Teacher Retention in Rural Schools: The Impact of Principal Leadership Practices

on Job Embeddedness and Teacher Decision-Making to Stay or Leave

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A Capstone Project

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by

James Robert "Rob" Wright

B.A. University of Richmond

M.S. Shenandoah University

Ed.S. University of Virginia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teachers have a considerable effect on students' achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Many school leaders, however, have a difficult time filling all positions within a school with effective teachers. Researchers point to turnover—about 14% of teachers move schools or leave the profession annually—as a primary cause of this phenomenon (Ingersoll, 2003). This problem is often even more rampant in rural schools (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2018). Moreover, high turnover negatively affects student achievement throughout a school, not only in classes of new teachers (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). This study focuses on what principals can do to mitigate the loss of teachers.

While there is a small research base on teacher turnover in rural schools (e.g., Keiser, 2011; Maranto & Shuls, 2012; Ulferts, 2016), researchers have traditionally focused on why teachers *leave* schools. To address these gaps in the literature, the primary purpose of this study is to determine why teachers choose to *stay* in rural schools and to provide practical information for school principals on practices that increase teacher retention. The lens of job embeddedness, a construct from the organizational literature that focuses on why employees stay in jobs, provides the theoretical foundation for this study's conceptual framework (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). This allowed an in-depth look at how both community and organizational factors impacted teachers' decision-making to stay in or leave schools.

For this capstone project, I employed a mixed-methods study design, using quantitative methods to obtain a broad look at the influences on retention in 37 rural

schools throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, and qualitative methods to gain deeper understanding. I surveyed teachers to determine which factors they felt affected their decision-making, and the relationship between their levels of job embeddedness and their intent to stay in or leave their jobs. Teacher and principal interviews provided a more nuanced look at the elements impacting teachers' decision-making and how principals felt they could influence those factors.

Findings from this study provide insight into the ways both community and organizational dynamics impact teacher retention. Teachers who valued the rural lifestyle were more likely to intend to stay in a rural school for at least five years. Organizationally, teachers were more likely to stay if they perceived themselves as being effective and felt that they could meet their professional goals in their job. The same was true for those who received regular encouragement and support from school leaders.

Based upon the findings from this study, I identify six key recommendations that address community and organizational themes. To improve teacher retention, rural school principals should: prioritize organizational fit when hiring, consider community fit when hiring, provide high-quality professional development, provide sustained support and encouragement, provide classroom autonomy, and provide leadership opportunities.

Key words: teacher retention, teacher turnover, rural schools, leadership, principal practices, job embeddedness, fit, induction, mentoring, working conditions, administrative support, leadership support

Department of Leadership, Foundations, and Policy
School of Education and Human Development
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA

APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT PROPOSAL

This capstone project proposal, "Teacher Retention in Rural Schools: The Impact of Principal Leadership Practices on Job Embeddedness and Teacher Decision-Making to Stay or Leave," has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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David Eddy Spicer, Ed.D. (Capstone Chair)

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Michelle Beavers, Ph.D. (Capstone Committee Member)

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Sara Dexter, Ed.D. (Capstone Committee Member)

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Michael Hull, Ph.D. (Capstone Committee Member)

March 31, 2021

Date of Defense

DEDICATION

To my rural education colleagues, your passion for serving students is an inspiration to

me. Please know that you are making a difference in their lives.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Alonzo's Story

Alonzo is a middle schooler in a rural county. He is an average student in the eighth grade. About half of the students in the school are on free or reduced lunch, and students of color comprise about 55% of the school's population. Four of the six eighth grade teachers are brand new to the school this year, as are a couple of his elective teachers. His science teacher is a long-term substitute because the school was unable to fill the vacancy with a licensed teacher.

Alonzo feels comfortable in an English class that is taught by a veteran teacher who knows how to relate to him, keeps her classroom organized and well-managed, and delivers fun and engaging lessons. He readily participates in class activities and discussions, and has a high B in the class.

When Alonzo goes to math, however, he has a dramatically different experience. His math teacher, Mr. X, is from a different state and is brand new to the profession. Mr. X has never worked in a rural setting before, dislikes the lack of amenities in the area, and only accepted the job because he couldn't get a job elsewhere. Alonzo and his classmates are aware of Mr. X's feelings as he frequently complains about the rural setting during class. Alonzo's math teacher struggles to maintain an environment conducive to learning. Students frequently act up in class, and, in response, the teacher

either yells at the transgressing students or continues to teach over the noise. Consequently, Alonzo has a hard time maintaining attention. Over the course of the semester, his math grades have slipped down to a D. Furthermore, he becomes bored during the sluggish classroom transitions and will talk to his friends in the class. One day his math teacher yelled at Alonzo for talking, and Alonzo, frustrated at being in such a chaotic class and then singled out, talked back to the teacher. He found himself sitting in in-school suspension the following day.

Despite his struggles in math class, Alonzo dreads going to science even more. His long term substitute does not actually teach, and instead gives the students an endless stream of incredibly boring worksheets to do. The substitute science teacher yells at the class frequently and is unable to provide much help if the students do not understand the science concepts.

In past years, Alonzo enjoyed coming to school and learning, but this year he worries about going to school each day. Except for his English teacher, Alonzo does not feel like his teachers know him or care about him. This is particularly the case in his math and science classes, where chaotic environments and a lack of teaching expertise are compromising his education and wellbeing.

While Alonzo is a pseudonym and his situation fictitious, his unfortunate situation is a common occurrence, especially in hard-to-staff rural schools around the nation. Innumerable students languish in classrooms and schools that are not properly staffed. Inevitably, their educations and their futures are compromised because of a lack of qualified teachers.

Problem of Practice

Primary Goals of Education and the Importance of Teachers

The primary goals of public education are to provide equal opportunity for all

students, create a capable workforce, and allow for social mobility (Labaree, 2010).

Teachers have a major role to play in attaining these goals, as they have a considerable

effect on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Nye, Konstandtopoulos, &

Hedges, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Students spend

numerous hours each day with teachers, learning the skills and knowledge they need to

succeed in school, which ideally prepares them for college or for earning a living as a

working adult. Ultimately, students with effective teachers will receive a better

educational experience than those with ineffective teachers; this difference can have a

lasting impact on students throughout their schooling and lives (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Teacher Shortages

Unfortunately, many school leaders struggle each year to find an adequate supply

of effective teachers to fill classroom vacancies (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-

Thomas, 2016). They may be forced to rely on long-term substitutes or to keep

ineffective teachers in place because they cannot adequately replace them. This

nationwide teacher shortage—which García and Weiss (2019) estimate to be

approximately 110,000 teachers and increasing—is driven primarily by attrition from the

profession as opposed to retirements or a paucity of teachers entering the workforce

(Ingersoll, 2003). Ingersoll (2003) notes that about 14% of the national teaching

workforce turns over—leaving the profession or moving schools—annually. More

recently, researchers assert that approximately half a million teachers leave the profession

or move schools each year, with half of those moving schools and half leaving the

profession (Boyd, Grossman et al., 2011; Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Perhaps even

more alarming is that attrition from the field has been increasing. Over the two-decade

time span from 1988 to 2008, teacher attrition increased by approximately 40%

(Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).[1]

To add to this problem, teacher turnover is distributed inequitably and is typically

higher in schools that need good teachers the most (Ingersoll Merrill, & Stuckey, 2018;

Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2006). By analyzing longitudinal data from the nationally

representative Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the National Center for

Educational Statistics (NCES), Ingersoll et al. (2018) found that almost half of teacher

turnover occurs in only 25% of schools, with high-minority, high-poverty, rural, and

urban schools being the most affected. Low performing schools are also among those

particularly vulnerable to turnover (Johnson et al., 2006). Hammer, Hughes, McClure,

Reeves, and Salgado (2005) call these "hard-to-staff" schools. Localized shortages,

stemming from higher rates of turnover, means that many of our nation's neediest

students are being taught by less experienced, less stable faculties.

Rural schools may be especially susceptible to local shortages of teachers due to

geographic isolation. Their distance from urban centers impacts their availability of

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[1] There is debate among researchers regarding the extent of teacher turnover. Harris and
Adams (2007) compared the rate of teacher turnover with that of analogous professions—
including nursing, social work, and accounting—and found that the aggregate turnover
among these professions is not significantly different, though they acknowledge that
turnover is still problematic in many schools.

qualified workers (Hammer et al., 2005). Additionally, high levels of student poverty in these schools is often a byproduct of their distance from urban areas. As Ingersoll (2001) points out, turnover is typically greater in high-poverty schools.

Miller (2012) notes that rural schools are more likely to staff positions with novice teachers when compared to non-rural schools. Many of these teachers often transfer to more affluent districts or higher performing schools once they have a few years of experience (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). This phenomenon creates a revolving door of inexperience (Sutcher et al., 2016), which combined with the fact that rural schools are less likely to employ teachers with graduate degrees (Duke, 2010), means that these schools may lack the pedagogical and content expertise of non-rural schools. As a result, many rural schools are staffed by ineffective faculty; at-risk students in these schools are typically the ones who lose out on teacher quality.

Sutcher et al. (2016) claim that the shortage of teachers will continue to increase in the coming years. Not only will the demand for teachers continue to rise with the increasing school-age population, but fewer college age students are enrolling in teacher preparation programs. Such a trend will undoubtedly aggravate local shortages in rural schools which already face challenges to teacher recruitment and retention (Hammer et al., 2005). This is an equity issue with which society at large must grapple sooner rather than later lest educational disparities widen among groups of students based on their geographic location.

While the problem of teacher turnover is often especially pronounced in rural schools, existing research is largely focused on large urban districts. In the next sections, I use that literature base to explore the consequences and costs of turnover and the role of leadership in mitigating this problem of practice. I then address implications for rural schools.

Consequences for Students

Regardless of whether teachers leave the profession or migrate to other schools, their departures have real consequences for students. Leaders in high-poverty schools often struggle to recruit teachers to fill vacancies, and even when they are able to hire replacements, the new teachers are often less experienced or less prepared (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Moreover, administrators struggling to fill positions cannot afford to be as selective in the hiring process (Maranto & Shuls, 2012).

During teachers' first three to five years in the profession, they are most likely to demonstrate an increase in their classroom effectiveness (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008; Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011; Rivkin, Hanushek, Kain, 2005). Unfortunately, close to half of teachers leave the profession during this critical time, as they are just learning their jobs (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2003). Turnover of this sort can undermine a school's effectiveness. If school leaders are frequently hiring new teachers to fill the positions of those who leave, it will be difficult for them to provide students with a highly effective faculty.

In a large study of elementary school students in New York City, Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013) found that teacher turnover does indeed have a negative impact on

student achievement, and that this effect extends to all classrooms in a school, not just

classrooms that have vacancies. They note that some of this effect can be explained by a

decrease in experience, especially in high-poverty, high-minority schools where open

positions are less likely to be filled with effective teachers. The researchers also suggest

that the weakening of collegial relationships and loss of organizational memory may also

play a role in lowered student achievement. Furthermore, these effects are substantially

larger in schools that are already low performing (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).[2]

The long term effects of ineffective teaching on students are numerous. Sanders

and Rivers (1996) analyzed longitudinal cohort data for elementary students and

determined that students' academic achievement was directly attributable to the quality of

their teachers. They note that these effects are cumulative over time. A student with

multiple ineffective teachers throughout a school career faces a major disadvantage to

long term academic success.

These negative effects can also persist into adulthood. Chetty, Friedman, and

Rockoff (2014) compared the school records of over one million students and their

subsequent tax records from ages 20, 25, and 28. They used a value-added approach to

analyze students' test scores and determine their teachers' effectiveness. From the tax

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[2] While a clear majority of the research base on teacher turnover indicates that it is
generally problematic for schools, not all turnover is detrimental to student achievement.
Boyd et al. (2008) examined turnover data from New York City, and found that among
first-year teachers, ineffective teachers were more likely to leave than effective teachers.
This finding did not hold, however, for second- and third-year teachers. Moreover, they
found that more effective teachers tended to transfer from low- to high-performing
schools, which would only exacerbate educational inequities.

records, the researchers were able to determine college attendance, earnings, and whether

or not a person had a dependent while a teenager. They concluded that students in classes

of highly effective teachers were more likely to attend college, had higher salaries, and

were less likely to have children when they were teenagers. With respect to students'

future earnings, Hanushek (2011) reached a similar conclusion, noting that a teacher with

above average effectiveness could potentially provide up to $400,000 in additional

income for a class of 20 students. Future earnings, however, are not the only financial

reason for school leaders to keep more teachers.

The Cost of Filling Vacancies

In addition to impacting students' achievement and long term outcomes, teacher

turnover also has economic consequences for schools, states, and the nation. Some

researchers have approximated the average cost of replacing a non-retiring teacher to be

approximately $8,000 to $12,000 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Barnes,

Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Milanowski & Odden, 2007). Carroll (2007) found the cost to

be somewhat lower, $4,366 for one specific rural school district. While these expenses

vary regionally and by district size, they clearly represent considerable costs. The

Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) estimates the total national price tag of replacing

teachers who move schools or leave the profession to be close to $5 billion. Despite this,

Milanowski and Odden (2007) claim that the more concerning cost of teacher turnover is

that of lost productivity in the classroom, a price that students must shoulder.

The Role of Leadership

Aside from teachers, school leaders are the most influential moderators of student achievement outcomes (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Principals are charged with developing the individuals in their organizations to better meet the academic needs of students, thereby indirectly impacting student achievement (Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Hitt and Tucker enumerate several dimensions of leadership practices related to building capacity that could directly or indirectly influence teacher retention. These include (a) "selecting [teachers] for the right fit"; (b) "providing individualized consideration"; (c) "building trusting relationships"; (d) "providing opportunities to learn for the whole faculty"; (e) "supporting, buffering, and recognizing staff"; (f) and "creating communities of practice" (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 549). Additionally, school leaders must engender an environment conducive to collaboration and adult learning. Three dimensions that have potential connections to retention include: (a) "building collaborative processes for decision making", (b) "sharing and distributing leadership", and (c) "strengthening and optimizing school culture" (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 553). Leaders also have a direct effect on teachers' retention decisions. Boyd, Grossman et al. (2011) found that a lack of administrative support is the primary reason many teachers choose to leave their positions. School leaders need to be cognizant of their impact on teachers' decision-making. It is leaders who must take charge to staff schools with effective teachers; keeping those teachers is a key element of that job.

The Challenge of Staffing Rural Schools

Unfortunately, the challenge of teacher retention in rural schools can pose a significant problem to school leaders. As noted earlier, schools in geographically isolated areas are often highly affected by teacher turnover (Ingersoll et al., 2018). In their review of the literature on recruitment and retention in rural schools, Hammer et al. (2005) put forth three reasons teachers often leave: low pay, isolation, and working conditions. In general, employees in rural schools are paid less than those in urban and suburban areas. Rural teachers can typically increase their salaries by moving to nearby suburban districts.

The geographical location of rural schools can further disadvantage them with respect to retaining teachers. Teachers in rural communities who come from other areas may find themselves far away from family members (Hammer et al., 2005). Perhaps because of this, Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2005) note that teachers prefer to work near their hometowns. Moreover, those living in rural areas may have to travel farther distances for urban amenities such as shopping (Miller, 2012). Any of these factors could cause rural teachers to seek more urban or suburban locales for employment.

Thirdly, while working conditions are often a concern for teachers in all settings, small school sizes may force some teachers to teach multiple subjects. Too many preparations can further burden overworked teachers (Hammer et al., 2005). This could cause them to move to larger, more affluent districts for a manageable workload.

Summary

In recent years, state educational agencies have been charged with creating plans to ensure that high risk students are provided with excellent teachers (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). A shortage of teachers, primarily caused by teacher turnover, is a key obstacle to meeting this goal. Leaders in rural schools face distinct challenges related to low teacher pay, geographic isolation, and challenging working conditions. While the challenges associated with teacher turnover are significant, the achievement costs to students and the financial costs to school districts, states, and the nation are too high to ignore. Fortunately, school principals are well-positioned to mitigate this issue, as there are a number of leadership practices they can leverage that have the potential to influence teachers' career decisions.

A sense of urgency to untangle this Gordian knot is overdue among legislators. School leaders, however, cannot wait for politicians to develop policy solutions to this problem, as the education and well-being of countless students are jeopardized each day. Instead, they must enact school-level practices to retain teachers to effectively educate their students.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Considering that turnover is a primary cause of teacher shortages (Ingersoll, 2003) and that these shortages are increasing (García & Weiss, 2019), it is unlikely that rural school leaders will effectively end local shortages without significant efforts to retain teachers. While a number of factors potentially influence teachers' career decision-making, I focus on the impact of school principals' leadership practices. Some of the

factors that cause teachers to leave schools or the profession are beyond the control of the school principal, such as teachers' salaries or life events—e.g., a teacher getting married and moving to be near the spouse's job. This does not mean, however, that principals are powerless to mitigate the amount of turnover in their building. As I address in Chapter Two, there are several categories of leadership practices that enable principals to significantly improve teacher retention.

There is a large body of literature on teacher turnover, as this has been an ongoing problem in education. Researchers have examined factors that affect teacher retention, such as characteristics of teachers, professional qualifications, school characteristics, availability of resources, and student population characteristics (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Several researchers (e.g., Keiser, 2011; Maranto & Shuls, 2012; Ulferts, 2016) have even looked at teacher retention specifically in rural school divisions. Most of this research, however, focuses on why teachers leave schools. In her dissertation on rural teacher retention, Keiser (2011) suggests a need for further research on why teachers choose to remain in their schools. She also raises the important consideration that teachers' reasons for staying may not be the exact opposite of their reasons for leaving. For example, teachers may choose to leave a school with poor working conditions, but they might not choose to stay even if those working conditions were improved; perhaps they choose to move to be closer to family. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to address a gap in the literature—the lack of research on why teachers choose to stay in rural counties—and to provide practical information for school principals on practices that increase teacher retention in their buildings.

Research Questions

This study explores the nature of teacher turnover in rural school divisions and methods by which principals might mitigate this problem. Many studies of teacher attrition and retention focus on why teachers leave schools or the profession. Keiser (2011) noted, however, a need for more research on why some teachers choose to stay in rural schools. Thus, my two research questions are:

1. What principal practices are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools?

2. What factors do principals identify as most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools?

My first research question addresses my primary focus as a researcher. My belief is that if scholars can begin to understand why some teachers voluntarily remain in rural schools, school leaders can potentially alter their practices to retain more teachers. To answer Research Question One, I use teacher surveys and interviews to explore whether principals' practices influenced their decision-making, and if so, which practices were most effective in encouraging teachers to stay.

My second research question provides insight into principals' perspectives of teacher retention. As they are essential to mitigating the problem of teacher turnover, it is critical to delve into why they believe teachers choose to stay or leave and what practices they enact to retain teachers. To answer Research Question Two, I use principal interviews to find out what principals perceive as being important factors in teachers' decisions to stay. Additionally, I compared their responses to those of teachers to

determine whether principals hold misconceptions regarding what factors influence teachers' decision-making. By answering both research questions, I am able to provide practical suggestions for principals to improve teacher retention in their schools.

Preview of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study begins with the rural context in which it takes place. Rural school districts have unique factors, such as geographical isolation and small size, that may affect teacher retention (Hammer et al., 2005). Some of these factors may discourage teachers from staying; others may promote retention among those who favor these characteristics.

Within this context, principals engage in leadership practices that influence teachers' career decisions. I group these practices into four areas: hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing administrative support. In my conceptual framework, these leadership practices indirectly influence teachers' career decisions through their impact on a teacher's fit and links—or connections—within the organization and their community, and what they would need to sacrifice to leave. The aggregate of these dimensions is a teacher's level of *job embeddedness*, which directly influences career decisions. A teacher with higher levels of embeddedness is less likely to leave their job (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001).

Study and Methodology Overview

In this study, I explore the nature of job embeddedness as it relates to teachers' career decisions. Specifically, I would like to know if job embeddedness could be used as

a predictor of teachers' decisions to stay. Assuming that is the case, I intend to explore

ways in which principals might increase job embeddedness among their faculty to

increase teacher retention. In the next chapter I present the findings of a literature review

on teacher retention and job embeddedness. In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology

of this study. Chapter Four presents my findings from the study. In Chapter Five, I review

these findings in the context of the literature and provide recommendations for school

principals.

Sample and Data Collection

This study examines teacher retention in seven rural school districts throughout

the Commonwealth of Virginia. These communities have relatively small school systems

with a handful of schools that serve a few hundred to a few thousand students. Many of

the jobs in these counties are in agriculture and aquaculture businesses, but the number of

positions available is often not enough to support a vibrant economy (Gagnon &

Mattingly, 2015). Furthermore, these schools are often located far from urban centers

(Virginia Department of Education, 2009). The NCES (2006) classifies these areas as

rural distant—locales that are located from five to 25 miles from urbanized areas—or

rural remote—locations that are even farther away. These factors may potentially affect

the turnover rate of teachers who work in these schools.

To inquire into this potential relationship and the role of the principal, I surveyed

374 rural teachers in 37 rural schools. These surveys measured teachers' job

embeddedness, asked about their career intentions for subsequent years, and also probed

the influence of principals' leadership practices on their career decisions. Additionally, I

conducted interviews with 18 experienced teachers in six rural schools to take a deeper

look at why those teachers have chosen to stay. These interviews provided further details

on the survey findings. I broadened my data collection on the relationships between

principal practices, job embeddedness, and career decisions by also conducting principal

interviews from four of those six schools. These provided insight into what principals

perceive as being important to teachers' decision-making and allowed me to compare

their responses to those of teachers. By using surveys and interviews, I obtained both

quantitative and qualitative data that I was able to triangulate to support my findings.

Analysis

I ran statistical tests of association on the survey data to determine the degree each

element of job embeddedness correlates with and predicts teachers' intentions to remain

in or leave their schools. Additionally, I determined which factors teachers claimed were

most influential in their career decisions by calculating the means of their responses to 40

survey items.

I transcribed and coded the teacher and principal interviews with a predetermined

code list and also looked for emergent themes from the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). I then

synthesized the interview data into community and organizational themes. At that point, I

triangulated the quantitative and qualitative data to determine findings for each research

question.

Findings and Dissemination of Results

Having analyzed the data, I grouped the findings into five themes: the rural

lifestyle, community connections, teacher effectiveness and professional aspirations,

collegial connections, and working conditions and administrative support. I found that

principal practices related to increasing teachers' organizational fit, improving working

conditions, providing administrative support, and hiring for community fit were most

likely to improve teacher retention. Based on these findings, I made recommendations for

school leaders and for future research. I created a research brief to disseminate my

findings to the superintendents and principals of the participating rural school divisions.

