5
Challenges to Administration Retention

Retention challenges	Rural, not near urban (n=26)	Rural, near urban area (n=6)	Small town (n=8)	Overall (n=40)
	Mean (SD)			
Low/uncompetitive salaries	3.19 (1.20)	2.50 (1.76)	2.29 (1.25)	2.92 (1.33)
Geographic isolation	3.42 (1.21)	1.67 (.82)	2.71 (1.38)	3.03 (1.33)
Social isolation	3.31 (1.23)	1.83 (.99)	2.00 (1.00)	2.85 (1.31)
Social environment and culture	3.15 (1.19)	2.67 (1.51)	2.29 (1.25)	2.92 (1.27)
Working conditions	2.46 (1.33)	2.33 (1.03)	1.57 (.98)	2.28 (1.26)
Close proximity to higher paying districts	2.85 (1.01)	4.00 (.89)	2.57 (1.51)	2.97 (1.16)

Note. Likert Scale range 1-6 (1= "Not at all", 3= "Some", 6= "A great deal")

Upon review of the open-ended questions, of the 28 responses regarding challenges to retaining administrators, isolation both geographically and socially was cited 11 times. Examples of responses included:
Not from a rural background;
Personal attributes don't align with community values;
Location remote, and
Do not relate to the community.

Salary was seen as equally challenging to retention based on its frequency in responses (n=11). Most responses about salary being a challenge to retention centered on administrators leaving for higher pay.

Retention Strategies

Table 6 illustrates the extent to which participants reported they relied on various strategies for retaining administrators in their school districts. Overall, the highest rated strategies identified were creating a positive school culture (M= 4.11), investing in professional development opportunities (M= 3.92), and using technology for mentoring and professional development (M= 3.61). On the other hand, offering an incentive for staying past the first year was rated the overall lowest (M= 1.78) in addition to "Other" (M= 1.67). No written responses were provided by participants to clarify what "Other" retention strategies may be. Nevertheless, because "Other" was rated with the lowest overall score, it appears whatever these strategies might be they are not used to a large extent. When these factors were further looked at based on school district community types (i.e., rural district near urban area, rural district not near urban area, and small town) some differences occurred. While the same highly rated recruitment strategies noted above were primarily endorsed across school district communities, districts in small towns endorsed offering increased salaries/raises at a slightly higher rate than using technology for mentoring and professional development. Thus, in small towns, technology for mentoring and professional development was not in the top three retention strategies, but was the fourth. When further assessing the lowest rated strategies across school district communities, offering incentives for staying past the first year remained the least used strategy for all school district communities (when not considering the option of selecting "Other"). Furthermore, when comparing these retention strategies among school district community types no statistically significant differences occurred based on school district location.

Table 6
Use of Retention Strategies

Retention strategies	Rural, not near urban (n=20)	Rural, near urban area (n=6)	Small town (n=8)	Overall (n=40)
	Mean (SD)			
Formal induction programs	2.52 (1.16)	2.33 (.82)	2.43 (1.13)	2.47 (1.08)
Formal mentoring programs	2.96 (1.27)	2.83 (1.72)	3.00 (1.29)	2.95 (1.31)
Other support for administration	2.76 (1.20)	2.17 (1.33)	2.71 (1.25)	2.66 (1.21)
Creating a positive school culture	4.12 (.73)	4.17 (.75)	4.00 (.82)	4.11 (.73)
Use technology for mentoring and professional development	3.84 (.94)	3.17 (1.33)	3.14 (1.22)	3.61 (1.08)
Involving communities to welcome/support	3.36 (.95)	2.67 (.82)	3.00 (1.41)	3.18 (1.04)
Investing in professional development	3.96 (.84)	4.00 (1.27)	3.71 (1.11)	3.92 (.94)
Offering incentives for staying past first year	1.92 (1.28)	1.33 (.52)	1.71 (1.25)	1.78 (1.18)
Offering increased salaries/raises	2.96 (.98)	2.17 (.75)	3.29 (.95)	2.89 (.98)
Offering improved benefits	2.56 (1.04)	2.00 (.89)	3.14 (1.22)	2.58 (1.08)
Offering tuition/other assistance in obtaining additional degrees	2.44 (1.44)	2.00 (1.55)	2.57 (1.62)	2.39 (1.46)
Regular evaluation process regarding retention	3.12 (.97)	2.83 (1.47)	2.43 (1.13)	2.95 (1.09)
Other	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.00)	3.00 (.00)	1.67 (1.16)

Note. Likert Scale range 1-6 (1= "Not at all", 3= "Some", 6= "A great deal")

The written responses supported the quantitative findings with regard to retention strategies. That is, comments regarding climate/culture were mentioned in 12 of the 28 provided responses. All of these comments centered on "*positive work environment*," "*creating a positive school culture*," or "*positive school climate*." The most prominent response; however, concerned personal ties to the area. Sixteen participants cited location and family ties as important to staying within a rural district. Comments included statements such as, *"fit in and like living in rural Iowa," "grew up and lived in the district all their lives," "sense of belonging in school and community"* and *"nice fit with the community."* While salary was also frequently cited (n=9), it appears the ideas of "*growing-your-own*" and "*having administrators feel like they belong*" are perceived as the most important aspects of retaining administrators in rural communities.