Ultimately, my research will help rural school leaders to retain more teachers and

increase the effectiveness of their faculties.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations

Like many smaller studies, this study may be limited in generalizability due to the

small sample (12–18) of teacher and principal interviews. While the surveys and

interviews were conducted in several counties, these counties are limited to one state, so

the findings may not be representative of all teachers in rural schools. The small sample

size of principals limits the generalizability of findings with regards to the principal's

perspective on teacher retention. Furthermore, in the principal interviews, the participants

may attempt to depict themselves in as positive a light as possible; while this may

influence the findings, by drawing on multiple sources of data I am able to provide a

clearer picture of what practices they engage in and how teachers perceive those actions.

Delimitations

I conducted this study under the assumption that turnover is problematic for

schools and that, in general, reducing turnover will improve student achievement.

Whether school leaders' practices increase the retention of effective teachers is beyond the scope of this study.

Primary delimitations include the focus on rural school districts and, for interviews, on teachers who have chosen to stay in a public school district for at least three years. In other words, I did not interview teachers who are no longer teaching in a school to ask them why they left. Teachers who have the minimum experience, but have not been in their current school for at least three years were also excluded from interviews. Turnover is especially high during a teachers' first years (Ingersoll, 2003); the focus on teachers who have stayed for at least three years is due to researchers' findings that once teachers have spent several years in a school, their odds of turnover drops significantly (Guarino et al., 2006; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

The focus here is also on classroom teachers. While specialist and resource teaching positions offer teachers a chance to move up the career ladder, I excluded these positions from my survey analysis and my interviews as these employees may have different reasons for staying in their jobs when compared to classroom teachers.

Through the interviews and surveys, I attempted to understand how job embeddedness impacts turnover. This entailed asking questions about teachers' fit with their school and community, the links they have created in their building and the area, and the perceived sacrifices they would make to leave. The retention of teachers based on their effectiveness or demographics is beyond the scope of this study, even though some researchers have found trends with regards to these factors and teacher retention (Guarino et al., 2006).

Background and Role of the Researcher

Researcher Background

At the outset of this project, I served as a resource teacher in a rural school district, having previously served as a classroom teacher. I grew up in a nearby rural school division and served my entire career in one rural school division. While this may seem to limit my perspective on the issue of teacher turnover, it also fueled my interest in researching the topic. Over the past decade, I have seen innumerable colleagues come and go. Many teachers who informally mentored me when I was a first year teacher have now left that division. Likewise, many colleagues who became friends chose to leave the county for other locales. While this problem of practice has caused me to lose colleagues and friends, it has been even more distressing to see effective teachers leave our high-poverty, high-minority student body for more affluent schools. I have seen first-hand the lower quality education students receive when they are sitting in classroom after classroom of beginning teachers who are still learning their craft or in classrooms staffed with long term substitutes because the school division cannot find a qualified candidate to hire. To be clear, I realize that all teachers must serve as beginners at the outset of their careers; a problem occurs, however, when turnover is so high that students have many beginning teachers throughout their education and their learning is continually affected.

In the midst of interviewing teachers and principals for this study, I was appointed to be a rural school principal myself. (I did not interview any of the teachers in my new school.) This provided a new lens with which to view my work, that of a school leader actively working to keep effective teachers. As both a principal in a rural school and an

educator who self-identifies as being committed to social justice, I have a vested interest in improving teacher retention in rural schools.

Influence of the Researcher

With respect to this research study, it is inevitable that my background may influence some aspects of the process. As I conducted interviews in rural schools, some of the participants were colleagues. I feel that this worked to my advantage in that I already had a trusting relationship with several of these participants. It is possible that they felt more inclined to be honest and open as they responded to the interview questions. Additionally, as a teacher who had seen numerous colleagues depart for other schools, I also believe that I carried preconceived notions regarding what principals could do to retain teachers. While writing up my findings, I stayed focused on the data to avoid the potential for my bias, and ultimately ended up changing some of my personal pre-existing ideas because of this.

Definitions of Key Terms

I use the following terms frequently throughout this paper and provide brief definitions here for clarity and to avoid confusion.

Teacher retention. I use the term teacher retention to indicate teachers choosing to remain at a school from one school year to the next.

Teacher turnover. Researchers operationalize this term in varying ways, with some including part time teachers, others counting any vacancy of a position regardless of whether it is voluntary or a dismissal, and still others accounting for retirements. I use the term turnover to refer to full time teachers who voluntarily leave a school prior to

retirement. Turnover encompasses both teachers moving schools and leaving the profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2001).

Teacher migration. Teacher migration refers to the act of teachers voluntarily moving from one school to another. I also use the term teacher mobility (Ingersoll, 2001).

Teacher attrition. This term refers to teachers choosing to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement. As I use it, this term applies both to teachers looking for work in other fields and teachers who take administrative or other non-teaching jobs within school divisions (Ingersoll, 2001).

Leavers. In the teacher turnover literature, leavers are typically defined as teachers who leave the profession and movers as those who move from one school to another (Ingersoll, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). For simplicity, I refer to all teachers who choose to leave a position—for any reason—as a leaver. My focus is on keeping teachers; I do not make a distinction between leaving the profession and moving to another school.

Stayers. Stayers are teachers who choose to remain in the same school from one year to the next (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Natives. I use this term to indicate teachers who are originally from the area in which they teach.

Non-natives. I use this term to indicate teachers who moved to the area in which they teach.

Experienced teacher. I use this term to indicate a teacher who has at least three years of experience in one school as it aligns with my interview sample. I chose to use

three years as a mark of experience because researchers note a drop-off in turnover after

several years (Guarino et al., 2006; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Moreover, several researchers

suggest that it takes three to five years for teachers to become effective (Boyd, Lankford

et al., 2008; Henry et al., 2011; Rivkin et al., 2005).

   Job embeddedness. Job embeddedness is a theoretical construct from the

management literature that was created to explain why employees choose to stay in their

jobs. The three elements of job embeddedness are: (a) links, or connections employees

have with others on- or off-the-job; (b) fit, or the alignment of an employee's skills and

values with an organization and his or her compatibility with the community; and (c)

sacrifice, or those things the employee would give up to leave a job. Note that each

element of job embeddedness has both an organizational and community component, for

a total of six distinct areas of embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Summary

   Retention of teachers is a problem of practice that school leaders cannot afford to

ignore. Teachers are leaving schools and the profession in alarming numbers (Ingersoll,

2003; Sutcher et al., 2016). Moreover, researchers have found that teacher turnover

negatively impacts student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013) and is expensive for

school districts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Milanowski & Odden, 2007).

This problem of practice can be especially harmful to schools in rural areas; geographical

isolation and high poverty can make it difficult for leaders in these schools to recruit and

retain an effective faculty (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001). Fortunately,

these are not the only factors that impact teacher turnover in rural schools. As Boyd,

Grossman et al. (2011) found, school principals play an important role in teachers' decision-making to stay in or leave a school. There are a number of leadership practices they can implement with the potential to improve teacher retention.

While many researchers have looked at why teachers migrate schools or leave the profession (e.g., Boyd, Grossman, et al., 2011), there is a lack of literature that addresses why teachers choose to stay in schools (Keiser, 2011). The current study uses the job embeddedness framework (Mitchell et al., 2001) to investigate why some teachers choose to remain in rural schools and what leaders can do to improve retention. I analyze the responses of teachers and principals in interviews and surveys to answer the research questions. Ultimately, this research will be used to help leaders and policymakers improve teacher retention in rural schools, which will lead to increased teacher efficacy and improved student achievement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher turnover has been an increasing problem for the past three decades (Ingersoll et al., 2014). There are several research foci within the literature base, including characteristics of teachers who stay in and leave teaching, characteristics of schools that teachers leave, teacher fit, the impact of induction and mentoring programs on early career turnover, working conditions, and leadership support. While the literature base on teacher retention is extensive, not all researchers have focused on areas of research that directly inform the work of principals as they attempt to retain teachers. Four areas within this literature base, however, do provide possible strategies for principals to improve teacher retention. They are: hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing leadership and administrative support. I settled on these four categories after reviewing the literature and synthesizing the findings of studies, as each of these practices are well-researched and are enactable by school principals. I address each of these bodies of research in this literature review.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature that informs principal practices with regards to retaining teachers. The first section focuses on my literature search method. I follow that with limitations of the body of literature. The next sections will review major categories of the teacher retention literature, including hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing

leadership and administrative support. I then summarize the original study on job

embeddedness, the primary construct for my conceptual framework, and then review the

handful of studies that have linked job embeddedness and teacher retention. In the final

section I provide an overview of the unfolding model of voluntary turnover that serves as

a foundation for understanding how teachers make career decisions (Lee & Mitchell,

1994).

Search Method

To perform a review of the literature on teacher turnover in rural schools, I

enacted a search method that aligns with my conceptual framework, an overview of

which I provided in the preceding chapter and which is discussed in detail in Chapter

Three. In the first part of my search, I looked for studies on the subject of teacher

retention, specifically those that addressed leadership practices. Secondly, I began to

focus on the specific leadership practices of my conceptual framework. Thirdly, I

searched the management literature for theories of why employees choose to stay in or

leave jobs.

To begin the first stage, I entered terms into the EBSCO database search engine,

Google Scholar, and ProQuest. Search terms included: *teacher turnover, teacher*

retention, teacher attrition, teacher migration, teacher mobility, and *teacher career*

intentions. I also paired these terms with the modifier *rural* to find studies that focused

just on rural schools. This yielded a great number of journal articles on teacher turnover

and several on turnover in rural schools. As I read relevant studies, I entered those titles

into Google Scholar and searched for articles that cited the previous articles. Through this

process, I found a number of recent studies on turnover. Moreover, I was able to identify the highly influential studies within this body of literature by noting which studies were cited most frequently in other research articles.

Throughout my search, as I found relevant journal articles and other sources, I downloaded them in PDF form, imported them into Mendeley—a reference management software—and then sorted them into thematic categories (e.g., fit, induction and mentoring, working conditions, rural teacher retention, etc.). As I read articles, I took notes in a spreadsheet-based database that allowed me to keep track of each article's methodology, citable notes, and major findings. Like Mendeley, I organized this database into categories. I also included columns for type and year of publication and whether the study was qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. This provided various options for sorting the database to quickly find articles.

By reviewing my notes in this database, I identified four recurring themes related to principals' leadership practices: *hiring for fit*, *providing induction and mentoring*, *influencing working conditions*, and *providing administrative support*. The identification of these themes allowed me to search for further articles that focused on these topics. Following a process similar to what is outlined above, I combined the previous search terms with modifiers such as *fit*, *induction*, *mentoring*, *working conditions*, *principal leadership*, and *support*. This part of the search provided a number of articles that bolstered my research on the influence of leadership practices on teacher retention.

To discover an applicable theoretical framework for my study, I looked outside the body of research in education, and began searching the psychology and organizational

management literature. Hom, Lee, Shaw, and Hausknecht (2017) conducted a review of

seminal research studies on employee turnover. In reading their article, I learned of the

construct *job embeddedness*, which seeks to explain why employees remain in their jobs.

I then read the original article on job embeddedness by Mitchell et al. (2001), which has

been cited 3,412 times, according to Google Scholar. From my initial reading, this

construct seemed to be relevant to the present study on why teachers choose to stay in

rural schools, therefore, I revisited the initial search process with job embeddedness in

mind. The EBSCO database and Google Scholar yielded few results, but a standard

Google search and a ProQuest search of dissertations presented a handful of studies on

the effects of job embeddedness on teacher retention (Burke, 2015; Watson, 2011;

Watson, 2018; Watson & Olson-Buchanan, 2016).

While reading the Hom et al. (2017) article, I also read about the *unfolding model
of voluntary turnover* proposed by Lee and Mitchell (1994). As this theory addressed the

psychological processes involved in an employee's decision to leave an organization, I

searched the literature for articles on the unfolding model combined with other terms

such as *teacher retention* and *job embeddedness*.

To conclude my search of the literature, I conducted an analysis of citations, in

which I perused the reference lists of articles I had already found to discern other

frequently cited studies. Butin (2010) notes that this should be the final step of any search

of the literature, and should be done to ensure the researcher has not missed any major

studies. In particular, I looked for studies that were referenced multiple times by other

researchers, and I paid close attention to the studies cited in the two major literature reviews on teacher retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006).

While I identified a large number of articles for possible inclusion in this literature review, I did not include every article in my data. Of those I found, I narrowed the list to empirical studies, reports, literature reviews, and meta-analyses, giving priority to more recent research and excluding articles from practical journals. I excluded studies that were more than 20 years old or that did not meet methodological standards. As I read articles, I retained sources in the database if they provided detailed methodology for data collection and analysis and had findings that were germane to the conversation regarding teacher retention in rural schools. In particular, I looked for articles that were focused on school-based reasons teachers might stay or leave. I included articles regardless of whether they focused on attrition from the profession or movement between schools, as both of these career moves by teachers are likely to increase the challenge of staffing rural schools. Studies that focused on teacher turnover in relation to salary, teacher demographics, or student characteristics, however, were excluded because these are unrelated to leadership practices at the school level.

Here is a summary of the criteria for inclusion in this literature review:

• the study was empirical in nature and peer-reviewed;

• the study was published within the past 20 years or was a seminal work;

• the authors provided a detailed account of their methodology;

- the study focused on teacher retention or an organizational theory related

  to career decisions; and

- the moderators of migration and attrition in the studies on teacher

  retention are able to be manipulated by principals.

In the next section, I provide a brief critique of the literature on teacher retention.

Limitations of the Literature Review

The body of research surrounding teacher retention is vast and extends

back several decades. Despite this, there are still areas within the literature in need

of further exploration. Much of the vast body of literature on teacher turnover

focuses on characteristics of teachers who stay and leave, such as their age or

experience level, gender, scores on ability testing, or race. For example, in their

review of the literature, Borman and Dowling (2008) examined 34 studies, 19 of

which examined teacher retention by teacher gender and 12 did so by teacher

race. Sixteen of these studies investigated the relationship between teacher

retention and student demographics and/or achievement. Of course, some of these

studies included multiple moderators, but this provides some sense of what many

researchers have analyzed. Remarkably, many of these studies fail to examine

why teachers stay, move, or leave. Instead, the researchers often provide findings

such as: women are more likely to leave the profession or unmarried teachers are

more likely to remain in the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008). While these

types of studies may be helpful to guide further research, they are of less practical

value, as this body of evidence does not seem suited to guide leaders in

decreasing teacher turnover.

Further, many studies that do address *why* teachers leave examine factors that are

beyond the influence of school-based leaders. These include teacher salaries, personal

reasons, and lack of professional preparation (e.g., Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond,

2017; Hendricks, 2014; Imazeki, 2005; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005;

Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017). These factors are beyond the scope of this

review as they would require district-level or state-level policy changes. As noted earlier,

the focus of this research project is on areas of research within the literature on teacher

turnover—such as working conditions, leadership support, and induction and mentoring

—that have more potential to be useful to school-based practitioners.

Another limitation of the body of literature is that it tends to focus on

investigating why teachers leave schools and the profession (Keiser, 2011). For example,

many teachers leave schools due to poor working conditions or a lack of leadership

support (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001). Much less attention has been focused on why teachers

stay. Mitchell and Lee (2001) state that "the decision to stay or remain with an

organization is not just the obverse of the decision to leave" (pp. 212–213). In other

words, what drives teachers to leave may be different from their reasons for staying.

Regardless, researchers need to determine why teachers stay as well as leave, as knowing

both sides of this story could be useful to the work of educational leaders and those

making and implementing education policy.

Finally, it has only been in recent years that researchers have turned their attention to the particular challenges of staffing rural schools. There are few studies that specifically address teacher retention (e.g., Beesley et al., 2010; Hammer et al., 2005; Keiser, 2011). I weave this smaller body of research throughout the literature review to provide additional insight into the influences of geography and the rural context on teacher migration as well as retention strategies specific to rural schools.

I now turn to the literature that focuses on those principal practices that have the potential to reduce teacher turnover. Major themes include: hiring teachers for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing administrative support. Additionally, I provide an overview of the theoretical construct job embeddedness, which is used to explain why employees stay in their jobs, and the unfolding model of voluntary turnover, which explains employees' decision-making to leave.

Hiring for Fit

While the concept of fit has been used in organizational research for decades, its use to analyze teacher retention is a recent development (Perrone, 2017). Mitchell et al. (2001) define fit as "an employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment" (p. 1104). Other researchers subdivide this construct into person-organization fit, person-environment fit, person-job fit, and person-group fit (Kristof, 1996). Of those dimensions, person-organization (P-O) fit and person-job (P-J) fit have been used regularly in teacher retention research.

In her review of P-O fit, Kristof (1996) notes that, although the concept has taken on diverse meanings, the most frequent operationalization involves "the congruence between individual and organizational values" (p. 5). To study its relationship with teacher retention, educational researchers must first identify indicators of P-O fit as the concept itself is not directly measurable. In one quantitative study on this topic, Ellis, Skidmore, and Combs (2017) designed survey questions to address philosophies of education and discipline, degree of teacher autonomy, and teacher input in decision-making to quantify teachers' P-O fit with a school.

In contrast, P-J fit has been defined as "the fit between the abilities of a person and the demands of a job" (Kristof, 1996, p. 8). This captures the capacity of a person to successfully perform his or her duties. In educational research, P-J fit has been measured with variables such as knowledge of subject matter, teaching skills, and degree of match with grade level and student population (Ellis et al., 2017).

Fit and Teacher Retention

While this body of research is still relatively small, findings from research consistently show a positive correlation between fit and teacher retention (Youngs, Pogodzinski, Grogan, & Perrone, 2015). In their qualitative study on the role of principals in retaining teachers, Brown and Wynn (2007) found that principals with a higher retention rate incorporated the concept of fit into their hiring practices; many of these principals focused on hiring teachers who would fit well with their current faculty. In a similar qualitative study on recruitment and retention, Egalite et al. (2014) assert that leaders who advance clear missions for their organizations are more likely to find and

retain teachers that are a good match for their schools. The generalizability of their finding needs further study, however, as Egalite et al. conducted interviews strictly in private schools, many of which had religious missions.

Player et al. (2017) used data from the SASS and Teacher Follow Up Survey (TFS) to investigate the relationship between P-J fit and teachers' career decisions. They found that teachers with higher levels of P-J fit were less likely to leave their schools or the profession. Likewise, Jackson (2010) used North Carolina's robust public education database to demonstrate that teachers who were a good match for their school—P-O fit— were less likely to leave for other schools. In yet another study, Ellis et al. (2017) used teacher questionnaire data to establish that higher levels of P-O and P-J fit are positively correlated with satisfaction and commitment, both of which have a positive relationship with employee retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). The research base is clear that teachers with higher levels of P-O and P-J fit are more likely to remain in their schools and in the profession.

It is worth noting that fit is not without its detractors. Blackmore (2019) notes that "recruitment based on 'best fit' to a cultural norm, feminist sociologists and psychologists argue, ignores unconscious bias in which recruiters select people like themselves" (p. 327). Principals hiring for fit need to ensure they avoid hiring based on teacher characteristics such as gender or race. Instead, studies highlight that principals should look for employees whose skills and abilities are a good fit for the job, and whose values align with those of the organization (Burke, 2015; Egalite, Jensen, Stewart, & Wolf, 2014; Player et al., 2017).

Role of School Leaders

To obtain teachers with high levels of fit, studies suggest that school leaders should be intentional about their hiring practices during the recruitment and selection process (Ellis et al., 2017; Perrone, 2017). Ellis et al. (2017) note a positive correlation between accurate job preview—the depiction of future job duties and working conditions given to a prospective employee—and job satisfaction. Unfortunately, Liu and Johnson (2006) determined that few teachers are given a realistic picture of their job during the hiring process, although limitations of their study included self-reported data and the potential for recall bias. They also found that many personnel decisions are made late, causing hiring decisions to be rushed. Ultimately, Ellis et al. (2017) recommend that divisions decentralize the hiring process—interviewing prospective teachers at the school level—to facilitate better exchanges of information. They also recommend that school leaders design an information-rich hiring process that gives teachers an accurate job preview (Ellis et al., 2017). Studies further suggest that division leaders need to build talent pipelines and ensure the budgeting calendar facilitates early hiring so that principals can be selective in finding teachers with the right fit (Ellis et al., 2017; Podolski, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

Rural school leaders often face an additional challenge when hiring for fit: shallow applicant pools due to their geographic isolation (Hammer et al., 2005). Hammer et al. recommend a "grow-your-own" teacher strategy that rural school leaders could use to broaden the pool and hire teachers with a good fit. They offer the example of a high school program for future teachers, in which school leaders created a pathway—with

financial assistance—for students to become teachers. Hammer et al. also recommend providing financial assistance for adults already working in schools—such as paraprofessionals and substitutes—to complete the requirements to become licensed teachers. Such practices have the added benefit of providing schools with teachers who are from the area; as mentioned earlier, teachers show a preference for working near their hometowns (Boyd et al., 2005).

In their study of rural school recruitment and retention, Beesley et al. (2010) found that principals who are more effective in retaining teachers preferred to hire applicants from rural areas in general. These principals presumed that teachers who grew up in rural settings were more likely to be content living and working in a rural area. The small sample size of principals ($N = 7$) in their study, however, limits the generalizability of their finding.

While the research base suggests that teacher fit is important, simply hiring teachers that fit a rural school is insufficient to ensure their retention. Principals must also work to support these teachers' transitions into the school and new teachers' transition into the profession. This can be done through a combination of induction and mentoring.

Providing Induction and Mentoring

Induction Programs

Teacher induction comprises orientation and support programs designed to support teachers during their entry into the profession and a specific school context. These are distinct from preservice activities for all teachers and inservice training (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). The use of these programs has increased dramatically in recent

decades, ostensibly as a response to the problem of teacher attrition. The most frequently

used induction supports include mentoring, seminars and workshops, and collaborative

planning time. A reduced workload, involvement in teacher networks, and teachers' aides

are also used, but are less common (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Of these supports,

mentoring is the most heavily researched with regards to mitigating teacher attrition.

Mentorships

Mentoring refers to the individualized support a veteran teacher provides a

novice. In their review of the literature on teacher mentoring, Hobson, Ashby, Malderez,

and Tomlinson (2009) define mentoring as,

> the one-on-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a
>
> more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the
>
> development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate their induction into the
>
> culture of the profession (in this case, teaching) and into the specific local
>
> context." (p. 207)

Hobson et al. (2009) compile a list of the potential benefits of mentoring for new

teachers, including higher confidence, morale, and job satisfaction. Mentors stand to reap

benefits as well, to include learning new pedagogical strategies, reinvigorated

professional commitment, and leadership opportunities (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009;

Hobson et al., 2009).

Benefits of Induction

Not surprisingly, researchers find that effective induction programs reduce the

probability of teachers moving to other schools or leaving the profession altogether

(Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Taken individually, collaborative planning time and

mentorships each had significant effects on turnover. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) analyzed

SASS and TFS data and found that common planning time among same-subject teachers

reduced novices' probability of leaving the profession by 43%. They also found a

reduction in migration to other schools as well, but noted that this finding was not

statistically significant. Mentoring significantly reduced attrition from the profession,

with the greatest effects coming with the use of in-field mentors (Smith & Ingersoll,

2004). By using longitudinal SASS and TFS data, Gray and Taie (2015) found that first-

year teachers who had mentors were more likely to remain in the field each year over a

five-year timeframe.

The greatest retention benefits from induction, however, occur when multiple

supports are used. Using the same dataset, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) compared the use

of comprehensive induction packages to basic induction packages and no induction. Of

these three options, they found that new teachers who received comprehensive induction

packages were significantly less likely to move schools or leave the profession. Similarly,

Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) used regression analysis with more recent SASS and TFS

data and found that increasing the number of induction supports correlates with a

decrease in migration. Glazerman et al. (2010) had a contrasting finding, noting that one

or two year induction programs did not exert a significant effect on teacher retention,

although it did increase student achievement for teachers in the two-year group. Their

sample, however, was limited to data from urban elementary schools, whereas Smith and

Ingersoll (2004) and Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) used a nationally representative sample, lending their studies broader generalizability.

Role of School Leaders

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) suggest that school leaders who provide multiple induction supports, including mentoring, over a minimum two-year timeframe, will produce a positive effect on teacher retention. Additionally, Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, and Liu (2001) recommend that leaders cultivate an *integrated culture* within their schools. In this type of collaborative culture, it is commonplace for veteran teachers to actively support new teachers. Additionally, novice teachers frequently learn from the observation and modeling of veterans (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Moreover, by analyzing teacher interviews in their longitudinal study, Johnson and Birkeland (2003) noted that teachers in integrated cultures were less likely to move schools. Wang et al. (2008) caution, however, that an integrated culture is unlikely to emerge naturally; they suggest that school leaders must actively cultivate this type of environment amongst faculty members.

Influencing Working Conditions

Working conditions are a significant moderator of teacher turnover (Borman & Dowling, 2008). In schools with poor working conditions, teacher dissatisfaction—and consequently, turnover—is likely to be higher. In Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation, working conditions are listed as a *hygiene*, or part of the job environment. While positive working conditions may not yield satisfaction, they can prevent

dissatisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959/2017). Therefore, school

principals cannot ignore working conditions if they wish to retain teachers.

Conceptualization of Working Conditions

Researchers operationalize working conditions in differing ways. According to

Ladd (2011), "many of these components of working conditions are overlapping and are

difficult to specify with precision" (p. 29). A strong correlation among dimensions of

working conditions complicates the research base (Boyd, Grossman, et al., 2011). For

example, a school with a high level of collegial support is more likely to have a favorable

behavioral climate. Moreover, Boyd, Grossman, et al. (2011) caution about the potential

presence of bias in research on working conditions as most of these studies use self-

reported data from teachers, which they say could be influenced by teachers' level of job

satisfaction. An additional complication is that some researchers include school

leadership or administrative support as a domain of working conditions (e.g., Grissom,

2011; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Ladd, 2011); others instead look at leadership as a separate

entity (e.g., Boyd, Grossman, et al., 2011; Johnson, 2006). Again, there is considerable

overlap here, as principals play a key role in moderating working conditions (Burkhauser,

2016). Due to the significant effect of school leaders on teacher retention noted by Boyd,

Grossman, et al. (2011), I include leadership and administrative support as a distinct

section.

Collegial Support and Collaboration

As noted above, support from veteran teachers is especially important for new

teachers (Hobson et al., 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). All teachers, however, can

benefit from an atmosphere of support and collaboration. Unfortunately, teachers in many schools perform their work in isolation from colleagues. Schools that instead have a culture of collaboration allow teachers to learn from one another via observation, modeling, and collaborative reflection (Wang et al., 2008). The collective learning that results from such an environment is more conducive to retention because teachers can rely on each other for help (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

Three elements undergird a supportive and collaborative environment. Foremost, there must be common understandings between leaders and teachers about the mission and goals of the school. Moreover, there must be a high degree of trust among the faculty for them to invite others into their classrooms for observations and to share challenges with each other. Finally, school leaders need to create formal structures for collaboration, providing time for teams to meet and plan during the school day (Ladd, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Teacher Effectiveness and Professional Development

Individual teacher effectiveness is another moderator of teacher retention. Goldhaber et al. (2011) examined longitudinal data from North Carolina—that included value-added measures of teaching effectiveness—and determined that teacher effectiveness is positively correlated with lower teacher attrition and mobility. Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, and Wyckoff (2011) studied turnover by using teachers' applications-to-transfer in New York City. They claim these are better indicators of intent-to-transfer than data from actual transfers because the latter ignores involuntary reassignments and teachers who wanted—but were unable—to transfer. Their findings

corroborate those of Goldhaber, Gross, and Player (2011): more effective teachers were

less likely to apply for transfers to other schools. Using survey and interview data,

England, Chiong, Menzies, and Parameshwaran (2018) discovered that teachers who

have served in the same schools for over 10 years are more likely to perceive themselves

as having attained professional mastery. In other words, teachers who think they are good

teachers are more likely to continue teaching.

Given that more effective teachers have higher rates of retention, research

suggests that school leaders should prioritize professional development (Kraft, Marinell,

& Yee, 2016). Using human resource data and responses to teacher surveys, Kraft et al.

conducted a longitudinal investigation of teacher turnover in New York City and found

that as school leaders improved professional development—specifically, content area

pedagogy and data use training—turnover decreased. In their qualitative study of school

leaders with high teacher retention rates, Brown and Wynn (2007) noted a recurring

theme of commitment to professional growth. Instead of focusing classroom visits on

evaluation, those principals used the visits to provide teachers with opportunities for

support and development.

Behavioral Climate

Teachers want to work in environments characterized by orderliness and safety

(Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). Consequently, student behavior and school

safety are important moderators of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001; Simon & Johnson,

2015). Another variable in Kukla-Acevedo's (2009) study of SASS and TFS data was the

effect of student behavior on teachers' career decisions. She found a positive correlation

between negative student behavior and turnover. Moreover, the effect was remarkably

higher for first year teachers, indicating a need for school leaders to provide additional

behavior support to novices.

Administrators can promote a positive behavioral climate by communicating clear

standards of conduct to students and then enforcing them equitably and humanely.

Additionally, they should foster a caring school culture in which teachers and students are

valued and supported (Duke, 2002). Ultimately, teachers will have a more productive

work environment characterized by less dissatisfaction when school administrators

maintain a consistent approach to discipline (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Facilities and Resources

The quality of school facilities and provision of adequate resources also seem to

play a small role in teacher retention. Using surveys from teachers in Washington, D.C.,

Buckley, Schneider, and Shang (2004) studied the relationship between the quality of

school facilities and teacher retention and found a small, positive correlation. They also

noted that issues such as indoor air quality, heating and cooling, and even lighting can

affect teaching and learning.

Many researchers (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Loeb et al., 2005; Nguyen, 2018) have

attempted to determine the importance of school resources. Loeb et al. (2005) collected

survey data from a random sample of teachers in California. They found that poor

working conditions, including large class sizes and a dearth of instructional materials or

technology, are predictive of turnover. A limitation of this study, however, was that first

year teachers were underrepresented due to a time gap between identifying the sample

and administering the survey. In contrast to Loeb et al.'s (2005) findings, however, Gritz

and Theobald (1995) found no significant connection between school expenses for

instructional materials and turnover. The generalizability of their study is questionable

today, however, as they used older data from the 1980's and their sample was comprised

entirely of White teachers. The body of research regarding the effect of school resources

on teacher turnover is in need of more conclusive findings (Nguyen, 2018).

Teacher Autonomy and Influence

A number of external forces influence and constrain the work of teachers,

including school leaders, the local community, and district, state, and federal policies.

Dissatisfaction can result, however, when teachers feel that they do not have the

autonomy to make instructional decisions in their classrooms. Glazer (2018) interviewed

14 invested leavers—teachers who were fully credentialed, held master's degrees in

education, and had successfully taught for at least three years and originally planned to

teach for many years at the outset of their careers—and found that experienced teachers

were more likely to leave when they felt "their situations no longer allowed them to do

what they had found to be successful teaching" (Glazer, 2018, p. 58). Many of these

teachers identified mandates from administration and accountability pressures as the

environmental changes that limited their autonomy and caused them to leave the

profession.

Kukla-Acevedo (2009), however, drew a contrasting conclusion with SASS and

TFS data. She concluded that that teacher autonomy was not significantly related to

teachers' career decisions. While Kukla-Acevedo's data included a much larger and

representative sample, it includes teachers at all stages of their careers. Glazer (2018)

only studied experienced teachers, so it is possible that teachers' need for autonomy

increases throughout their careers. This discrepancy warrants further research into the

effect of autonomy on teacher retention.

In addition to being able to make decisions in their classrooms, teachers also

benefit from having influence throughout a building. Ingersoll (2001) conducted a

regression analysis with SASS and TFS data, and found that teachers are less likely to

depart from a school when they have more school-wide influence. Simon and Johnson's

(2015) research suggests that administrators should welcome teachers to the table in

making instructional decisions. Brown and Wynn (2007) concur, finding that principals

with a less hierarchical approach to leadership—those who share decision-making—are

more likely to retain teachers.

Role of School Leaders

Overall, the body of research on school working conditions indicates that

favorable working conditions yield lower teacher migration and attrition. This is not

surprising, given that working conditions are one of Herzberg et al.'s (1959/2017) key

hygienes. As noted above, school leaders directly influence teachers' working conditions.

Effective principals are able to foster a collaborative school culture (Brown & Wynn,

2007; Wang et al., 2008), provide professional development opportunities (Brown &

Wynn, 2007; Kraft et al., 2016), maintain a consistent approach to discipline

(Allensworth et al., 2009; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), provide classroom autonomy to

teachers (Glazer, 2018), keep facilities in good repair, and provide instructional resources (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb et al., 2005).

In her study of North Carolina state data, Burkhauser (2016) noted that principal quality exerted a positive effect on teachers' perceptions of working conditions. One hallmark of an effective leader, then, is to promote positive working conditions for teachers. These findings have implications at the district level. Burkhauser recommends that district leaders survey teachers regarding their perceptions of working conditions. With this knowledge, they can redirect resources or provide targeted professional development to leaders to improve negative conditions. Additionally, the study suggests that division leaders should provide incentives for their most effective principals to work in low performing schools in an effort to improve poor working conditions often found there (Burkhauser, 2016).

Providing Leadership and Administrative Support

Even beyond their influence on working conditions, school leaders can have a dramatic effect on teachers' career decisions (Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Ladd, 2011; Player et al., 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Leaders have a plethora of responsibilities within a school. They must communicate a vision and expectations, encourage and recognize staff, be available to talk with and listen to teachers, and provide instructional support (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Player et al., 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Their capacity to perform these tasks effectively can influence teacher turnover.

In her study of working conditions in North Carolina, Ladd (2011) examined the influence of leadership, professional development, facilities and resources, and teaching environment on teachers' career decisions. Of these, she claimed that teachers' perception of leadership was the most predictive indicator of intent to stay or leave. Similarly, Grissom (2011) found that the effectiveness of principals—which they measure using six indicators of leadership on the SASS and TFS surveys—is positively correlated with teacher retention. Moreover, this association was even stronger in disadvantaged schools (Grissom, 2011). Player et al. (2017) also used SASS and TFS data to argue that leadership had a broad influence on teacher retention. They noted that this effect extended to elementary, middle, and high schools, rural, urban, and suburban schools, and even novice and veteran teachers. School leaders require the skills to handle the many facets of their jobs; teachers are more likely to leave if their administrators lack the competence to lead (Player et al., 2017).

Research by Boyd, Grossman, et al. (2011) suggests that administrators must also support the work that teachers do in their classrooms. They define administrative support as "the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them to improve their teaching" (Boyd, Grossman et al., 2011, p. 307). In their quantitative study of the influence of six school factors on teacher retention in New York City, Boyd, Grossman, et al. found that administrative support was the only significant predictor of teacher retention. The concept of support, however, is ambiguous and has multiple meanings among teachers. Some teachers may prefer autonomy; others may desire frequent classroom visits. Leaders must possess the awareness and flexibility to

differentiate based upon each teacher's needs and preferences (Boyd, Grossman, et al., 2011).

Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness is a construct that captures why employees choose to stay in their positions. Put differently, it is the sum of the forces that constrain a person in their current job (Mitchell et al., 2001). Prior to its conceptualization, many organizational researchers studied the effects of job satisfaction on organizational commitment, but job satisfaction alone does not address all of the reasons employees might choose to stay or leave.

The factors that compel employees to remain in their jobs were examined at length by Mitchell et al. (2001) who classified them into six dimensions of job embeddedness. These dimensions include on-the-job and off-the-job components of fit, links, and sacrifice (see Table 1). By on-the-job, Mitchell and colleagues mean those factors directly related to a person's organization; whereas, by off-the-job, they are referring to factors related to an employee's community or home life. The inclusion of the three off-the-job dimensions in their framework is significant, because they capture nuances of employee's career decisions that were not typically addressed in the organizational literature prior to this framework. Previous researchers had focused almost exclusively on organizational factors the influenced employee retention despite evidence that workers sometimes leave for reasons unrelated to their jobs (Mitchell et al., 2001). These three dimensions—fit, links, and sacrifice—are discussed in the following three sub-sections.

Table 1

Dimensions of Job Embeddedness

Organizational fit	Organizational links	Organizational sacrifice
Community fit	Community links	Community sacrifice

Fit

Mitchell et al. (2001) define fit as "an employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment" (p. 1104). Organizational fit is the congruence of an employee's and an organization's values and goals. Moreover, it also captures the employee's ability to do the job satisfactorily—an employee who is ineffective is not a good fit for a position. In other words, the dimension of organizational fit includes both P-O and P-J fit.

Community fit refers to a person's match with the surrounding locale. As mentioned earlier, fit could play an important role in the retention of teachers in rural areas. An employee who grew up in a rural area and enjoys the quieter, slower pace of life will be more likely to stay than one who is used to city life with its concomitant amenities such as shopping and nightlife. A higher degree of fit with the organization or community will yield a greater chance an employee will remain with the organization (Holtom, Mitchell, & Lee, 2006).

Links

Links are "characterized as formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1104). Organizational links refers to

the connections among colleagues and between an employee and the organization. Within a school setting, these connections include the collegial support and collaboration among teachers that is noted earlier in this chapter.

Outside of work, links could refer to connections to people, groups, or other organizations within a community. People are less likely to leave a position and move to another area when they have a great number of community links. Mitchell and Lee (2001) note a direct impact of these links, too, when they state, "people who are friends and close to us can bring pressure to bear that will influence our deliberations or thoughts about leaving a job" (p. 217). This normative pressure within a workplace or community could prevent individuals from wanting to leave or move.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is conceptualized as "the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1105). Leaving a position may cause organizational sacrifices, such as leaving close coworkers or a favorable supervisor, or giving up a pension or tenure. Community sacrifices, however, typically entail a person leaving a job and moving to a new area. This could involve moving away from family or friends, a suitable community, or local amenities. Mitchell and Lee (2001) note that off-the-job sacrifices could also occur without a move; accepting a new job could force a longer commute or less desirable work schedule that impacts life at home.

Dimensional Connections

Mitchell et al. (2001) liken job embeddedness to a web with numerous interconnections as there is considerable overlap among these dimensions. They state that, "one who is highly embedded has many links that are close together (not highly differentiated)" (p. 1104). In other words, embedded employees have many tightly connected strands serving to keep them in their jobs. This was evidenced by positive correlations among the dimensions of job embeddedness in the findings of the original study. Community fit, links, and sacrifice all showed significant associations, as did organizational fit and sacrifice (Mitchell et al., 2001). As an example, a person who grew up in a rural area and has numerous links with family, friends, and community groups may be more likely to fit within a that type of community. Additionally, they may feel that they have more to sacrifice if they left. Similarly, if a person has a high degree of organizational fit, then they may perceive themselves as having more to sacrifice organizationally. While these dimensions will be studied separately in the present study, it is important to bear these interconnections in mind as the dimensions do not exist in isolation.

Findings from Original Study

Mitchell et al. (2001) studied the effects of job embeddedness on the turnover intentions of grocery store and hospital workers to determine the validity of their new construct. They found that job embeddedness did indeed account for more variance in turnover than job satisfaction alone. In studying the effects of job embeddedness on grocery store and hospital workers' intentions to leave, Mitchell et al. (2001) found that

job embeddedness is "positively, significantly, and moderately correlated with job

satisfaction and organizational commitment" (p. 1111). Of the six dimensions,

organizational fit is most strongly correlated with satisfaction and commitment. Not

surprisingly, the three community dimensions have less correlation with job satisfaction

and commitment.

The authors found that higher levels of job embeddedness meant that employees

were less likely to search for job alternatives, which led to lower voluntary turnover.

Employees who are more embedded—meaning they rate highly in each of the six

dimensions—are more likely to stay in a position (Mitchell et al., 2001). Moreover, job

embeddedness serves as a better predictor of voluntary turnover than job satisfaction or

job commitment (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). More recent research continues to support these

findings (Burton, Holtom, Sablynski, Mitchell, & Lee, 2010). As such, job embeddedness

is an ideal framework for studying teacher retention with a focus on determining why

teachers stay in rural schools.

Job Embeddedness and Teacher Retention

Job embeddedness has served as a framework for a number of studies in

organizational literature, however, it has only recently emerged as a lens for looking at

the problem of teacher retention (e.g., Burke, 2015; Watson & Olson-Buchanan, 2016;

Watson, 2018). In her dissertation, Watson (2011) noted that she was the first researcher

to explore the connection between job embeddedness and teachers' career decisions. In a

quantitative study, she surveyed 143 teachers with less than five years of experience. She

used the original job embeddedness survey from Mitchell et al. (2001) and included a few

other questions on demographics and their turnover intentions. One limitation of her

study was that the vast majority of her respondents were current stayers; she only

received responses from 15 former teachers. As noted earlier, Watson mitigated this

shortcoming, however, by asking teachers about their future intentions to stay in or leave

their current school. She notes another potential limitation in that her study was

conducted during a period of economic recession, when there were not many job

alternatives; this could have affected her findings by inflating the number of teachers

planning to stay in their positions (Watson, 2011).

Using a multivariate ANOVA test, Watson (2011) found a negative correlation

between job embeddedness and teacher turnover; if a teacher was more embedded in a

job, they were less likely to have left it. She also found a modest relationship between job

embeddedness and intent to stay during the subsequent school year. Of the specific

dimensions of job embeddedness, she found that organizational fit, community fit, and

community sacrifice were significantly related to teachers' career decisions. Interestingly,

though, she found that school districts with low turnover rates did not necessarily have

higher overall levels of job embeddedness (Watson, 2011).

Watson (2011) notes that future research into the correlation between job

embeddedness and teacher turnover should involve qualitative study. Qualitative methods

such as interviews may provide more in-depth answers to questions about this connection

that cannot be answered with a survey alone. The present study is meant to fill that need

for more research.

Teacher Career Decisions

Outside of the realm of education there is also a plethora of research on why employees choose to stay in or leave jobs. In their review of seminal research on employee turnover, Hom et al. (2017) trace the development of turnover research over the past 100 years. While much of the older research is focused on job satisfaction, the availability of alternatives, and the ease of changing jobs (Hom et al. 2017), more recent studies have examined varying forms of, and external influences on, organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Cohen, 1995). The traditional view is that job dissatisfaction or low organizational commitment leads employees to leave, and that employees who are satisfied and committed will stay. Mitchell and Lee (2001) note that this notion is correct, but "it is too narrow and simplistic" (p. 225). Sometimes people remain in unsatisfying jobs, or leave organizations to which they are committed. In other words, there could be a number of reasons employees choose to stay in or leave jobs.

The Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover

In what has been termed the "dominant turnover perspective today" (Hom et al., 2017, p. 536), Lee and Mitchell (1994) proposed the *unfolding model of voluntary turnover*, codifying four distinct routes to employee departures. In three of these pathways, an event—which Lee and Mitchell label a *shock*—"jars employees toward deliberate judgments about their jobs and, perhaps, to voluntarily quit their job" (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, p. 60). Shocks can be positive, negative, or neutral, and are more likely to engender turnover than dissatisfaction (Hom et al., 2017). Examples of shocks include a pregnancy, a poor job evaluation, or an unexpected job offer from another organization.

In Lee and Mitchell's (1994) first decision path, these shocks cause employees to evaluate them in light of previous decisions, personal rules, or similar shocks. In this path, the shock activates some pre-programmed script that the person then executes; very little decision-making is involved in this process. An example of this decision path would be a person deciding to become a stay-at-home parent upon the birth of a child, and then enacting that plan upon having a baby. Similarly, a person reaching retirement age or winning the lottery could also engender a pre-existing script to leave a job.

The second possible decision path—branded a "push" decision by Lee and Mitchell (1994)—also begins with a shock that is typically negative. In this situation, however, an employee does not have an existing script. Instead, the employee evaluates the shock to determine whether it is compatible with his or her existing *images*, or a person's values, goals, and methods of achieving those goals (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). This produces a binary choice. If keeping the job would conflict with the employee's images, then the employee will most likely leave; alternatively, the employee may be able to reconcile the shock and his or her images and stay on the job. Examples of shocks that may precipitate push decisions include unplanned pregnancies, unfavorable performance reviews, or being passed over for a promotion.

Decision path #3—which Lee and Mitchell (1994) call a "pull" decision—is similar to #2, except that it can be induced via positive or negative shocks, and that the employee's inability to reconcile the shock with his or her images results in that person initiating a job search. This likely produces a more complex thought process, as the decision-maker must evaluate several potential courses of action such as staying in his or

her current position, or choosing among other job offers. Mitchell and Lee (2001) expand this idea to include job alternatives that are possibilities but may not be guaranteed. Pull decisions can be engendered by similar shocks as push decisions or by unsolicited job offers from other companies.

No shock initiates the final decision path, rather, an employee gradually reconsiders whether or not his or her images fit with the current organization. If they do not, job dissatisfaction reduces organizational commitment, which can then lead to turnover. Decision path #4 can arise from the gradual shift of individual or organizational values or goals. For example, perhaps a teacher slowly realizes he is no longer invested in education and subsequently becomes dissatisfied with the long hours he works at home to lesson plan and grade assignments. Over time he begins to explore other career paths and eventually leaves the field of education for a job with more defined hours (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Job Embeddedness as a Buffer Against Leaving

For many employees, remaining in their current job is their default action and may not even constitute a conscious choice (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). According to the unfolding model of voluntary turnover, shocks nudge workers out of the status quo, and the decision to stay in or leave a job becomes a deliberate decision-making process. Not all employees who experience shocks, however, choose to leave their positions. Mitchell and Lee note that the decision paths of the unfolding model are influenced by a person's job embeddedness. If the more a person is embedded in their job increases their chance of staying, then job embeddedness acts as a buffer against leaving due to shocks.