Discussion

It is no surprise rural schools encounter difficulties recruiting administrative candidates. Salary limitation, geographic isolation, and distance from professional growth are some reasons noted for lack of recruitment to rural areas (Townsell, 2007). While this study identified the same types of issues, the number one reason cited among Midwestern respondents appeared to be geographic isolation. Interestingly, location appeared to cut both ways. It was the most cited reason for administrators leaving, and yet it was the most cited reason for administrators staying. The caveat appeared to be whether the administrator had a tie to rural areas and if the district had provided incentives to become an administrator through a "grow your own" type program. As noted earlier, the subject of isolation appears to have a larger impact on small town districts (social isolation) and districts not near urban areas because of the social isolation principals experience as noted by Townsell (2007).

As expected, salary does play into administrators' decisions about whether to remain in a district or leave a district, but again, it was equally cited both on the side of being retained and on the side of leaving a district. Low salaries, social environment, social isolation, and proximity to districts with higher pay were all problematic for rural districts; however, the proximity of the district to urban districts influenced the degree to which these issues appeared to be a challenge for recruiting and retaining administrators. Districts near urban areas were more likely to report issues with salary because they, likely, are located in close proximity to larger districts that pay more. Thus, they are often forced to compete and find themselves losing administrators to higher paying, nearby districts. The issue of salary was reported as both a recruitment and retention strategy for many rural schools. However, it appears it is especially important for the rural districts near urban areas to pay attention to the financial packages offered to administrators in the nearby urban districts when considering recruitment

and retention strategies, as was also noted by Beeson and Strange (2000). While financial issues are a real problem for most rural districts, districts distant from urban areas may not find salary/compensation packages to be as prominent an issue as rural districts located near urban areas with more competitive packages. This supports Chalker's (1999) statement concerning rural schools' unique contextual characteristics and how they require unique leadership. Indeed, it appears even the geographic placement of the rural community can have real effects on a district's challenges to recruitment and retention. Therefore, leaders within these districts must develop strategies that reflect their districts' unique challenges.

An area not identified as a challenge was working conditions. Hence, districts might consider exploiting this in recruitment for rural schools. The issue, and it scored (M=1.93) out of 6 possible, indicating the working conditions are considered by most as a positive influence. While it was cited most often among the open-ended responses for retention strategies, it appears to be a reason administrators stay because they believe they belong and are supported. Considering this aspect, it is perhaps a point to be emphasized when rural districts are recruiting.

Apparently, the most common methods used to recruit administrators in the Midwest appear to be the "growing your own" approach. Hammer and colleagues (2005) found "grow your own" initiatives nurture local talent through collaborations among public school systems and postsecondary institutions. This method was the number one method for recruitment according to the open-ended responses. While responses indicated state-wide advertising, networking, websites, and references were used for recruiting administrators to the district, the fit between those who have a commitment to the area appears to be the most beneficial to both the district and the administrator.

What did appear to work as an important retention strategy for rural schools was emphasis on a positive school culture and climate, investment in professional development, use of technology for mentoring, along with increased benefits. These strategies align with the findings by Hammer et al. (2005). Superintendents cited as promising practices: 1) grow-your-own initiatives, 2) targeted incentives, 3) improve recruitment and hiring practices using state and local data, 4) improve school-level support, and 5) use interactive technologies.

As rural districts move forward, programs for "grow your own" need to include practice for possible future principals in authentic settings where they can observe leadership in action as well as engage in collaborative leadership with stakeholder groups. As districts plan for future leadership needs, it will take concerted efforts in mentoring to help high functioning teachers move into administrative positions and become effective instructional leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007), and it will require the superintendent having vision for implementing change initiatives to transform principals from managers to instructional leader through quality professional learning (Browne-Ferrigno, 2006).

Limitation and Future Directions for Research

A limitation of the current study was the lack of diversity in participants. Specifically, the study respondents primarily identified as Caucasian males. While this sample is fairly representative of superintendents within the region in which the present study was conducted, as well as nationally, it would be helpful for future research to attempt to gain access to the perspectives of a more diverse sample of superintendents.

A second limitation was the sample was limited in terms of the location of the districts. The majority (65.0%) of participants reported they currently serve as the superintendent of a rural district not near an urban area. Therefore, future research should seek to specifically target a more balanced selection of rural locations.

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