Mitchell and Lee (2001) tested this notion by collecting data from employees at a regional service center for a financial organization. The researchers measured employees' job embeddedness prior to departure, surveyed them on types of shocks they experienced, and conducted exit interviews to assess decision paths. They found that people who are highly embedded think about leaving less, and ultimately were more likely to stay, than those who have low embeddedness. While their results were exploratory, it is plausible that job embeddedness can reduce employee turnover by buffering against shocks.

Summary

Regardless of how perfect a job or organization may seem, shocks are bound to occur—and will likely occur more often in dysfunctional organizations—causing employees to think about leaving. If personnel are highly embedded in their jobs, however, they are less likely to follow through on actually leaving. Embeddedness occurs through an employee's fit and links to their organization and community, and what they would have to sacrifice to leave their position. Within the context of rural schools, it is possible that a principal focused on increasing the job embeddedness of his or her faculty would also see an increase in teacher retention. Throughout the literature base on teacher retention, four categories of leadership practices emerge as promising principal practices that have the potential to increase teachers' job embeddedness. As mentioned earlier, these are: hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing leadership and administrative support. All of these practices have been empirically linked to teachers' career decisions. Additionally, these groupings form a logical framework because they address principals' actions throughout a teachers'

career arc: recruitment, induction, and the conditions in which they work. In the next

chapter, I explain how I designed this study to explore the relationships among those

principal practices, teachers' job embeddedness, and teachers' decisions to stay in or

leave rural schools.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, I seek to understand why some teachers choose to stay in rural schools—as opposed to migrating to other schools or leaving the profession. In the previous two chapters, I described the problem of teacher turnover in rural schools, and I discussed what is known and what is not known about the topic. In this chapter, I articulate the conceptual framework that forms the basis for this study, describe my method for collecting and analyzing data, make note of data collection limitations, and examine ethical considerations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focuses attention on principals' leadership practices, whether and how they influence teachers' *job embeddedness*, and how job embeddedness impacts teachers' decision-making to stay in or leave their jobs (see Figure 1). I chose to use four categories of leadership practices: hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing administrative support. As I detailed in Chapter Two, these are practices amenable to change by principals that have been extensively researched in the teacher retention literature.

The Rural Context

Principals' Leadership Practices

Hiring for Fit

Providing Induction & Mentoring

Influencing Working Conditions

Providing Administrative Support

Job Embeddedness

Fit   Links   Sacrifice

Teachers' Career Decisions

Stay   Leave
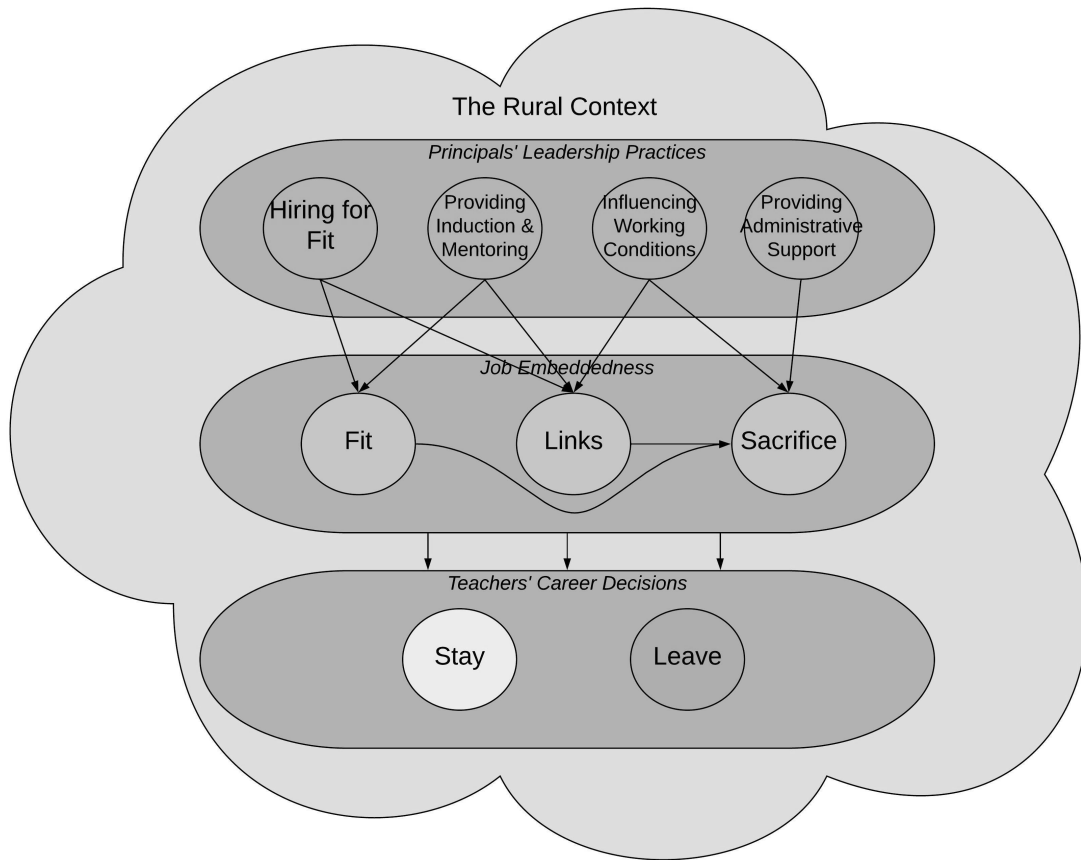
Figure 1. Conceptual framework depicting principals' leadership practice influencing teachers' job embeddedness, which in turn influences their career decisions.

The theoretical foundation for this study is job embeddedness, which addresses why employees choose to stay in their jobs (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. created this construct to capture the elements that lead to employees' decisions to remain in their jobs. They conceive of job embeddedness as a "broad constellation of influences on employee retention" (Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 1104). The more an employee is embedded, the less likely he or she is to leave a job. Job embeddedness has three dimensions—links, fit, and sacrifice—that I discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Each of these dimensions has

a component related to an employee's organization and community. This seemed to be an ideal construct to undergird my study, given that the focus of my research is on why teachers choose to stay in rural areas and that job embeddedness provides a framework for understanding why employees stay in jobs.

Thirdly, the conceptual framework provides a lens for looking at how teachers make decisions to stay in or leave schools. As I wrote about in Chapter Two, Lee and Mitchell's (1994) *unfolding model of voluntary turnover* provides a framework for understanding why employees choose to leave jobs. Job embeddedness, however, acts as a buffer against employees leaving, influencing them to stay in their current positions.

Research Questions

As noted in Chapter One, the two primary research questions for this study are:

- What factors are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools?
- What factors do principals identify as most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools?

These two research questions serve as a foundation for the design of the study. They undergird the methodology of this study, including the research design, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures (Butin, 2010).

Research Design

To answer the research questions, I used a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively, I collected survey data from teachers in rural schools to determine the factors most influential in teachers' decisions to stay in rural schools. According to Butin (2010), quantitative methods such as surveys

allow researchers to gather data from a broad sample, which provides a wider perspective than qualitative. Survey data, however, does have limitations in that it is unable to provide the depth of perspective of qualitative data such as that found in interviews. Another benefit of qualitative data is that it can provide researchers the opportunity to discover unforeseen perspectives. To that end, I also interviewed teachers to determine which factors are important in their decisions to stay in rural schools. To provide a leadership perspective, I interviewed principals in rural schools to find out what factors they perceive as being important in teachers' decisions to stay. Ultimately, I used this mixed-methods approach to provide data types of both methodologies in an attempt to obtain a comprehensive picture of principals' leadership practices and their impact on teacher retention (see Table 2; Butin, 2010).

Access and Participants

This study took place in seven rural school districts in Virginia, specifically, those that are labeled either rural distant or rural remote, based on their NCES locale descriptions of being five to 25 miles from urbanized areas (rural distant) or farther (rural remote). Two of those districts are in rural distant towns within rural counties. I excluded rural fringe counties because of their proximity to urban centers. Because of this proximity, many of these fringe divisions lack characteristic features of rural areas such as smaller schools and higher levels of poverty.

Table 2

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures by Research Question

	Research Question 1. What factors are most influential in teachers' decisions to stay in rural schools?	Research Question 2. What factors do principals identify as most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools?
Data Collection	I emailed surveys to teachers within participating counties. Teacher interviews were drawn from those willing to participate based on survey response; they must have served at least three years in their current school.	I emailed principals from schools with higher and lower overall levels of teacher job embeddedness.
Data Use	Surveys: I used these to see which dimensions of job embeddedness are most predictive of teachers' career intentions. Additionally, I analyzed teachers' responses to see which dimensions they say are most important to their decision-making. Interviews: I used these to probe more deeply and develop a rich narrative pertaining to why teachers have chosen to stay in their current schools.	Interviews: I used these to find out what principals perceive as being important factors in teachers' decisions to stay. I also compared those responses with those of the teachers.
Data Analysis	Surveys: I calculated means of the factors teachers identified as impacting their career decision-making. I also used correlations and regression analysis to determine the relationship between each dimension of job embeddedness and teachers' career intentions. Interviews: I coded transcripts using NVivo and looked for themes in teachers' responses.	Interviews: I coded transcripts using NVivo and looked for themes in principals' responses.

Survey Data Collection

To begin data collection, I contacted the superintendents of 45 rural school divisions for permission to conduct research. I solicited participation from each of these

counties—as opposed to just one—to increase the sample size and thereby reduce sampling errors in the final analysis of the surveys (Fink, 2017). In my correspondence, I explained the purpose of my research study, asked about allowing their teachers to participate, and offered to share findings with them to help improve the teacher retention in their schools (see Appendix A). From these superintendents, I obtained permission to conduct research in seven divisions that represent 37 total schools. I then electronically distributed surveys according to each division's policy. For some school divisions, I sent an email containing the survey link to the superintendent or a designee, and that person shared it with teachers in the entire division. In other divisions, principals distributed the surveys to teachers in their schools (see Appendix B for principal and teacher emails). In both scenarios, I asked those distributing the surveys to not pressure teachers into responding. Ultimately, I received 374 responses to the survey, from teachers at 37 different schools.

To increase participation, I offered an incentive for teachers to complete the survey. In my email communication that was distributed to teachers, I advised them that I would randomly select five survey respondents to receive $25 Amazon.com gift certificates. Teachers needed to include an email address to be considered for these incentives; I gave respondents the option of including their contact information to be considered or not. Once I completed collecting survey data, I input all email addresses into a randomizer and chose five winners. The winners each received an email with the gift certificates attached.

Interview Participant Selection

My goal for the interview portion of my data collection was to select four case schools in which I would interview the principal and three teachers. While I expected that interviewing teachers and principals would generally provide valuable information on why teachers choose to stay in schools, I surmised that talking to multiple people from the same school could possibly provide the potential for further themes to emerge in the case schools.

I used the final question on the survey to obtain a potential sample of teachers for interviewing. This question asked teachers who had remained in their current school for at least three years whether they were interested in participating in an interview to provide a more detailed perspective on their rationale to stay in their school. I offered a $25 Amazon.com gift certificate to all teachers who were chosen to participate in the interviews.

I only chose to interview teachers with at least three years of experience in their school to avoid interviewing novices, operating under the assumption that job embeddedness is likely to increase over time—especially with respect to links and sacrifice, but perhaps also to fit. Additionally, school divisions in Virginia may offer teachers a continuing contract (which is the state's version of tenure) after three years, depending on their local policy, which could be an important element related to sacrifice; if teachers change schools once they have a continuing contract, they may be placed on provisional status again.

Once I completed the survey data collection, I used a mean of means—first taking the mean of survey responses to questions for each dimension of job embeddedness, then averaging those means—to determine a job embeddedness score for each teacher, and then calculated an average job embeddedness score for each of the 37 schools. From there, I ranked the participating schools in terms of average teacher job embeddedness. I attempted to contact the principals of four schools—two each with high and low average job embeddedness scores and having at least three teachers willing to participate in interviews—to request their participation in the second phase of my study. By looking at rural schools with high and low levels of job embeddedness, I hoped to compare the perspectives of principals and to gain insight into what is important to teachers' retention; this would aid me in answering Research Question Two. To incentivize interview participation, they were advised that participating principals would also receive $25 Amazon.com gift certificates.

Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts to communicate with these principals, I was only able to schedule an interview with one of them. This was perhaps due to the context in which my data collection took place, during a three-month shutdown of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many principals were likely busy responding to the new reality of leading teachers to deliver instruction via online platforms.

Having heard from the one principal who agreed to be interviewed, I then contacted the three teachers from that school that had responded to the surveys with a willingness to also be interviewed. Of those, only one responded immediately. Another

responded a couple of weeks later also agreeing to be interviewed. I was unable to schedule an interview with the third teacher at that school.

As a result of the difficulty of reaching principals and teachers, I ended up selecting three additional principals to contact. To the extent possible, I based my selection on the schools' average job embeddedness, grade levels served, and number of teachers willing to be interviewed. I selected schools to represent both high and low job embeddedness, as well as elementary, middle, and high schools. Additionally, I selected schools that had more than three teachers willing to be interviewed in the hopes that enough of them would respond to my emails (see Table 3). Ultimately, I was able to schedule interviews with the principals of four schools and 18 teachers from six schools (see Table 4).

Table 3

Average Job Embeddedness Scores of Schools Selected for Interviews

School	School Type	Average Job Embeddedness	Principal Interviewed	Number of Teacher Interviews
School A	High	3.99	No	3
School B	Middle	3.97	Yes	2
School C	High	3.88	Yes	3
School D	Elementary	3.79	Yes	2
School E	Primary	3.70	No	2
School F	Elementary	3.54	Yes	6

Table 4

Demographics of Teachers Interviewed

Teacher	School Type	Years teaching	Years at school	Native/Non-native	Top reasons for staying
Teacher A1	High	18	5	Spouse native	Spouse's family Teaching assignment Principal
Teacher A2	High	10	4	Native	Home/family Community Want to finish degree
Teacher A3	High	4	4	Native	Students Home/family Community
Teacher B1	Middle	25	13	Spouse native	Spouse's home/family Proximity to family Small community
Teacher B2	Middle	40	39	Native	Home/family/own a house Comfort with staying School reputation
Teacher C1	High	11	11	Native	Home/family Collegial relationships Desire to work with challenging students
Teacher C2	High	9	5	Non-native	Professional growth Administrative and collegial support Small school size
Teacher C3	High	7	7	Non-native	Family work environment Own a house Want to finish degree
Teacher D1	Elementary	25	25	Native	Giving back to community Want to make a difference Home/Family
Teacher D2	Elementary	5	5	Native	Loan Forgiveness program Home/Family Collegial relationships
Teacher E1	Primary	16	5	Did not mention	Location/commute Collegial relationships Value alignment
Teacher E2	Primary	20	20	Did not mention	Familiarity with school/children/parents Teaching assignment Location/commute
Teacher F1	Elementary	5	5	Non-native	Collegial relationships Teaching assignment/consistency
Teacher F2	Elementary	5	5	Non-native	Collegial relationships Rural area
Teacher F3	Elementary	23	23	Native	Home/family Felt valued by administration Collegial relationships
Teacher F4	Elementary	7	7	Native	Students Collegial relationships Home/family
Teacher F5	Elementary	19	17	Non-native	Collegial relationships Rural area Difficulty of finding another job
Teacher F6	Elementary	25	20	Native	Collegial relationships Home/family Uncertainty of working elsewhere

Instrumentation

Surveys

The survey for this study was created using Qualtrics. The first section of the survey was designed to measure teachers' job embeddedness, and incorporated survey items with likert scales from Mitchell et al.'s (2001) original study. These were slightly modified to be more applicable to schools. Multiple questions were provided for each of the six dimensions of job embeddedness. The second section of the survey asked teachers about the amount of influence 40 individual factors had on their career decisions. These influences were grouped according to dimensions of job embeddedness, working conditions, and leadership and administrative support. Factors related to job embeddedness were taken from the job embeddedness measure. Those related to working conditions and leadership and administrative support were derived from the review of the literature in Chapter Two. These questions were presented as likert scales.

Demographic questions were used to gather information such as how long teachers have served in the profession and at their current school as well as whether they were from the area in which they teach. Table 5 displays demographic data related to survey respondents' school level and their years of service. Almost half of the teachers that completed the survey worked in elementary or primary schools. About 60% of teachers had ten or more years of experience in the profession; over half of the respondents had been in their present position for at least 5 years.

Table 5

Survey Respondents' School Level and Years of Experience (N = 369)

	n	$\%$
Grade Level		
Primary/Elementary	182	49
Middle/Intermediate	77	21
High	97	26
Other (Technical Center, Specialty Academy, etc.)	13	4
Years of Experience as Teacher		
0	16	4
1–2	40	11
3–4	35	9
5–9	53	14
10+	223	60
Length of Tenure in Present Position		
0	26	7
1–2	83	22
3–4	65	18
5–9	68	18
10+	124	34

As mentioned earlier, a final question on the teacher survey asked teachers who have served in their building for at least three years whether or not they were willing to participate in an interview. If they were willing to participate, they were also asked to provide the researcher with contact information (see Appendix C for the informed consent; see Appendix D for the teacher survey).

Teachers were asked to identify the school in which they worked so that I could determine schools' average levels of job embeddedness. No other identifying information was collected except for that of experienced teachers who agreed to provide their contact

information to participate in an interview or those who wished to be considered for the

gift card drawing; providing this information was optional. My hope was that the

anonymity of the surveys provided a better response rate (Fink, 2017) and improved

honesty of responses to survey items.

Semi-structured Interviews

Teacher interviews were included to obtain a deeper perspective and elicit a rich

narrative of why teachers choose to stay in one particular rural school (see Appendix E

for the informed consent; see Appendix F for the teacher interview protocol). Principal

interviews were designed to gain a leadership perspective on why principals think

teachers might choose to stay, move, or leave, and also to find out what actions they take

to keep teachers (see Appendix G for the informed consent; see Appendix H for the

principal interview protocol). These interviews were based on my research questions and

the conceptual framework for this study. Both interview protocols began by stating the

purpose of the study and asked for consent from the participants to record the interview.

Interview questions were semi-structured; they were prepared in advance and included

potential follow up questions to probe respondents' answers.

Data Collection Procedures

Surveys

Upon receiving permission to conduct research in divisions, I sent

superintendents, their designees, or school principals an email with a link to the Qualtrics

survey. I asked them to forward the email to all teachers in their division or school. The

use of electronic surveys streamlined the process of data collection, as I could share the

survey with a large sample size easily and with no cost. Moreover, it also simplified data

analysis as data was electronically compiled when participants responded. To incentivize

participation, teachers were notified that five survey respondents would be randomly

chosen to receive $25 Amazon.com gift certificates. When completing the survey,

respondents first read about the purpose of the study, and then were directed to complete

an informed consent agreement. Participants were advised that their responses would be

kept confidential, as data would only be presented in the aggregate. As noted earlier, I

received 374 responses from teachers at 37 schools in seven divisions.

Semi-structured Interviews

Once I concluded the teacher survey, I began scheduling interviews with teachers

and principals. The teacher surveys included a question at the end inquiring whether

teachers who had served in the same building for at least three years would be willing to

participate in an interview to help me gain a deeper understanding of their decisions to

stay in their current school. This question informed them that the interviews would be

recorded for transcription, but that names would be anonymized when including data or

quotes in my research paper. I also let them know that all interview participants would

receive a $25 Amazon.com gift card. Teachers that responded that they were willing to be

interviewed were asked to provide an email address for me to contact them.

I emailed these teachers to coordinate times to interview them. Due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via video conferencing, either using

Zoom or Google Meet. Each interview took thirty to forty-five minutes. Prior to

conducting these interviews, I emailed participants a link to an informed consent form, which respondents read and digitally signed online.

Prior to emailing teachers, I emailed principals in the four focus schools to ask if they would be willing to be interviewed for my study. In this email, I provided basic information about my research project and asked them if they would be willing to participate in an interview, again incentivizing participation by offering each participant a $25 gift card. I communicated that the goal of these principal interviews was to determine which factors principals perceived as important to teachers' retention decisions and to determine what practices they engage in to raise teacher retention. Additionally, they were informed that interviews would be recorded and transcribed, and that any use of their responses would be anonymized. As with the teacher interviews, I emailed participants a link to an informed consent form, which respondents read and digitally signed online prior to being interviewed.

Like the teachers interviews, principal interviews took between thirty and forty-five minutes. I began each interview by informing participants of the purpose of the interview and asked for permission to record. Each interview was recorded using Zoom video conferencing software.

Data Analysis Procedures

Surveys

Once I finished collecting survey data, I analyzed it using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a program capable of running a variety of statistical calculations on numerical data. Prior to analysis, I cleaned the data to ensure an accurate

analysis. Of the 374 responses, five were less than 50% complete and were therefore

removed from the analysis. After removing those respondents, I then used SPSS to

conduct a multiple imputation missing data analysis. Two of the survey questions related

to teachers' likelihood of leaving were missing more than 5% of the values ("How likely

is it that you will leave the organization in the next… 3 years, 5 years?"), indicating a

potential pattern of missingness. By looking closer at the patterns of these responses, I

noticed that nine respondents had responded that it was *very likely* they would leave

within the next 12 months ("How likely is it that you will leave the organization in the

next 12 months"), but then they did not respond to the following two questions noted

above. It seemed reasonable that if an employee was very likely to leave the organization

within 12 months that they were also very likely to leave within three years and five

years; I edited those responses to reflect this assumption. After cleaning the survey data, I

calculated the Cronbach's alphas for each of these dimensions to determine internal

reliability. All internal consistency reliability estimates were acceptable or better (range

α: .757 - .940) for all dimensions except Community Sacrifice (α = .614; see Table 6),

which is below the normally cited level of acceptability (α = .70; Cortina, 1993).

Table 6

Cronbach's Alphas for Teacher Survey Dimensions

	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	N of Items
JE Measures		
Community Links (ComLinks)	.840	6
Organizational Links (OrgLinks)	.757	3
Community Fit (ComFit)	.808	6
Organizational Fit (OrgFit)	.916	9
Community Sacrifice (ComSac)	.614	3
Organizational Sacrifice (OrgSac)	.857	10
Influences on Career Decisions		
ComLinks	.818	4
OrgLinks	.806	3
ComFit	.827	4
OrgFit	.902	7
ComSac	.806	3
OrgSac	.893	8
Working Conditions	.864	7
Leadership	.940	4

To begin the analysis, I first looked at the data from teachers' responses to the question "To what extent do each of these factors influence your decision to stay from year to year (or will influence whether you return next year)?" I averaged teachers' responses to the 40 individual factors to determine which factors teachers reported as being the most important to their decision-making. I then took a mean of those means for each of the dimensions of job embeddedness to ascertain which dimensions are the most influential according to teachers.

Next, I measured the strength of the six components of teachers' job embeddedness—organizational fit, community fit, organizational links, community links,

organizational sacrifice, and community sacrifice. The survey included three to ten items per component. These items were based on Mitchell et al.'s (2001) original survey on job embeddedness; the survey items were adapted to be applicable to teachers. I averaged these items for each teacher to obtain a measure of each component (e.g., I calculated an organizational fit score, a community fit score, etc., for each teacher).

Like Mitchell et al. (2001), I used a mean of means to determine an aggregate job embeddedness score for each respondent. This was obtained by taking an average of the six scores for the components of job embeddedness. Finally, I then calculated an average job embeddedness value for each school that participated in the study; this score was used to select the case schools at which I conducted teacher and principal interviews.

Once I determined measures for each component, I calculated correlation coefficients to determine the strength of the relationship between each of the six components of teachers' job embeddedness—organizational fit, community fit, organizational links, community links, organizational sacrifice, and community sacrifice —and their career intentions. Given the large number of significant correlations, I then performed regressions on the survey data to determine if—and to what degree—those components are predictive of teachers' career intentions (Ravid, 2015). I analyzed the data using five models. In the first three models, I used each of the teachers' career intention responses as the dependent variables ("How likely is it that you will leave the organization in the next… 12 months/3 years/5 years?" and "How often do you think about leaving?"), calculating each model of the regression analysis four times, once for each dependent variable. In Model 1, which I refer to as the Job Embeddedness Model, I

used teachers' job embeddedness scores (the mean of the means of the six dimensions) as the independent variable. In Model 2, the Full Sample Model, I used the six dimensions of job embeddedness as the independent variables (community fit, community links, community sacrifice, organizational fit, organizational links, and organizational sacrifice). In Chapter Four, my analysis centers on the Full Sample Model—except where otherwise noted—as it includes the entire survey sample and emphasizes the focus of this study, the dimensions of job embeddedness. For Model 3, the Full Sample Expanded Model, I again used the six dimensions of job embeddedness, but also included teachers' time in the profession, time in their current job, and the number of induction supports they received as additional independent variables. I included this model in the analysis because it allowed me to look at additional factors that were included on the teacher survey.

After finishing the three regression analyses above and beginning the process of writing up my findings, I discovered there was no significant relationship between a teacher's community or organizational links and their career intentions. As I had initially expected such a connection, and several teachers had expressed the importance of these connections in their interviews, I decided to include two additional regression models to provide an additional perspective on the data. Regression Models 4 and 5—which I refer to as the Veteran Sample Model and the Veteran Sample Expanded Model—are identical to Models 2 and 3, except the sample only includes survey respondents who have at least three years of experience in their current position ($N = 259$; see Table 7), which better aligns these models with the interview sample.

Table 7

Regression Analysis Models, Samples, and Independent Variables.

Model	Sample	Independent Variable(s)
Model 1 - Job Embeddedness Model	All survey respondents ($N = 369$)	Job embeddedness (mean of the six dimensions)
Model 2 - Full Sample Model	All survey respondents ($N = 369$)	Six dimensions of job embeddedness
Model 3 - Full Sample Expanded Model	All survey respondents ($N = 369$)	Six dimensions of job embeddedness Time in the profession Time in current job No. of induction supports
Model 4 - Veteran Sample Model	Survey respondents with over three years experience in their current position ($N = 259$)	Same as Model 2
Model 5 - Veteran Sample Expanded Model	Survey respondents with over three years experience in their current position ($N = 259$)	Same as Model 3

Semi-structured Interviews

After I completed each interview with a teacher, I used the online service Temi (www.temi.com) to automatically transcribe the conversation. Before finalizing each transcript, I listened to each recording and used the software to manually proofread and fix any mistakes. The transcripts were then imported into NVivo, software designed to analyze qualitative data. Using the code list found in Appendix I, which is derived from my conceptual framework and research questions, I read through each transcript and applied these codes within NVivo. As new themes emerged, I created new codes and added them to the code list (these are denoted with an asterisk in the code list). Once I

completed that process, I read through the data for each code, taking notes and highlighting recurring themes to determine the most salient findings from the interviews.

Trustworthiness and Validity

My goal was to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study by using data triangulation, concurrent data collection and analysis, a large sample size, and thick description. The use of multiple types and sources of data, including teacher surveys, teacher interviews, and principal interviews provides two significant viewpoints on the problem of teacher turnover. As I began collecting interview data, I also commenced the survey analysis, which aided in further data collection by providing ideas for probes in the interviews. Finally, I provided a thick description of my work with participants, detailing the process of recruiting and interviewing them, and providing quotes to accurately convey their responses (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Validity for the survey is bolstered by the use of the preexisting job embeddedness questionnaire to determine teachers' degree of job embeddedness. This ensured that I measured job embeddedness as Mitchell et al. (2001) did in their original study. Additionally, I obtained a large, diverse sample ($N = 369$) by including several rural school divisions in this study.

Methodological and Data Collection Limitations

My conceptual framework is intended to narrow the focus of this study and to be used as a lens for understanding this problem of practice. The use of survey and interview questions focused around the influence of principals' leadership practices and why teachers choose to stay may limit their responses, preventing me from gaining a full

understanding of their reasons for staying. To mitigate this methodological limitation, I included a question in the interview protocol that asks teachers to tell me anything else regarding why they choose to stay.

An additional limitation was the social context in which I collected data. I began distributing surveys to teachers shortly after schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews with teachers and principals took place during this time frame as well. This potentially affected my data in a number of ways.

First, it is possible that I received more survey responses because teachers were working from home and had more flexibility of time to respond. Teachers tend to remain busy at school; I may have had fewer responses were schools still open during data collection. Additionally, as noted earlier, the closures may have impacted my ability to contact principals. During this time, principals faced new challenges in coordinating their schools' responses to the closures. Many were tasked with helping teachers learn to deliver instruction online, organizing volunteers to help deliver food to kids, and deciding how to hold virtual promotion and graduation ceremonies. As a result, some principals were likely too busy to respond to an interview request. Finally, in the context of the pandemic shutdown, rampant job loss plagued our nation. It is possible that this time of uncertainty influenced teachers' responses to the survey, perhaps influencing teachers to respond as being less likely to leave their jobs due to the rising unemployment.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting this research, I abided by the ethical standards of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. With regard for the standard of respect for persons, I

entreated superintendents, their designees, and principals to not coerce teachers into taking my survey. Moreover, I made sure to convey accurate information regarding my study to survey and interview participants and asked for informed consent prior to collecting data, including recording interviews, and gave them the opportunity to opt out at any time. Concerning beneficence, I took precautions to safeguard subjects from employment-related risks by securing my survey and interview data on my password-protected personal computer. Additionally, I anonymized all responses that are used within this paper to prevent the possibility of negative action against teachers or principals. With respect to justice, I wrote my survey and interview questions to be as neutral as possible; I did not want to inadvertently cause a teacher to consider leaving their position due to my line of questioning. I also attempted to maximize the benefits to study participants. Teachers and principals will hopefully benefit from the action communications I provide to the participating districts to improve teacher retention. If teacher retention improves, then both principals and teachers will benefit. Principals will have less of a burden in hiring each year, and will see increased experience in their faculty. Teachers will benefit in that their teams are more stable and their teammates will have more experience to share with their colleagues (Rallis & Rossman, 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Two research questions guided this study on the impact of principals' leadership practices on teacher retention. The first research question asks: What principal practices are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools? The second research question asks: What factors do principals identify as most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools? The first question attempts to uncover which principal practices are important; the second examines principals' own perceptions of the effectiveness of these practices in reducing turnover. An understanding of the determinants of teacher retention is critical to answering both of these questions. As noted in the preceding chapter, I use the theoretical construct job embeddedness—which captures the diversity of influences that compel an employee to remain in their job—to organize and unpack the factors related to teacher retention. In the main body of Chapter Four, I build a case for the primary importance of three of the dimensions of job embeddedness—community fit, organizational fit, and organizational sacrifice. Identifying the most important components of job embeddedness is key to understanding which principal practices stand to have the greatest impact upon teacher retention in rural schools. After making the case for those three dimensions, I then answer the research questions by articulating the practices that principals can implement to increase teachers' embeddedness in those three dimensions.

To begin this chapter, I first present a finding from my analysis of teacher survey data, establishing a relationship between job embeddedness and teachers' likelihood of staying at a school. As job embeddedness has not been used extensively to look at teacher turnover, I wanted to determine whether the construct had a significant relationship with retention given the data in this study. I then share my analysis of the data organized by the dimensions of job embeddedness: community fit, community links and sacrifice (which I group together as explained below), organizational fit, organizational links, and organizational sacrifice. I lead with those dimensions related to community as the organization is situated within the community. Under each dimension, I present the findings from the interviews of the four rural school principals who shared their thoughts on teacher retention; this provides evidence to answer the second research question regarding which practices principals identify as being important. I then offer my analysis of the survey data, which provides a broad look at these influences across a diverse sample of teachers, before zooming in for a closer look by analyzing the interview findings from eighteen teachers; these findings are connected to the first research question of which principal practices are most important to teachers' retention. Finally, I end the chapter by reviewing these findings and using the accumulated evidence to answer my two research questions.

Job Embeddedness

A key assumption of this study is that job embeddedness should be closely connected with teacher retention; teachers that are more embedded within their communities and organizations are less likely to leave. Prior to looking at the six

dimensions of job embeddedness, I looked at whether that assumption held for the data in

this study. I first analyzed the teacher survey data to determine the degree of correlation

between the job embeddedness construct itself and the likelihood of teachers leaving their

schools. Teachers' mean job embeddedness scores—the mean of their scores for each

dimension—had a moderate negative correlation with likelihood of leaving (within 12

months, $r = -.400^{***}$; within 3 years, $r = -.428^{***}$; within 5 years, $r = -.404^{***}$) and

thinking about leaving ($r = -.440^{***}$), meaning that higher levels of job embeddedness

correlated with teachers that indicated they were less likely to leave their schools (see

Appendix J for full Pearson correlation coefficient table).

Given these correlations, I also conducted a simple linear regression analysis with

the same variables (Job Embeddedness Model). Teachers' job embeddedness was

significantly predictive of all four dependent variables—likelihood of leaving within 12

months, likelihood of leaving within three years, likelihood of leaving within five years,

and the frequency a teacher thinks about leaving (see Table 8). These results indicate that

job embeddedness is a useful predictor of teachers' intent to stay in a school. For each

dependent variable, higher measures of job embeddedness yield a reduced likelihood of

leaving and thinking about leaving among teachers.

Table 8

Regression Coefficients and Adjusted R² for Job Embeddedness Regressed on Likelihood of Leaving

	Leave12months	Leave3years	Leave5years	LeaveThink
Job Embeddedness	-0.90***	-1.02***	-1.03***	-0.74***
(Intercept)	5.52***	6.65***	7.19***	5.78***
R^2adjusted	.157	.181	.161	.191

*$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$

The question remains, however, whether some of the dimensions of job embeddedness are more useful than others in predicting teacher retention. To better understand these six dimensions, I put the principal interviews in conversation with survey data and teacher interviews in order to build evidence to respond to the research questions. I turn first to those related to community, the forces outside of the school organization that affect a teachers' career decision-making.

Community Fit: The Rural Lifestyle

To determine the impact of community fit on teachers' retention decisions, survey and interview questions asked about employees' fit with the broader community outside of the organization. In the interviews, when teachers noted that they liked the area in which they taught, I used probing questions to discern more specifically what they liked about their rural communities. Findings suggest that a teachers' degree of fit with their rural community can be a determinant in whether they consider staying in the community long term.

Principal Interviews

The principals had differing perspectives on the rural lifestyle. On the whole, they seemed to think that rural living was not as appealing as suburban living to many teachers. Most of the principals discussed the fact that rural living was not appealing to everyone due to the lack of amenities. Of them, one said, "There's not a lot to attract and keep young people." Another said, "They want to live where there's some action. … They're going to the city, … they're going for better shopping." One principal, however, remarked that many rural teachers desire a slower pace of life saying, "There's some people that come here seeking a rural life, you know, and they're good with it." This principal acknowledged that some teachers actually prefer living in rural areas because of the lack of bustle that often accompanies suburban and urban lifestyles.

In addition to the lack of amenities in many rural locales, one of the principals also noted that finding a significant other could be difficult for younger teachers. One said, "Some of the [teachers] that are young are looking for a [significant other]." She added, "Young people can come here and … then they get lonely." With a smaller population and fewer nightlife options, she noted that this could be a challenge to retention and that some teachers left because of this.

Another principal wanted to ensure that new hires were comfortable with a rural lifestyle, in other words, that they had some degree of community fit. She stated, "In our interview process, uh, we do talk about have you worked in a rural school? You know, are you comfortable with rural life?" That principal used part of the interview process to determine whether an interview candidate would enjoy living in a rural area or not.

Teacher Survey

To some extent, the teacher survey corroborated the principals' thinking that a teacher's fit with the community was an important component of retention. When ranking the averages of responses for the 40 prompts that teachers used to self-report the influences on their career decision-making, the prompt "How much I like the place where I live" ranked seventh ($\bar{X}$ = 3.84; see Table 9 for the top influences). Teachers also felt that their match to the community was important ("The community being a good match for me", $\bar{X}$ = 3.84; see Appendix K for the full listing of influences). Less important, however, were the "Leisure activities and amenities offered in the area," which had a considerably lower score ($\bar{X}$ = 3.01), but which still corresponded to a moderate influence on their decision-making. When taking the mean of the means of these influences to determine an average influence for each dimension of job embeddedness, community fit was the second least important dimension ($\bar{X}$ = 3.46; see Table 10), although this still amounted to a moderate level of influence. According to the results from this section of the survey, some aspects of community fit are more critical to teachers' decision-making to stay in a job, namely, whether teachers like their community and feel it is a good match for them.

Table 9

Teacher Perceptions of Primary Influences on their Decision-Making to Stay

To what extent do each of these factors influence your decision to stay from year to year?	$\bar{X}$	SD	Dimension
The support I receive from my school's leadership	4.15	1.05	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Adminstrative Support)
Encouragement I receive from my school's leadership	4.08	1.10	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Administrative Support)
How effective I perceive myself to be at my job	4.07	0.97	Organizational Fit
The competence of my school's leadership	4.05	1.08	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Administrative Support)
The autonomy I have in my classroom	3.87	1.09	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
My administration's approach to student discipline	3.85	1.21	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Administrative Support)
How much I like the place where I live	3.84	1.19	Community Fit
My school's culture	3.84	1.16	Organizational Fit
The respect of people at work	3.83	1.12	Organizational Sacrifice
The congruence of my values and the school's values	3.80	1.07	Organizational Fit
The prospects for continued employment with this organization	3.80	1.17	Organizational Sacrifice

Note. Teachers responded to each factor using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*A great deal*).

†When taking the mean of means for these influences, I included factors from the survey related to Leadership and Administrative Support and Working Conditions under the dimension of Organizational Sacrifice because this dimension is meant to capture anything— beyond fit and links—that an employee would give up to leave.

Table 10

Teacher Perceptions of Influences by Dimension of Job Embeddedness

Dimension	$\bar{X}$	SD
Organizational Fit	3.70	0.88
Organizational Links	3.62	1.03
†Organizational Sacrifice	3.57	0.84
Community Sacrifice	3.53	1.10
Community Fit	3.46	1.00
Community Links	3.07	1.19

Note. These are the means of all of the factors associated with each dimension of job embeddedness. Responses to each factor used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*A great deal*).
†Includes influences related to Leadership and Administrative Support and Working Conditions.

Results from the regression analysis corroborated this finding. Using the Full Sample Model (Model 2) of the regression analysis to look at the data from teachers' measured levels of job embeddedness (see Table 11), there was a small but statistically significant impact of community fit on teachers' likelihood of leaving within five years ($b = -0.29*$) and how often they think about leaving ($b = -0.18*$). In the Veteran Sample Model, the effect of community fit on teachers' likelihood of leaving after five years was somewhat stronger ($b = -0.42*$; see Table 12). In other words, higher levels of community fit yielded a higher chance of teachers intending to stay for at least five years; this effect was greater for teachers who had served in their school for at least three years. A higher degree of community fit, however, did not impact whether teachers thought they might depart within 12 months or three years.

Table 11

Regression Coefficients and Adjusted R² for Full Sample Model and Full Sample Expanded Model (Models 2 and 3)

Dimension of JE	Leave12months		Leave3years		Leave5years		LeaveThink	
	M2	M3	M2	M3	M2	M3	M2	M3
ComLinks	-0.13	-0.12	-0.13	-0.13	-0.09	-0.12	0.02	-0.02
OrgLinks	-0.02	-0.03	0.05	0.04	0.08	0.11	0.08	0.11
ComFit	0.04	0.05	-0.14	-0.12	-0.29*	-0.23	-0.18*	-0.13
OrgFit	-0.56***	-0.52***	-0.39*	-0.36*	-0.21	-0.24	-0.39***	-0.44***
ComSac	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.02	0.01	-0.06	0.19*	0.13
OrgSac	-0.36**	-0.38**	-0.53***	-0.54***	-0.62***	-0.55***	-0.59***	-0.52***
TimeProfession		-0.18**		-0.22**		-0.14		0.04
TimeCurrentJob		0.05		0.08		0.11		0.07
# of Induction Supports		-0.04		-0.07		-0.15**		-0.09**
(Intercept)	5.55***	6.14***	6.73***	7.43***	7.24***	7.80***	5.97***	5.88***
R^2adjusted	.199	.212	.232	.229	.191	.212	.346	.372
ΔR^2adjusted		.013		-.003		.021		.026

*$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$

Table 12

Regression Coefficients and Adjusted R² for Veteran Sample Model and Veteran Sample Expanded Model (Models 4 and 5)

Dimension of JE	Leave12months		Leave3years		Leave5years		LeaveThink	
	M4	M5	M4	M5	M4	M5	M4	M5
ComLinks	-0.15	-0.15	-0.06	-0.05	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.03
OrgLinks	-0.03	-0.01	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.01
ComFit	0.17	0.19	-0.19	-0.17	-0.42*	-0.38*	-0.16	-0.14
OrgFit	-0.52*	-0.52*	-0.62**	-0.63**	-0.51*	-0.52*	-0.37**	-0.37**
ComSac	-0.05	-0.04	-0.02	0.00	-0.06	-0.10	0.09	0.04
OrgSac	-0.33*	-0.35*	-0.37*	-0.40*	-0.41*	-0.37*	-0.47***	-0.42***
TimeProfession		-0.17		-0.24		-0.13		0.03
TimeCurrentJob		0.00		0.00		0.14		0.05
# of Induction Supports		-0.04		-0.03		-0.12		-0.09*
(Intercept)	5.36***	6.12***	7.25***	8.33***	8.37***	8.69***	6.13***	6.01***
R^2adjusted	.157	.155	.205	.208	.216	.222	.294	.305
ΔR^2adjusted		-.002		.003		.006		.011

$*p \le .05, **p \le .01, ***p \le .001$

Teacher Interviews

Several experienced teachers noted that aspects of the rural lifestyle were appealing to them and played a role in their decision-making to stay at their schools. In their interviews, teachers discussed appreciating the tight-knit community, the slower paced lifestyle, and the geniality of the residents. One teacher stated, "I do like the community and that's been probably the biggest factor keeping me here." While it might

seem that teachers who grew up in a rural community would be a better fit for the rural

lifestyle, that was not always the case. Another teacher—who grew up in the outskirts of

a city—said that he liked the "relaxation of the area … it's laid back … it's country." A

third, who also grew up near a city, however, expressed mixed emotions:

> It's quiet … I just, I like the small town feel. Although I get annoyed with it
>
> sometimes, that they're like restaurants that you have to drive an hour or two, but
>
> like, it's not that big of a deal … and the community of people, like everyone just
>
> seems, they're always so nice and friendly and welcoming.

While there were some aspects of rural living—such as the distance to dining options—

that were not ideal for this teacher, she felt that these were a reasonable trade-off for the

perks of small town life. Other teachers also said they liked the "small town feel,"

mentioning that they enjoyed seeing people they knew—including students and parents—

in the grocery store and at community events.

The small school size—which I include under community fit because it is a

frequent byproduct of rural communities—was another perk to a few teachers. They

appreciated knowing every other teacher and the ability to better build relationships with

students. One teacher who had moved from a larger school district said:

> We know each other, I mean, you know, we can sit here and know every single
>
> teacher, if you're in a larger school, you have people that you haven't seen in an
>
> entire year. You didn't even know they work there.

She went on to say, "The principal knows you when they see you. They say, 'hey, how

are you doing?' They know something about you. And I think it's really important

knowing all of your staff." According to this teacher, familiarity with all of the staff

members in a school was important not only for her, but also for the principal. The

building leader should be well-acquainted with the entire faculty, and she felt that this is

more likely to occur in rural schools because of the smaller sized faculty.

Community Fit Summary

The data from the principal and teacher interviews supports the notion that a

teacher's fit with the community can be an important component in whether teachers

decide to stay in a rural school long-term. The survey data, however, provides an

additional consideration in that community fit seems to be a factor only when teachers are

thinking about staying for longer periods of time; in this instance, at least five years.

Perhaps this is due to younger teachers needing to take a job out of college and their

willingness to work wherever they are offered a position to gain experience. For them to

consider staying long term, though, they need to be amenable to rural living. Beyond fit,

an additional consideration for potential new hires is whether or not they have

connections to the area, so I next look at community links and sacrifice—employees'

connections to an area and the things they would leave behind if they left.

Community Links and Sacrifice: Community Connections

In addition to how employees fit within their community, other elements that are

community-based relate to whether employees have connections to people or groups in

the community—links—and what they would give up if they left the area—sacrifice. In

this section, I look at those things that embed teachers in their communities.

In interviews, both principals and teachers spoke of the ostensible importance of teachers being from the area in which they taught. Additionally, all of the native teachers interviewed—those likely to have higher community links and the most to lose should they decide to move away—indicated links such as family among their top reasons for staying in their school; they did not want to give up these connections by changing jobs and moving to a new area. I include community links and sacrifice together due to this overlap in the interviews. Findings from the survey, however, were less supportive of the importance of these two dimensions with regards to teacher retention.

Principal Interviews

Three of the four principals noted the significance of teachers having links to the community, whether these were family members, friends, or other ties to the area. One seemed to think that, to these teachers, this was the most important factor in their decision-making. She claimed, "There are some people that went to this [school], they went to college, they came back here to teach, and they're not going to leave no matter how bad they think conditions are." In her view, a teacher's ties to their school division would act as a buffer against leaving in the presence of any negative working conditions. Another principal had a similar perspective, saying, "The teachers that stay are the ones that have local ties. … People want to work where they're from or where they have ties."

A third principal, from the school with the lowest average job embeddedness, noted that her school frequently employed out-of-state hires. She noted that sometimes these ended up being "teachers that were homesick," which made them more likely to leave. She went on to say, however, that the "connection [to the area] is so important.

[We've got to] help them make that connection if [they] don't already have it." She felt

that these links to the area were important despite the necessity of hiring teachers from

out of state.

In an acknowledgement of the importance of teachers' community links, one

principal mentioned trying to increase the local candidate pool: "I found that hiring

someone with a local tie in some way leads to being able to build a teacher that will stay."

Accordingly, she had advocated that the district provide college scholarships for local

students interested in teaching. These scholarships would include contracts to come back

and teach in the students' home town for a number of years. This would ostensibly

increase the probability of those teachers staying for the long term.

Teacher Survey

The survey provided mixed results as to whether teachers are more likely to stay

in their jobs if they had connections within their community. According to teachers' self-

reported influences on the survey, community links was the least important of the six

dimensions of job embeddedness (see Table 9). While rated as moderate influences,

"Proximity to family" ($\bar{X}$ = 3.40) and "Whether or not I work near my hometown"

($\bar{X}$ = 3.34) were low on the list of 40 factors, ranked 26th and 28th, respectively.

Respondents felt that these connections moderately influenced their decision to stay from

year to year. Looking at the mean of means, community sacrifice was the fourth most

important influence of the six dimensions of job embeddedness. These results indicate

that, on average, teachers perceived their community connections as having some degree

of impact upon their decision-making. In the regression analyses, however, no significant

relationships existed between either community links or community sacrifice and teachers' intentions to leave.

In the Full Sample Model, a small, but significant, positive relationship existed between the dimension of community sacrifice and how often teachers *think about leaving*. In other words, if they feel they have more to sacrifice, they are marginally more likely to think about leaving. The internal consistency of the factors associated with community sacrifice, however, was poor ($\alpha = 0.614$), casting doubt on the reliability of this finding.

Teacher Interviews

Similarly to the principals, a majority of the teachers who were interviewed—15 out of 18—mentioned the importance of their links with the community. This web of connections varied depending on whether the respondent was a native or non-native. Broadly, the connections included family members, the community itself, close friendships, families of students, and even teachers' homes.

Family Connections. Nine of the eighteen interviewees were from the area in which they taught—I refer to them here as "natives"—and four teachers noted that they had attended school where they worked. Two of the respondents reported that their spouse was from the area but they were not. All of the natives, including the two whose spouses were natives, stated that having family members nearby was one of their primary reasons for staying at their school. A few teachers noted the importance of support that comes from having family members close by, and one mentioned wanting to be near an older mother to help her out.

Community Connections. Aside from family, four of these native teachers noted other community connections as also being important. Several that had attended the area schools expressed a desire to help their community, with one saying, "I always knew that I wanted to give back to my community and teaching is how I can do that," and another, "[It's] been nice giving back to my community." These teachers were seemingly motivated to serve children who were from their hometown and to make the community better.

Being from the community came with additional perks. One teacher noted, "I grew up here, it's home. … So I'm comfortable with reaching out to different parents, or, you know, different community members, like on the board of supervisors, school board, because I know everybody." Another said that as a local, "You know a lot about the families and you can be a little bit more conscientious about the backgrounds of the kids and knowing where they're coming from and address their needs." Over time, teachers that stayed expressed that they liked that they had taught parents and even grandparents of students and that they knew them. One teacher was so comfortable living in her hometown that she gave out her cell phone numbers so that families could reach out to her for additional support.

Home Away from Home. Native teachers might be reluctant to move because they would sacrifice their community links, but non-native teachers—those who had moved to the area in which they taught—build community links over time and would sacrifice these to move, too. Five teacher interviewees noted that they were "non-natives." Some had stayed for a few of years and deliberated moving back home; others

had settled in the area on a more permanent basis. In these interviews, non-natives noted

the significance of spouses, close friendships, and even housing as factors in the decision

to make a home away from home in a rural community.

Settling Down. Some of these teachers stayed in their schools because they

married spouses and began settling down to make the community their home. One

teacher commented, "I really had no intentions of staying here, but then I met [my

husband] … otherwise I probably would have left." Another teacher mentioned:

> There are others that, um, they got to [the school district], you know, some came
>
> newly married or got married while they were here and started a family. So
>
> they've started their own roots. … I know a good chunk came from [out of state].
>
> … So I think, you know, they've been here, they've established relationships and
>
> stuff, so this is like their home away from home.

This teacher felt that by having a spouse, an out-of-state teacher could more readily make

a rural community their home. A third teacher commented, "We have … a life together

here, you know, which means for us, because I have someone to come home to every

night, you know, I'm not living by myself." For her, the fact that she could make a home

with someone else and build a life was an important consideration in them living in a

rural community away from their home.

Close Friendships. The presence of a spouse, however, was not the only indicator

a non-native was more likely to stay; close friendships were also important to making a

home in a rural area. Another non-native teacher moved to her current workplace

knowing a couple of other teachers from college. She noted:

We've had a really good friendship for a very long time. So coming here with

them has made this process, I think a lot easier for me and we kind of all started

around the same time. So we've gone through similar experiences and challenges.

… Going to a new area would have been a scary thing with, by myself. So having

someone already here was helpful.

For this teacher, the difficulty of moving to a new area was mitigated by the close friends

she already knew there.

Housing. This same teacher mentioned one other consideration that impacted her

decision-making regarding whether to make a home in a rural area. She said that she

would consider sticking around longer if she could find a place that she liked and that

was not too expensive. She noted that the dearth of affordable housing was a frequent

problem for teachers in her area. Housing was an important element for two other

teachers who mentioned that they owned a home and did not want to give up a short

commute to their current place of employment. Leaving their current job would lengthen

their commute or force them to sell their house and move.

Connections to Students and Families. As they work in schools, teachers build

connections to the students and families in the community. When asked what they would

sacrifice if they moved, several other teachers mentioned they felt like they would give

up seeing students—current or former—both in school and in the community. One

teacher said, "It's also those other rewards I get when I see the kids I've taught come

back and see how well they have done, hear them say … 'I miss you so much.'"

Throughout their years of service, teachers get to know families and also build up

reputations within these rural communities. The respect they had earned from families was important to several of them, as was their knowledge of families in the area—two teachers noted that they had taught the parents of several of their students, which is a connection they valued and something they would give up if they changed jobs.

Building a Life. Over time, this web of community connections grows and strengthens. One teacher discussed the life her and her husband had created in their rural community. This life they had built served as a buffer to leaving the area when they thought about leaving "to go back home." The teacher lamented, "The biggest factor for us is family. I mean it's a six-hour trip just to see his family. It's another like two hours to see mine." Even though she had already been in the area for several years, she was not fully committed to staying in the area because their families were so far away. She said, "Every year it's kind of like, do we go back? Do we not go back? … Then it's just, we've been here for so long [we've] built a little bit of a life." A tension existed between her connections back in her home state and those she had built in her new community. For the time being, those new connections were strong enough for her to continue living and working in her home away from home.

Community Connections Summary

According to the principals, community links are integral to retaining teachers. They perceived natives as much more likely to stay than non-natives. One principal even advocated for a program to grow their own teachers, paying them to go to college and then come back and teach in the area.

Teachers' responses to interview questions fell into two categories based on whether they were natives to the area or not. To many of the natives, staying seemed to be their default choice; they wanted to be there, whether it was for the proximity to family or to give back to their community. For non-natives, there seemed to be a process involved in deciding whether or not to make a community one's home. A primary factor in that decision-making was the presence of close relationships, whether a spouse or friendships. Over time, these teachers seemed to build up stronger connections with the area.

The data from the principal and teacher interviews indicates that natives are more likely to stay in a school, but the survey data does not fully corroborate this claim. In the survey, teachers reported community links to have a moderate influence on their decision-making to stay. Surprisingly, however, it was the least influential dimension of job embeddedness. Moreover, when looking at teachers' measured community links, there was no evidence of a statistically significant relationship with likelihood of leaving in the regression analysis; this finding held across all models of the regression.

Given this apparent contradiction in the data, it is difficult to make a strong claim regarding the relative importance of community links and sacrifice. One possible explanation is that teachers with high community links are more inclined to stay in a particular area, but this does not prevent them from leaving a job to take one in a nearby school or leaving education altogether and finding a job in the community. In other words, teachers who are from an area have a natural web of connections to their community, which serves as a buffer to their leaving the area. These teachers want to be near their families or close friends; if they change jobs but stay in the area, however, the

move does not necessarily affect those relationships. The broad nature of community

links, which includes teachers' families, friends, and even their roots further complicates

the matter of determining the importance of these two dimensions. This discrepant data

will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Organizational Fit: Teacher Effectiveness and Professional Aspirations

I now shift from a focus on teachers' community embeddedness to their

organizational embeddedness. The next sections describe the organizational dimensions

of job embeddedness and how they impact teachers' career choices. To discern the

influence of organizational fit, I asked teachers and principals questions about the

alignment of employee and organizational values, the importance of having the skills

necessary to be an effective teacher, and professional goals. According to the survey and

interview data, organizational fit is a key element when discussing teacher retention.

Principal Interviews

The four principals were all concerned with finding and keeping teachers who

were compatible with their schools. To them, this process began with recruiting and

hiring teachers with a desire to work in their schools and then continued with the

provision of mentoring to help them be effective. They also discussed providing an

appropriate level of autonomy so that teachers had some level of independence in their

classrooms.

Finding the Right Teachers. All four principals discussed the importance of

finding teachers who possess the right fit for their schools. One principal spoke directly

to the importance of organizational fit in whether or not teachers choose to stay in a

position, and connected this dimension to the hiring process. She remarked, "I want to offer [jobs] to individuals that I feel will fit in with my current faculty." She then elaborated that "we've been intentional … in who we hire that we want to bring in positive people." This principal wanted to hire teachers whose values were in alignment with her vision for the school.

Another principal noted that her school had a high poverty rate which she felt created a more challenging work environment than is found in more affluent schools. She said, "Teachers in this building work harder than some teachers in some other areas of the state. … Our kids, yeah, they really need us." Rather than seeing the schools' high poverty rate as an impediment, however, she took it as a challenge to find and hire teachers who wanted to make a difference in the lives of needy children:

> So it's just building a staff that really is in it for the right reasons, understands our work is super important, understands that we are going to have to work harder in a lot of areas than maybe some other teachers do. And that's okay. And that's why we do it because these are the most special kids in the world that we work with and they need us.

For her, teachers who are not in the profession for altruistic reasons were more likely to leave her school due to the challenging environment. Therefore, finding teachers with the right fit for her students was an integral step in keeping them there.

For this same principal, an important part of finding the right teachers was the job interview. This principal said that she wanted to provide transparency in teacher interviews, saying,

Our kids take special people and I'm always upfront in the interview. We're a

Title 1 school. We have a lot of teachers here who love working here in this Title

1 school with these kids that have disadvantages. So I'm very upfront in

interviews to let them know that, hey, if you come here, that's important to us.

Because if you don't come in knowing that that's the type of school you're

committing yourself to, then you're probably not gonna be as likely to be

successful.

She said she dedicated interview time to "asking questions about value systems, you

know, really listening carefully to how the candidates answer the questions." She

continued, "You want to figure out, okay, why is this person in this? Do they just want a

job? Cause if they just want a job, our school is probably not the right place for them."

To her, the interview was the time to determine whether a candidate would be willing to

work with what she perceived as a more difficult group of students. This would help her

determine if this teacher could have the potential to be a long-term hire, someone who

would have a greater chance of staying. It would also give this applicant an accurate

perception of the type of job this would be, so that the teacher would not be surprised by

the working conditions if they accepted the position. The principal's hope was that at the

end of an interview, both she and the teacher would know whether the applicant was a

good fit for the school.

Providing Mentoring. Once teachers have been hired, they need support to build

their capacity to successfully do their jobs. Two of the principals expounded upon the

need to provide structured mentoring to teachers who were entering the profession. One

principal felt that the provision of mentorships was even more important in rural schools. She mentioned that due to their geographical isolation, it was difficult for them to hire teachers who had been prepared in a traditional manner:

> That puts our school systems like into a situation where you're pulling people in on provisional licensure, or you're maybe not getting the most prepared candidates and then you have to grow them. … We're having to build the teachers in a different way, whether they're, you know, career switchers or just have a degree in something close and … it's hard for them to make that transition. And they need a lot of extra support to make that transition."

Regardless of the teachers' pathway into the profession, she asserted, "We need to work on ensuring that when the teacher comes through the door, that they are … wrapped around with various supports and know who to go to." That way, these teachers can get the help they need if they are struggling with instruction or behavior.

Another principal added that part of the principal's role in this process is to provide time for mentors to check in with their mentees. She said, "The school level mentor and I sit down and go through a plan for the year. … We can make sure that each teacher is [meeting with] their mentor on a regular basis." These meetings would provide the support that new teachers need to navigate their entry into the profession.

Additionally, one principal noted that it is not just new teachers who need mentoring; even veteran teachers can struggle with classroom management. She remarked,

> If someone is struggling, they're going to be assigned someone to help them with
>
> behavior management. It might not necessarily be me. A couple of coaches in the
>
> building will go in and they'll look at classroom procedures and setups, they'll do
>
> observations, and they'll give them recommendations for things they can change
>
> to get a better handle on classroom management.

Ultimately, she felt that new teachers needed a "warm relationship, a safe relationship, and [a] non-judgmental, non-evaluative relationship." Principals can and should provide support, but this type of safe relationship can provide a struggling teacher with a colleague that can help them develop their capabilities and improve their fit.

     Providing Autonomy and Influence. A teachers' ability to do their job effectively is not the only factor in organizational fit. As teachers gain experience, the autonomy they have in their classrooms and how much influence they are given throughout the school becomes increasingly important. One principal spoke about this need, implying that "if I can give [teachers] that autonomy, that power", then they would be more likely to stick around. He said that autonomy is "like a basic need." Additionally, he wanted teachers to feel empowered and influential throughout the building, saying, "Each teacher has the opportunity to be on some type of a leadership team. They're asked in the summer, which kinds of things would you like to participate in?" Furthermore, he felt that involving teachers in the hiring process would provide multiple benefits. Not only would it give these teachers a great deal of influence in hiring future coworkers, it would also increase the likelihood of hiring teachers with good organizational fit and provide a foundation for new hires to come in with some organizational links. Finally,

this principal would have lead teachers sit in on meetings and then go back and report to their departments. He said:

> I communicate with my lead teachers with the intentions of them going back,
>
> sharing it with the department and then whatever concerns that department has,
>
> they can talk to the lead teacher. … [They don't] come directly to talk to me. I
>
> want to put that lead teacher out there as the leader of that group or department.

He expressed that he wanted teachers within his building to be leaders. The principal admitted that giving teachers autonomy and influence is often a tough balancing act and that some boundaries need to be in place, but he ultimately felt that he needed to treat teachers like professionals and involve them in school-wide decision-making.

Another principal also spoke of novice teachers appreciating school-wide influence, saying, "They need to know they are heard in our building and what they say is valuable and worthy of being discussed. They just need to feel like they're valued." She wanted them to feel that they were important members of the team and had influence throughout the building, too. She believed this could contribute to them wanting to remain a part of that team.

Teacher Survey

Survey results were indicative of a strong connection between organizational fit and teacher retention. Of the 40 individual factors that teachers reported influenced their decision-making, "How effective I perceive myself to be at my job" was the third most influential ($\bar{X} = 4.07$). The fifth most important influence was "The autonomy I have in my classroom" ($\bar{X} = 3.87$). Also high on the list were "My school's culture," ranked

eighth ($\bar{X} = 3.84$) and "The congruence of my values and the school's values," ranked

tenth ($\bar{X} = 3.80$). Not only were multiple individual factors related to organizational fit

highly rated by teachers, the aggregate of these factors was as well. When calculating the

mean of means for each of the dimensions of teacher reported influences, organizational

fit was the most important dimension of job embeddedness ($\bar{X} = 3.70$). When asking

teachers about the influences on their career decisions, their fit with their organizations

was the most important consideration in their decision-making to stay or leave.

Similarly, the regression results indicate that, among the six dimensions of job

embeddedness, organizational fit was the strongest predictor of teachers' likelihood of

leaving within 12 months ($b = -0.56^{***}$); higher organizational fit yielded a significant

and moderately lower likelihood of teachers planning to leave. Organizational fit was also

significant at three years ($b = -0.36^*$) and for thinking about leaving ($b = -0.44^{***}$). In

the Full Sample and Full Sample Expanded Models (Models 2 and 3), it was not a

significant predictor of the likelihood of teachers leaving after five years. In the Veteran

Sample and Veteran Sample Expanded Models (Models 4 and 5), however, organizational

fit did significantly predict whether teachers intended to remain in their positions for five

years (Model 4, $b = -0.51^*$; Model 5, $b = -0.52^*$). In the regression analysis of the entire

survey sample, organizational fit was a significant determinant in teachers' intent to stay

in their jobs for the short term; for teachers who had already served their schools for at

least three years, it was important in both the short and long term.

Teacher Interviews

When discussing their fit with their schools, teachers spoke of similar themes as the principals, but included additional topics related to their professional aspirations as well. A few mentioned their personal values that influenced them to want to teach in a rural area. Others discussed the development of teacher effectiveness through mentoring and professional development that was necessary for them to be successful. A couple of teachers noted the importance of a teaching assignment that suited them and the autonomy to teach as they saw fit in their classroom. Finally, teachers wanted to be able to influence the broader school community as well as reach their professional goals.

Values. An employee's fit begins with the alignment of their values with the values and needs of the organization. Some veteran teachers expressed that working with what they perceived as challenging students in rural communities was an important part of where they wanted to work. One teacher said:

> [I want] a little bit of a challenge. … I'm not so much interested in, you know, a
> more, I guess, wealthy school district where you're trying to teach fish how to
> swim. I do like the challenge … in terms of impacting, improving young kids'
> lives. Yeah, so you feel that you're needed in a situation like this.

For him, an affluent school with high achieving students and few behavior problems would not be a good fit for his abilities as a teacher. Other teachers echoed this sentiment, stating things, such as, "I wanted to make a difference," and, "I want to work with a group of kids to give them a better chance." These teachers' value systems of making a

difference in students' lives meshed well with working in their schools with less

privileged students.

Mentoring. Another integral component of organizational fit is that employees

need to have the skills necessary to be successful their workplace. In their interviews, two

teachers noted the need for new teachers to be mentored to build their classroom skills,

which would increase their organizational fit. Finding time to cultivate these

relationships, however, is not easy amidst the bustle of an average school day. One

mentor teacher lamented that new teachers are assigned mentors, "but because that

person is busy as a bee, they can't do but so much. … That person needs to be given time

to really mentor that individual." For a mentorship to be successful, the principal must

provide time for mentors and mentees to meet and observe each other.

One veteran teacher also noted that serving as a mentor was beneficial because it

allowed him to continue to develop as a teacher. He said,

> I get to go in and I get to watch some of these teachers, that's good for me. I'm
>
> not only helping them, but I look at some of the things that I really liked that these
>
> teachers are doing. And I'm like, hmm, I want to try that.

This can give more experienced teachers access to up-to-date pedagogy that novice

teachers recently learned while in college.

Professional Development. Even after their initial years of teaching, teachers

need to continue to hone their skills to adapt to changes in their students' educational

needs; in other words, they need to maintain their organizational fit. Three interviewees

spoke of appreciating the provision of professional development as this afforded them

opportunities to grow as professionals. One teacher related needing help developing her

skills with data analysis and with staying current with her content area curriculum.

Another teacher appreciated when principals encouraged teachers to "attend a

professional [conference] on their curriculum. … More empowerment of your own

content area would go a long way." This would allow them to stay abreast of new trends

in their subject.

Additionally, one teacher noted that while she was nervous about classroom

observations, she appreciated receiving helpful feedback after being observed by the

principal, noting that teachers are often unaware of areas in which they need

improvement. As she commented:

I remember the first year I taught … [the principal] came in and observed me.

And then we [met] and we talked and she goes, do you realize that you're talking

over top of your kids? And I'm like, what do you mean? And then she pointed out

that I was talking louder, too, you know? And so she recommended that I started

using a quieter voice or I started using some kind of a hand signal or whatever.

Feedback from her principal gave her the insight necessary to improve her teaching. She

continued, "When you're in the throws, if somebody doesn't come help you, how are you

supposed to improve?" This teacher felt like principals needed to provide teachers with

constructive, non-threatening feedback to teachers by "coming into your classroom and

watching you and just giving you feedback without making it a grade, but just giving you

feedback or it can be giving you the time to go watch what is considered a good teacher."

This type of feedback would build their efficacy, helping them to be more successful as a teacher.

Teaching Assignment. Another theme that emerged related to organizational fit and teachers' ability to do their jobs successfully was that of teaching assignments. Over time, teachers develop expertise in grade levels or subjects. One elementary teacher expressed that she liked consistency:

> I like knowing what I'm going into and I feel like each year having worked with third grade for so long, I know how to go in and better handle it. Like I have some goals that I work on to help me become a better teacher in that regard. I'm not jumping from a new class to a new class each year, so that's convenient. … I'm spending less time learning the curriculum and more time with my behaviors.

This consistency allowed her to build up the skills necessary to be highly successful in third grade because she did not need to focus as much on the content. A transfer to another grade level would force her to shift her focus back to the grade level content and could lessen her effectiveness as a teacher. Another mentioned her desire to stay in her current assignment, saying "I've found my niche [regarding grade level and content]. I've never had such an enjoyable experience, so that's one reason it would be hard to leave." When a principal changes a teacher's assignment, this could engender a sense of starting over, which could undermine their organizational fit and increase the potential for a teacher to leave. One teacher further noted that her teaching assignment was one reason she stayed in her current school. She said she "was afraid … if I left the building or left

the county, I would be put into a grade that I didn't want." She had found a grade level

that suited her abilities as a teacher and did not want to risk giving that up.

  Autonomy and Influence. Organizational fit not only involves teachers' values

and skills, but it also encompasses their professional needs as an employee. Teachers

crave autonomy in their classrooms and the ability to influence school policies and

procedures. Several teachers indicated a great deal of pride in the way they ran their

classrooms. Indeed, one referred to her classroom as her "territory," with one stating that

she wanted to be able to "go in my room and shut my door, teach my children." When

asked for what he looked for from principals, another said "I think what I look for in a

principal, honestly, is they trust me to do my job. They let me alone, trust the fact that I'm

a professional to do my job, then I'm okay." Another echoed a similar sentiment: "He

trusts me. … He knows I'll get the job done, he just kind of lets me do my own thing. No

one really ever bothered me just because they knew I did what I needed to do." The

principal honored this teacher's expertise and allowed him the independence to do his job

according to his professional judgment.

  One teacher reported that this degree of autonomy took time to acquire, because

"trust is earned." According to this teacher:

> I know exactly what I can do and what I don't have to do. Nobody bothers me
>
> anymore. I'm at that level where nobody comes in anymore and observes me,
>
> they know I'm doing my job, they know I do it well, and then they just leave me
>
> alone. If I leave, go to another division, I'm going to be observed, I'm going to be
>
> watched, I'm going to have to do X, Y, and Z. I've already done that here.

Over time, he had built up a reputation that allowed him a greater degree of independence. Not only was this autonomy important, but he perceived it as something that he would give up if he left for a job elsewhere.

In addition to autonomy, teachers also desire to take on responsibility and exert influence within their schools. As one stated, "I wanted to grow. … So being able to [take on] some leadership opportunities and things that actually make a difference, really kept me there." Another expressed appreciation that teachers were included in decision-making, noting that the principal "implemented a school leadership team … to talk about all kinds of things from the staff, get togethers, to student remediation, to what new classes could we add. … So we know that he has a vision for the school and he allows teachers to be part of it." Teachers have a vested interest in their schools and want to be included in the decision-making. Ultimately, by giving teachers autonomy and influence, it signals that principals trust them. Additionally, the provision of leadership roles can help teachers reach their professional aspirations.

Professional Goals. A final aspect of organizational fit is whether employees' professional goals can be met within their organization. For example, some teachers desire to have greater responsibility beyond classroom teaching—such as serving as a department chair, on a leadership team, or as a discipline dean. One teacher felt that a rural school afforded her more access to these leadership opportunities because of the small staff and fewer people willing to take on such roles. In addition to serving as a teacher leader, she said that the principal "respects me and comes to me a lot. … She'll

ask me what works with this group of students, and we look a lot at targeted data and group kids by, you know, what skill they need help in."

While the smaller setting of rural schools may afford teachers more access to leadership opportunities due to the smaller number of positions, rural schools' small size can also be a detriment to meeting teachers' professional goals. Another teacher related that she held a master's degree as a specialist, but was unable to use her degree in her current school because it was small and didn't have a position for her. She said, "I personally would like to use my master's degree at some point. There's not a lot of opportunity." Another teacher similarly lamented, "There are not as many opportunities to move up." Even though those teachers were effective at their jobs, they were less likely to remain at that school for the long term because they were unable to meet their professional goals.

Organizational Fit Summary

Across all three sources of data, organizational fit was a substantial factor in teachers' decision-making to stay in or leave a school. To stay, teachers need to feel that they are effective in the classroom and can reach their professional aspirations. Teachers' perceived effectiveness was strongly related to retention. They wanted to feel like what they were doing in their classrooms was working. Mentoring of novice teachers helped to learn the rudiments of teaching, and ongoing professional development for experienced teachers helped them to stay current with pedagogy.

There were several salient aspects of professional aspirations that related to teachers' career decisions. For some, these aspirations were value-driven; they wanted to

work with a needier demographic of students to help them be successful. Other teachers

expressed a need for independence in their classrooms, to do what they felt was

instructionally necessary. Several also wanted opportunities to extend their influence

beyond their own classrooms, to serve as teacher leaders in their schools.

Organizational Links: Collegial Connections

Despite their need for classroom autonomy, teachers do not want to work in

isolation from their colleagues. "Organizational Links" refers to the fact that they

collaborate and plan together, and offer support and ideas when needed. In their

interviews, one factor that teachers repeatedly stated as being important to them were

their connections to the other people within their schools. These organizational links stem

from employees' collegial relationships. Principals also noted the merit of teacher

collaboration. The findings were unclear here, however, as the survey data was not

supportive of the consistent data from both the principal and teacher interviews.

Principal Interviews

In their interviews, two of the four principals acknowledged the importance of

collegial relationships. They discussed the value of teachers working together and the

principal's role in establishing a culture of teamwork. In the context of addressing the

importance of these relationships with respect to retention, the principals also put forth

their strategies for recruiting and hiring teachers to cultivate these collegial relationships.

Collegial Support and Collaboration. When asked about what teachers would

give up if they moved to a new school, one principal mentioned that teachers who left

would "be leaving behind a family." Another principal stated, "We're very team oriented

here. Teachers plan … together everyday." To her, the fact that teachers had dedicated time to plan together was an integral part of teachers building connections with each other.

Another principal emphasized his role in establishing a culture in which teachers work together. He felt that it was his job to establish links between teachers so that they would support each other. In particular, he focused on identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and then connecting teachers who needed help with those who were able to provide assistance.

The same principal also talked about meeting with each team of teachers twice a month to discuss the ways each teacher needed support and discuss how both he and the team could provide that support. In his view, this would help teachers "feel more of a team concept" among the faculty. He felt that these meetings would lead to an environment where teachers were able to share with each other regularly and where they could stimulate each other's professional development.

Recruiting Connections. For these same two principals, the hiring process was a key component in creating a school with strong organizational links. The first principal noted that she tried to hire teachers who already had connections within the school, assuming that they would be more likely to stay. She claimed:

> I have people here that recently graduated [from college]. I get them to reach out to their friends. They meet us at the recruiting location. I've gotten many people that way. I've recruited them in pairs or threes. … Every one of those people that I've recruited that way are still here.

This principal said she also connected new hires with other teachers in the building. Not only did she want to find employees who had pre-existing connections within the school, she also wanted to help them establish connections with other colleagues.

The second principal also seemed interested in building the organizational links of potential new hires. He would involve other teachers in the interview process, saying, "If I have to hire another teacher for a particular department, I might bring the lead teacher in with me so we can be a part of the decision-making process together." Then, when new teachers begin working, they will at least know one other member of their department.

Teacher Survey

Similarly to community links, the survey results for organizational links were also mixed. When calculating the mean of means for each of the dimensions of teacher reported influences, organizational links was the second highest among the dimensions of job embeddedness ($\bar{X} = 3.62$), only behind organizational fit. While they did not rank among teachers' top influences, two individual factors of organizational links nevertheless had high means: "My connection to my school" ($\bar{X} = 3.79$) and "My grade level or department team at work" ($\bar{X} = 3.71$). While they were not among the most important, teachers felt these two factors were still essential to their decision-making.

When conducting regressions with teachers' measured organizational links, however, there was no significant relationship with their likelihood of leaving. This finding held for all regression models. Whether or not teachers held connections within their schools had no significant influence on their intent to stay or leave. Whereas teachers indicated that these school connections were important in the influences section

of the survey, they were not predictive of teachers' career intentions when these

connections were measured.

Teacher Interviews

Over half of the teachers interviewed noted their work family was a primary

reason keeping them in their current school. They articulated the need for support from

colleagues to be successful at their jobs. To them, however, this collaboration was

unlikely to transpire without efforts by a principal to establish a culture of collegiality.

When asked about their top reasons for staying in their current school, ten

teachers noted collegial relationships as being one of their top reasons. Different

interviewees noted that when it came to their reasons for staying, "the people were

number one," that they stayed "because of the family atmosphere," or that the people that

they worked with were "like a big family." One captured the importance of work

colleagues simply, stating that leaving would be like "giving up my second family." As

another teacher noted, these supportive collegial relationships yielded many "close

friendships." Four mentioned they were reluctant to leave because of these friendships,

and one flatly stated, "I've been with the same teachers, the same team for the last four

years, so I'm comfortable working with the same people. I'm not starting over and trying

to build new relationships." Building collegial relationships takes time, and these teachers

were reluctant to go through the process of establishing new relationships in a different

school.

For many teachers, this family environment is integral to providing the support

necessary to survive as a teacher, whether when dealing with a difficult student or

something else. As one veteran stated, "I just think the biggest part about us keeping

teachers is we have to have a supportive culture." She said that, in this type of

environment, "When somebody's struggling, we all pitch in … we all help each other,

when you're in a small district, you can do that." As that same teacher related, "We had

somebody that had their car repossessed. You know, there were some of us who got

together and were willing to give them the money to pay the payment so they could get it

back." This brand of generosity would likely not exist without strong organizational

links.

In interviews, four teachers noted that it is up to the principal to set the tone for

collegiality, with one saying, "I think the principal has to set up a family culture in the

building so that when people are having troubles … everybody is needed, asked, wanted

to chip in and help out." If the principal encourages the development of collegial

relationships—for example, by implementing common planning time for teams—then

staff members will be more likely to get support from each other.

Organizational Links Summary

Both principals and teachers indicated that teachers' organizational links were key

in their decision-making to stay or leave. Teachers widely reported that these

relationships among members of their teams were some of the most important factors.

One principal noted a creative idea to hire groups of teachers who already know each

other, but others noted ways of nurturing these relationships by providing common

planning time or by connecting teachers that could support each other.

Interestingly, though the teachers and principals both spoke to the importance of collegial relationships in the interviews, and the teachers self-reported the importance of them on the survey, when teachers' organizational links were measured and analyzed against the likelihood of their leaving, there were no significant relationships between the two. Perhaps similarly to community links, teachers view these connections as something they can keep if they take another job in the same area; in other words, they can stay in touch with those work colleagues despite not working in the same building.

While the extent that organizational links influences teachers' decision-making to stay remains unclear, several teachers did note that they were reluctant to leave behind their collegial relationships, indicating that organizational links are one probable component of organizational sacrifice. The relationship of other sources of organizational sacrifice to teachers' likelihood of staying are explored in the next section.

Organizational Sacrifice: Working Conditions and Administrative Support

Organizational sacrifice refers to anything an employee would give up if they left an organization. I include data related to working conditions and administrative support here because these factors do not directly relate to organizational fit or links. Furthermore, if there are favorable working conditions or leadership, teachers may be hesitant to leave those for the unknown conditions and leadership of a new school. For instance, if a principal provides frequent encouragement to teachers, then they would sacrifice that encouragement if they left. Findings from the survey and interviews suggest that there are a number of practices principals can engage in to create an organization that teachers are reluctant to leave.

Principal Interviews

All of the principals seemed to understand that the school environment and their leadership had an impact on teachers' career decisions. In their interviews, the principals discussed the importance of encouraging and recognizing the efforts of teachers. They also voiced the need to provide teachers with support, whether by making themselves available to talk and listen to teachers, supporting them instructionally, or helping to establish a disciplined behavioral environment in which teachers can work effectively.

Encouragement and Recognition. Encouragement from a school leader is one potential source of organizational sacrifice. Three of the principals discussed teachers' need for encouragement that they are doing good work and contributing to the mission of the school. For one principal, it started with letting first year teachers know how important they were. She stated:

> It's really important to me that first year teachers—cause that's a critical year— that first year teachers know that I'm confident in their content knowledge and their education they brought with them. … I will tell them, I'm so glad I hired you. So this is what you brought to the school. … I name something specific they did, something creative they did.

She further noted the insecurity that new teachers often have about their teaching practice, saying, "They need to know that I see all the good they have, even their rough edges, you know, and that mistakes are allowed. … We'll move on and learn from them." She wanted to normalize new teachers' mistakes and explicitly tell them the good things she saw coming from their classrooms.

A different principal spoke more about wanting to recognize teachers and "highlight their strengths." He gave an example of a math teacher:

> What he does is he plays an inspirational video every day before he starts his lesson and … he talks about it for about two or three minutes, but he always has some type of way to combine it with his lesson. That's a unique talent. … So I did have him present to his department … and had a conversation about his gifts and talents with the faculty. So when I say highlight your strengths, you want people to see what you're doing well, and I think that makes you feel good.

This would not only serve as encouragement, it also provided public recognition of this teachers' strengths. This principal did admit that he needs to do more with respect to acknowledging teachers' hard work, such as when he's doing walkthroughs. "I need to leave a note or something saying, hey, I was in there for five minutes, I liked the lesson, I liked your … classroom management." This would allow him to quickly provide encouragement to a number of teachers each day.

Still another principal said that she used her weekly memos to showcase the wonderful things teachers were doing, saying, "My memos totally focused on here's some great things that I noticed this week and I'd highlight people, and it was always different people." Teachers often work in isolation from other adults, so she said, "It means so much for somebody to acknowledge something that you've done." This practice of recognition would also allow teachers to see some of the things their colleagues have done in their classrooms.

Availability to Talk and Listen. Principals should not only provide encouragement and recognition to teachers, they should also be available to talk and listen when teachers need to ask questions or discuss concerns. One principal spoke of the need to be available as a priority for him, so that teachers could come talk through issues. He felt that his availability was an important component of teachers' decision-making to stay or leave:

> If there's an issue, you know, I think sometimes teachers need to be able to dump all the issues out. We have conversations and … I still might not have the answer, but if they can come and just have, feel free to have an open ended conversation with you, candid conversation, I think that goes a long way.

He went on to say: "They understand that I might not agree with them, but if I can give them that opportunity to voice themselves and feel like their opinion was heard … I think it tends to [encourage] teachers to stay." According to him, a principal being available to listen was an important factor in teachers' decision-making to stay in a school or leave.

Instructional Support. A principal listening to a teacher is one form of support, but teachers also need to feel instructional support in their classrooms. This support could come from specialists or directly from the principal. In one school, the principal noted that a great deal of teachers' math and reading planning was completed by specialists. The principal said, "They have 100% support for all the math [and reading] planning and instruction. … They literally are handed, this is what you need to focus on." She viewed this support from math and reading specialists as something valuable that they would give up by moving to another school.

Additionally, teachers need affirmation that their schools' leadership will support their instructional decisions. One principal demonstrated his understanding of this challenge when he said, "I do think it's a big part of teacher retention, that teachers don't feel supported." He further stated, "I think it's important that my teachers know that I'm on their side and I'm here to support them." This principal recognized that serving as an ally to teachers could increase their likelihood of staying.

Behavioral Climate. A positive behavioral climate is essential to the efficacy of teachers and is another potential source of organizational sacrifice. Two principals spoke directly about their influence on student behavior within their schools. One noted that, prior to her arrival at the school as principal, there was no coherent system of documenting student behavior or processing student referrals. She related:

In the beginning of the year we got together, we looked at their system. I shared, let's break it into levels. This is a classroom referral, this is an office referral. We taught the teachers, this is a classroom referral when the child's continually not doing his homework, that's not a go-to-the-office thing. That's a you with the child and the parents, you know.

For her, providing clarity to teachers was an important part in reducing their frustration with respect to student behavior. Teachers knew what to expect, and they knew when they were able to send a student to the office or when they needed to handle a situation within the classroom.

Similarly, another principal spoke to the importance of communicating procedures, but also letting teachers know about the limitations which constrain

principals' responses to behavior infractions. Training teachers in school procedures is important as she says, "[Teachers] have to know when to write a referral, know how to write a referral." She further noted that sometimes teachers became frustrated when they feel like she didn't process a disciplinary referral as strongly as they would have liked. Of this she said, "We are much more limited in what we can do from the administrative side, and I don't know that teachers always fully understand what our limitations are." She continued, "There's still a fraction of individuals that feel like the hammer needs to come down and they have a really difficult time understanding that they need to look internally and change some things when working with a kid." Communicating the nature of her limitations was important to limiting teacher frustration.

Teacher Survey

When teachers were asked about the degree to which 40 factors influenced their decision to stay from year to year, teachers indicated that leadership and administrative support were highly influential in their career decision-making. After analyzing the mean of each of those influences, all four factors related to leadership and administrative support were among the most influential, with support ($\bar{X} = 4.15$) and encouragement ($\bar{X} = 4.08$) being the top two factors that teachers identified as influencing their decision-making. Competence ($\bar{X} = 4.05$) and approach to discipline ($\bar{X} = 3.85$) were also rated highly. After averaging these four factors ($\bar{X} = 4.03$), it is apparent that teachers think leadership and administrative support matters *a lot* when it comes to deciding whether to stay in or leave schools.

Two other factors related to organizational sacrifice were also important. On average, teachers felt that the "Respect of people at work" ($\bar{X} = 3.83$) and "The prospects for continued employment with this organization" ($\bar{X} = 3.80$) influenced their likelihood of staying. Organizational sacrifice factors related to compensation rated lower (compensation, $\bar{X} = 3.19$; benefits, $\bar{X} = 3.20$; health-care, $\bar{X} = 3.16$; retirement benefits, $\bar{X} = 3.25$), although this still indicated a moderate amount of influence.

In the Full Sample Model (Model 2) of the regression analysis, organizational sacrifice had a significant negative relationship with likelihood of leaving (12 months, $b = -0.38$**; 3 years, $b = -0.54$***; 5 years, $b = -0.55$***) and thinking about leaving ($b = -0.52$***). Additionally, in this model, organizational sacrifice had the highest effect size of all of the dimensions of job embeddedness, with the exception of likelihood of leaving after 12 months. As measured on the survey, teachers who had more to lose if they left their job were less likely to leave.

Teacher Interviews

Teachers had a good deal to say on the subject of leadership and administrative support during interviews. Leaders are responsible for a number of practices that interviewees discussed, including encouraging and recognizing teachers, listening to concerns, and providing instructional and behavioral support. Additionally, they noted the importance of leaders protecting their time and keeping morale high.

Encouragement and Recognition. In their interviews, nine teachers noted the need to feel valued and appreciated. They stated a need for regular affirmation that they are "doing a great job" so that they feel like they are a "contributing member of [the

school] family." Little things do not go unnoticed by teachers. One stated, "I remember my second year, I think [the principal] came by and left me a little note and I kept that note all year." Another expressed gratitude when principals said "I really appreciate what you're doing today. I see what you're doing in that classroom, and that's fabulous. … [Principals should] stick [their] heads in every single classroom every day." Still another was grateful that his principal sends "emails to all the teachers, thanking them periodically for the work they are doing and stuff they've done." One teacher addressed the importance of encouragement and recognition by saying "If you're thinking about leaving and you feel so welcomed and so appreciated, it's going to be just as hard to leave." Clearly encouragement and recognition is something principals must attend to consistently.

Availability to Talk and Listen. Several teachers mentioned the importance of their principal having an open door policy and being willing to sit down and talk, listen, offer advice, and keep things confidential. This is one way principals can show that they care about teachers. One teacher said of principals, "It's really important to be a good listener without judging me." Someone else noted the importance of just listening, "If you don't agree with something, they will listen to you and say, okay, well, you know, and even if they don't agree, they're like, well, this is how it's going to be, but at least they listened to me." Still another stated:

> They should actually listen. … You should be able to get out whatever the situation is or whatever's going on, you know, without them interrupting or

writing, or, you know, looking at their computer or doing other things while

you're trying to explain.

By taking the time to actively listen, principals send a clear message to teachers that they

care about and are willing to support them.

Instructional Support. Not only must principals be willing to listen to teachers,

they also must be willing to provide instructional support; teachers should not feel that

they are on their own in their classrooms. One mentioned wanting to be observed more

and to receive feedback to help build her confidence in the classroom. Another

appreciated when she received help in "making curriculum decisions based on that data."

Still a third felt supported when she had "a schedule that suits the needs for the

curriculum that's being taught." Other ways principals can show support is to provide

help and resources to teachers when they have novel instructional ideas, and by attending

grade level "meetings … to be in on those decisions, to know those things, especially as

the instructional leader in the building." By serving teachers as an instructional leader,

principals will help teachers to feel supported in their classrooms.

Principals can also provide support by reducing the number of external

distractions so teachers can focus on their work in the classroom. One teacher noted, "I

think the buffering situation with parents is a very important aspect that principals need to

think about." When parent meetings are necessary, principals should be prepared to back

up the teacher. Another teacher shared that she worried about dealing with tricky parents,

but was thankful to have an even-keeled principal that "calms the other people around

you, and [teachers] know that they have someone there that's going to lead them through

the storm." When principals provide this buffer, teachers can more fully concentrate on their classroom instruction.

Behavioral Climate. In interviews, five teachers suggested that student behavior was a critical area for principals to attend to regarding teacher retention. As one teacher asked, "Is the principal making an atmosphere for disciplined learning to be occurring?" Another experienced educator said, "As someone who has left a school before, discipline is a huge part of it, and that goes with feeling supported. I left my first teaching job because I didn't feel supported. … The discipline was terrible." A disorderly environment makes it hard for teachers to do their jobs and may drive them to leave.

Moreover, teachers wanted to feel that their principal did not "disregard reasoning that has caused the teacher to write a discipline referral on them." As one teacher stated:

> I don't have too many issues that go on in my classroom, but if I'm finally
> coming to administration, that means that there's a problem. And now I need you
> to come, try to talk or try to step in, or let's have a conference with everybody to
> see what's going on.

Principals need to support teachers when they come to them with behavior issues. Another teacher lamented:

> It was not uncommon if you wrote a kid up that you would get a call from the
> office questioning, "Did he really do this? He says he didn't do this," that kind of
> thing. And like, I have fairly good classroom management … but when a kid
> throws a desk at me, no, I didn't make that up.

Not only does this style of leadership disregard poor student behavior, it also conveys a lack of trust between principal and teacher. If principals repeatedly ignore misbehaviors and fail to hold students accountable for their actions, a chaotic environment will likely develop and teachers will have little incentive to stay.

Several teachers commented that they needed principals to provide clear expectations not only for student behavior, but also for how teachers are to respond to infractions. One teacher remarked,

> She was such a consistent principal and I think consistency is key. You know, we always knew what to expect from her. I knew her behavior plan, I knew exactly what was going to happen if I sent a kid to the office.

This principal had clearly articulated expectations so that teachers knew the consequences for student misbehavior in advance.

Ultimately, teachers needed to feel supported with respect to student behavior, expecting principals to "go in there … give them support … and try to help them with managing the classroom." A grateful teacher related the time when she was struggling with a challenging class: "I was very stressed out and she did come in and provide some like, an extra set of eyes and kind of helped me get through a test I was giving because the kids kept having [behavioral] issues." This situation allows the principal to support the teacher by directly helping her with behavior management.

A couple of teachers admitted that providing behavioral support is sometimes challenging to principals because some teachers lack the skill necessary to maintain an

orderly classroom. One interviewee related the story of a colleague that was frustrated

about not receiving enough support from the principal:

> I have a colleague that does write quite a few referrals and, you know, the
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> comment has been then, why bother writing them because [the principal is] not
>
> gonna do anything about it. And I'm like, well, how many are you actually
>
> writing? You start telling me numbers, I'm like, okay, then this is a classroom
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> management issue and not a principal issue.

Another teacher felt like "some teachers have a hard time because they don't build

relationships with the kids and they don't really know how to do so." In these instances,

they noted that principals need to find ways to develop these teachers' areas of weakness.

Time. One theme that repeatedly emerged in my analysis of the teacher

interviews is that of teachers' time. Several teachers expressed that they appreciated when

principals honored their time by reducing the amount of required paperwork, meetings,

and duties. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in schools, as two teachers indicated

in interviews. One veteran teacher stated, "When I started [teaching], we worked with

kids and did a little bit of paperwork. Now it's like, we have a full time office job and we

still have to work with kids." Another noted that lesson plans should not be onerous to

create and that extensive plans not only created too much work, but they were not useful

to teachers.

Another teacher related the story of a teacher friend of his who had retired early,

saying, "He is the type of person, which a lot of educators are, if they're assigned

something, they're gonna do it and they're gonna do it the right way. He was lesson

planning, unit planning, so much data collection. … It was stuff thrown at him that he just kind of said, man, I'm done with the extra paperwork." This teacher went on to say that his friend would likely still be teaching if it were not for the excessive paperwork.

Fortunately, there are principals that seem to understand the dearth of time available to teachers. One teacher noted that his principal "values his teachers' time because he will openly say things like, you know, I'm not going to make you go to meetings that you don't have to." The teacher further elaborated that he felt meetings should be useful, not just informational, and that only the required participants should be in meetings. Another teacher pleaded for principals to avoid assigning excessive duties/ covering other classes for teachers, noting that teachers need to be able to go to the bathroom. She elaborated:

> A lot of times when a teacher is sick, we don't have enough subs, they don't get them a sub or whatever reason. Teachers then have the duty of covering for someone else during their planning. … That should be avoided … assigning people to sit with other people's classes during their planning is a big morale breaker in the middle of the day.

Ultimately, this is a work-life balance issue. It is often the norm for teachers to work at home on evenings and weekends because they do not have enough time during the school day. As a teacher put it, "People will want to move along if they don't feel like they have a life outside of school." Principals should provide a buffer against unnecessary paperwork, meetings, and duties. If teachers' time is consumed by too much of these

things, they will have less time to focus on what is important in schools: teaching and learning.

   Morale. Another theme that emerged in the interview data is that of teacher morale. Several interviewees noted that they were grateful for "little morale activities" and "random events … just to boost [teachers'] morale." These could be as simple as the principal providing free jeans passes, organizing covered dish lunches, and celebrating birthdays. Of course, these things not only build employee morale, but they could also contribute to building organizational links and a sense of collegiality. One teacher appreciated that "when we do have faculty meetings, [the principal] always sets aside time for us to share things that are going on in our lives." Principals, however, do not need to organize morale boosters alone. A few teachers mentioned that their schools had committees to plan morale boosters and social activities. One said that knowing "that [the principal] made things like that a priority, I think means a lot to people. And it's a good way not only to get to know your principal, but to get to know the people in your building." Another way principals can help boost morale is to provide individualized help to teachers as they need it. One teacher appreciated the special support she felt she could receive in a small, rural school when she had a family need one semester. She approached the principal about it, "I was like, hey, can I request first block planning? And they gave that to me. You know, if I was in a [bigger district], no one's really gonna care. So they're just very willing to work with me." This kind of individualized assistance can boost morale and give teachers a reason to stay in a smaller school.

Organizational Sacrifice Summary

Organizational sacrifice is a highly important element in teachers' decision-making to stay in a school. This makes sense at face value; the more teachers feel that they will give up if they leave, the less likely they are to leave. Moreover, this claim is strongly supported in the teacher survey data and the principal and teacher interview data. In the survey and interviews, teachers noted that encouragement was integral to their decision-making to stay or leave—they wanted to feel appreciated. The principals recognized this as well. Administrative support—both instructional and behavioral—also played a key role in teachers' career decisions. When asked about what influenced their decision-making to stay on the survey, teachers reported support from leadership as being the most important. Finally, the teacher interviews revealed the need for principals to honor teachers' time as professionals, and to keep morale high.

Influences on Teacher Retention

This study's research questions endeavored to determine which principal practices are most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools as well as which factors principals identify as being most influential. The combination of data from the teacher survey and both teacher and principal interviews provide insight into what principals can do to positively affect teachers' decision-making to stay in schools. I begin, however, by reviewing the dimensions of job embeddedness—the web of factors that constrain teachers from leaving their jobs—that are most influential, as they shape how I answer the research questions. Subsequently, I turn to those principal practices that have the capacity to increase teachers' embeddedness in those dimensions. I conclude the chapter

by examining the practices that the principals identified as being most important and make brief comparisons of their viewpoints with what teachers identified as being essential to retention.

Most Influential Dimensions of Job Embeddedness

I looked at three sources of data to determine which dimensions of job embeddedness were the most important to teachers' retention decisions: the regression analysis, teachers' rankings of factors, and their interview data. According to the regression results from the survey, the dimensions of organizational fit and organizational sacrifice had the largest effect sizes (see Table 11). In this analysis, fit was slightly more important to teachers in deciding whether to return for the next school year. Higher organizational fit was predictive of a greater likelihood of intent to stay. Sacrifice—comprised of working conditions and administrative support—was the most important, however, when teachers were considering their long-term intentions. The strength of these relationships changed when looking solely at teachers who have been in their positions for at least three years; organizational fit was even more important for experienced teachers (see Table 12).

This data is corroborated by teachers' rankings of determinants of their decision-making (see Table 10). When calculating the mean of means of their responses to factors influencing them to stay or leave on the survey, organizational fit again emerged as the most influential dimension of job embeddedness. In the analysis of this data, organizational links was the second most important, followed closely by organizational sacrifice.

In their interviews, teachers discussed factors within all three of these organizational dimensions. They noted factors related to fit such as their effectiveness, the amount of autonomy they received, and their professional aspirations. Collegial relationships were noted as a major factor related to organizational links. Working conditions, such as student behavior, and administrative support were notable with regards to organizational sacrifice.

Of the community dimensions, only community fit yielded survey findings to support its status as an influence on teacher retention. The regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between this dimension and teachers' intentions to stay at least five years; the effect was even stronger among experienced teachers. Additionally, teachers noted "How much I like the place where I live" as a factor that influenced them "a lot." In their interviews, several teachers discussed wanting to stay in a school for the rural lifestyle. Although the interview data provided evidence of teachers wanting to stay in a school for their community links and sacrifice—especially being from an area and having family members nearby—this data was not supported by the survey results.

Given the significant findings from the regression analysis, and the support from the teachers' perspectives on the survey and in the interviews, findings from this study support the claim that organizational fit is the most important dimension of job embeddedness when it comes to retaining teachers in rural schools. Organizational sacrifice is the second most important dimension. For teachers to consider staying at least five years, community fit—their willingness to live in a rural area—was another significant, yet smaller, influence. I do not find consistent support to make a claim about

the significance of organizational links at this time. While teachers *said* these connections were important in the interviews, measurement of their organizational links provided no predictive relationship with their intentions to stay or leave in the regression analysis. Likewise, I do not have evidence to suggest community links or sacrifice as being significant in teachers' decision-making. This study leads me to conclude that organizational fit, organizational sacrifice, and community fit are the most influential dimensions of job embeddedness. I now examine principal practices associated with those dimensions.

Research Question #1: Most Influential Principal Practices

The primary research question in this study asks: What principal practices are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools? In the previous section, I noted the importance of organizational fit, organizational sacrifice, and community fit. Here I enumerate practices with the potential to increase teachers' embeddedness in those dimensions, which would thereby increase their likelihood of staying.

Practices Related to Organizational Fit. Practices related to increasing organizational fit among a staff include hiring teachers for fit, developing their effectiveness, and giving them classroom autonomy and school-wide influence. When hiring, principals that hire teachers with consideration for their values, such as whether they are inclined to work with rural students that are often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, will have a greater portion of their staff whose values align with the needs of their school. Moreover, when principals give those applicants an accurate job preview, truthfully describing their duties and working conditions, those prospective teachers who

are unwilling to work in that type of environment may choose instead to work elsewhere, producing a candidate pool with better fit.

For teachers to stay long term, they need to feel they can attain their professional aspirations. Consequently, principals who inquire about job candidates' goals—and discern whether they can meet those goals in their schools—will be better able to hire teachers who derive more long-term satisfaction with their positions. Once hired, placing teachers in the grades and subjects they are most suited to teaching—in other words, match their skills and abilities—would contribute to their effectiveness, and thus, their chances of being successful. Teachers' effectiveness can also be increased through the use of mentoring for new teachers and suitable professional development activities for experienced teachers to keep their pedagogy current. Finally, providing experienced teachers with appropriate classroom autonomy and giving them leadership positions to influence entire schools can not only empower them, but also help them feel professionally fulfilled. Each of these practices contributes to developing a teaching staff with a high degree of fit in a school, increasing their probability of wanting to stay.

Practices Related to Organizational Sacrifice. As discussed earlier in this chapter, two factors related to organizational sacrifice are working conditions and administrative support; if these elements are favorable, then teachers will have to give them up if they leave. Principals who establish clear behavior expectations for students and enforce consistent consequences will enable teachers to practice their craft in an orderly behavioral environment. Implementing approaches to boost employee morale—such as through the provision of jeans passes or team building activities—as well as

buffering teachers against unnecessary time sinks—for example, needless paperwork—also provides a school environment in which teachers will want to work.

School leaders create a supportive workplace by regularly encouraging teachers for their efforts, and by recognizing them for when they do a good job. This will help them to feel valued and important to the school team. Principals provide instructional support when they give teachers constructive feedback on classroom observations or when they help with data analysis. By creating positive working conditions and providing support, principals produce an organization that teachers will be reluctant to leave.

Practices Related to Community Fit. While there are several practices principals can use to improve organizational fit and sacrifice, the most evident practice that directly influences community fit is related to hiring. Principals that consider teachers' fit with the rural community, asking them about their inclination to live and work in a rural area, may be able to discern whether teachers are open to staying for longer periods of time. Teachers who are amenable to a rural lifestyle will be more satisfied with the slower pace of life and more accepting of the lack of amenities. With a greater degree of community fit, they will be more likely to stay in that area.

Research Question #2: Factors Identified by Principals

The second research question in this study asks: What factors do principals identify as most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools? In this section, I discuss the principal perspective on teacher retention and briefly compare their views with the findings from my analysis. As I did earlier, I again start with community factors and then move on to organizational factors.

Community Factors. In their interviews, the principals addressed two community-related themes that they felt impacted teachers' career decisions: their fit with the rural community, and their status as a native or a non-native to the area. Three of the principals noted that rural living was less appealing to many teachers. One of those principals, however, went on to say that there are teachers who desired a rural lifestyle; she felt that teachers who enjoyed a quieter, slower-paced community would be more likely to stay. Several of the principals also expressed their presumption that native teachers would be more dedicated to working in their hometown school, with one even claiming that poor working conditions would not sway them to leave. Another principal claimed that a number of non-native teachers, especially those originally from out of state, were constantly looking to leave and find jobs back in their hometowns. According to the findings of the present study, the principals were accurate in that stayers tend to be those teachers who enjoy the rural lifestyle. Their notion that native teachers were more likely to stay, however, was not strongly supported by the data.

Organizational Factors. The principals identified numerous organizational factors that they presumed influenced teacher retention. All four of them felt that the retention process began with hiring the right teachers for their schools—two of them explained that they were looking for those who were positive, and willing to work with a less privileged demographic. The group acknowledged the importance of providing mentoring for new teachers, discussing the need for mentors who would support them and help them gain the skills necessary to be successful. For more experienced teachers, they addressed the need for classroom autonomy and leadership opportunities to

influence the direction of the school. Two of the principals commented on the value of teachers' relationships with each other. One asserted that teachers would be averse to leaving their work "family." Finally, the principals identified the encouragement, recognition, and support they could provide teachers as being integral to their retention.

Overall, the group was perceptive to the importance of organizational factors in teachers' decision-making to stay or leave. The only major deviation was in their assertion of the significance of collegial collections. They made claims similar to those the teachers also made in interviews, that these working relationships were key to retention, however, these claims were not supported by the survey regression analysis. None of the principals mentioned factors such as teachers' career aspirations, their need to protect their time, or building morale, all things that the teachers indicated were important to them. This does not necessarily mean that principals do not see the value in these factors, they just did not discuss them in their interviews.

Summary

In this chapter, I have examined the data from the principal interviews, teacher surveys, and teacher interviews. I reported findings by dimension of job embeddedness, noting the significance of organizational fit, organizational sacrifice, and community fit. I ended the chapter by using these findings to answer the research questions and make claims regarding which principal practices are most important to teachers' retention in rural schools. In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to the literature on teacher retention and provide practical recommendations for school leaders seeking to keep teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this study, I have attempted to discern which principal practices can boost retention by analyzing data from teacher interviews, teacher surveys, and principal interviews. In Chapter One, I examined the challenge of teacher turnover in rural schools, and discussed the notion that high turnover can lead to lowered student achievement and the perpetuation of equity issues among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Turnover is a complex issue, as each teacher who chooses to stay in or leave a school does so for their own reasons. While some of these reasons are outside of the control of school administrators, principals do have meaningful influence on teachers' decision-making (Boyd, Grossman et al., 2011).

I presented the findings from this study in Chapter Four; in this chapter, I discuss those findings in relation to the existing literature on teacher retention. First, I address themes related to community, including teachers' fit with a rural lifestyle, and their community connections. I then discuss those related to organizations, covering teacher effectiveness and their professional aspirations, their collegial connections, and working conditions and administrative support. As my study identified several salient themes related to principals' leadership practices, I end this chapter by providing recommendations for school leaders and directions for future research.

Community Themes

To date, very little research has examined the influence of rural communities on teacher retention; much of the research base instead focuses on organizational factors. Job embeddedness—the web of connections that functions as a buffer to keep employees in their jobs—adds a major contribution to the study of teacher retention in rural schools because it also accounts for external, community factors that influence teachers' decision-making. I explored two themes in this study with the potential to impact teacher retention in rural schools: whether or not teachers are amenable to living the rural lifestyle and whether they have connections within their communities.

Rural Lifestyle

Findings from the present study add a potentially important concept to the research base in that teachers who are amenable to a rural lifestyle are more likely to stay in a rural school. This finding is in alignment with Watson's (2011) finding that community fit is a significant predictor of retention. She studied novice teachers in Central California, however, only 43% of the sample were from rural schools. In contrast, previous researchers (Hammer et al., 2005; Miller, 2012) have suggested that teachers are drawn to work in suburban schools due to the geographical location and presence of amenities. Hammer et al. (2005) indicate that leavers of rural schools often do so partly because they relocate, due to not wanting to live and work in a rural area. According to the present study, however, there are teachers who prefer the rural lifestyle—those who seek a quieter, slower pace of life—and are satisfied with the amenities available in these areas.

Two teachers spoke directly to this idea in their interviews, noting specifically that they enjoyed rural living. Moreover, the regression results from this study indicate that teachers who like the rural lifestyle and have a good community fit are more likely to stay in a school for at least five years. Survey results revealed, however, that community fit showed no relationship to teachers' decision-making for shorter periods of time. Perhaps these findings are due to new teachers' willingness to take a job—regardless of location—for a few years to gain experience. For them to stay long term, however, they need to have satisfactory fit with the community.

Community Connections

In their interviews, all of the native teachers indicated a desire to stay in their schools and to be located near family. Some non-natives spoke about being far from their families and thinking about moving closer to home; others had decided to settle in the area, starting families and building connections within the community. When teachers had deeper connections to their community, there was a greater sense of having to give something up if they left. Nevertheless, teacher survey data did not reveal a statistically significant relationship of either community links or sacrifice—teachers' perceptions of what they would give up if they left their community—to their likelihood of staying in a school or leaving. As noted in the previous chapter, this appears to be a contradiction in the data.

Boyd et al. (2005a) and Cannata (2010) both note a preference for teachers to work near their hometowns. Their research, however, focused on where teachers accepted their first jobs, not whether they stayed in a particular school. The authors note that this

finding could simply be due to teachers' familiarity with the area in which they are job

hunting. This idea is supported by the research of Engel and Cannata (2015), who note

the relatively small geographic size of teacher labor markets.

There is not extensive research on whether native teachers are more likely to stay

in their hometown schools to teach. Bornfield, Hall, Hall, and Hoover (1997) indicated

that special education teachers with close ties to their communities were more likely to

stay in their schools. The sample size of this study, however, was small ($N = 86$). Keiser

(2011) had a similar finding, noting that teachers who stayed in rural schools were more

likely to be from similarly rural areas; they were not, however, necessarily natives. In her

study on embeddedness among teachers, Watson (2011) determined that the dimension of

community sacrifice—factors external to an organization a person would leave behind if

they left their job—was significantly related to novice teachers' career decisions. She did

not, however, specifically examine the connection between community links and staying

or leaving.

Only marginal evidence currently exists from both this study and the literature to

support the idea that native teachers are more likely to stay in their schools. In many rural

areas, native teachers could continue living in their hometown, but teach in another

nearby school, thus not sacrificing their community connections to change jobs.

Conceivably, this is why there was no statistical connection between community links

and retention in the current study. More research is necessary to make a definitive claim

regarding the importance of community links and community sacrifice on teachers' career

decisions.

Perhaps the good news—in contrast to the views of two of the principals in this study—is that rural school principals do not need to focus intently upon hiring natives. Recruitment is often a challenge in rural schools (Hammer et al., 2005), but in light of this finding, principals should feel comfortable casting a wide net to bring in more applicants. While a "grow-your-own" teacher program is still a reasonable option to increase the applicant pool, this study suggests that it does not need to be the primary strategy for recruitment.

Organizational Themes

When compared to community-related themes, the impact of school organizations on teacher retention has been more extensively researched. Indeed, in the current study on rural schools, teachers rated organizational factors as more influential than community factors. The regression analysis also yielded larger effect sizes for organizational factors. In the next section, I discuss three themes in light of the findings from my study in relation to those from other researchers—teachers' school fit, their collegial connections, and the school environment.

Teacher Effectiveness and Professional Aspirations

Previous studies have shown the importance of person-job and person-organization fit; the findings from the current study reinforce those positions. Teachers with higher levels of fit are more satisfied, more likely to stay in the profession, and less likely to leave their schools (Ellis et al., 2017; Jackson, 2010; Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). Brown and Wynn (2007) found that principals who consider fit in the teacher hiring process have higher retention. Considerations include both teachers'

effectiveness in the classroom and their professional aspirations. Teachers are more likely

to stay if they have a commitment to work in a high needs school, if they are given

classroom autonomy and school-wide influence commensurate with their experience, and

their professional goals can be met in a given school.

Numerous researchers have linked teacher effectiveness—and, accordingly,

person-job fit—with teacher retention. More effective teachers are more likely to stay in

their schools and the profession (Boyd, Lankford et al., 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2011;

Henry et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Player et al., 2017). My findings in rural schools

support this research base, as higher measures of organizational fit were significant

predictors of an increased likelihood of staying. In the survey of influences on retention,

teachers indicated "How effective I perceive myself to be at my job" as being the third

most important factor. This is not surprising, as a person is unlikely to stay in a job at

which they are not effective. Perhaps to be expected, programs that are aimed at boosting

teacher effectiveness—such as induction and mentoring programs and high quality

professional development programs—have been shown to increase teacher retention

(Brown & Wynn, 2007; Gray & Taie, 2015; Kraft et al,. 2016; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

As noted in Chapter One, rural schools often have higher levels of student

poverty, which is associated with higher turnover (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). Often,

early career teachers will work in these schools for several years to gain experience, and

then will transfer to more affluent schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Some teachers,

however, take jobs at high-poverty schools because of their desire to make a difference

(Simon & Johnson, 2015). Several teachers in the present study noted that they wanted to

stay in their current schools for precisely this reason—they wanted the challenge of

making a difference in the lives of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another consideration regarding teachers' professional aspirations is the amount

of autonomy and influence given to teachers as they gain experience. Johnson (2006) and

Glazer (2018) both noted that teachers are more likely to stay in their positions when they

have more autonomy. In contrast, however, Kukla-Acevedo (2009) claimed that

autonomy did not significantly affect teacher retention. Data from the interviews and

surveys in the present study support the findings of Johnson and Glazer—amount of

teacher autonomy is an important influence when deciding whether to remain in a job.

Teachers with autonomy are more likely to be satisfied with their job. Similarly,

researchers (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001) have noted that teachers are less

likely to leave a position when they have influence throughout a school. Interview results

and survey data from the current study corroborate their findings, especially among

teachers who have been in a school for at least three years. When it comes to building-

wide decisions that affect everyone, teachers want to feel like their voices are heard. As

one teacher interview participant alluded to, autonomy and influence can also be

important sources of organizational sacrifice as they are often earned over time. Teachers

will give them up if they leave and may have to re-earn them in a new school.

A final consideration for teachers' fit with their school are their professional goals.

Burke (2015) noted professional goals as one factor that influenced teachers' career

decisions. In the current study, two teachers connected their future career decisions with

their aspirations. One noted that she eventually wanted to take on a specialist role, but

that she was unable to do so in her current school due to its small size; there was no such

position available. Another teacher, however, mentioned she appreciated her current

school precisely because the small size of the school allowed her to take on additional

professional responsibilities.

Looking more broadly at organizational fit as a dimension of job embeddedness,

Watson (2011) found that it is significantly related to teachers' career decisions. My

findings suggest that teachers' school fit can provide an important buffer against leaving

their jobs in rural schools.

Collegial Connections

Numerous studies have shown that collaborative school cultures are more

supportive of teacher retention (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Johnson

& Birkeland, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). It seems that teachers who work together

are more likely to stay together. Not all studies, however, reached the same conclusion.

When studying the impact of job embeddedness on the retention of special education

teachers, Burke (2015) did not find that collegial support was predictive of retention.

In the present study of rural schools, teachers spoke of their collegial relationships

—or work families—as being integral to their desire to remain in an organization. For

several interviewees, these not only formed the basis of friendships, they also provided

the support they felt they needed as teachers. These connections not only provided them

with links to other people within their organization, they also helped them to be more

effective—developing their organizational fit through support and collaboration—and

were cited as a source of sacrifice—something teachers did not want to give up—if they were to leave the organization.

The interview data in this study, however, was not supported by the entirety of the survey data. When directly asked about influences on their decision-making, teachers' survey responses indicated that these connections mattered. When using a regression, however, to analyze the effect of teachers' measured organizational links—their connection to their schools and colleagues—on their intent to stay in or leave their schools, there was no significant relationship. While the majority of the literature is suggestive that teachers' collegial connections are important to their retention, the findings from the current study are mixed.

Working Conditions and Administrative Support

Findings in the current study indicate that supportive leadership is one of the most important determinants in whether teachers decide to stay in a school. In their interviews, teachers wanted to feel affirmed and that they were contributing to the success of the school. They wanted feedback on their instruction and help with data analysis so they could improve their practice. In their interviews, teachers wanted to be trusted when they referred misbehaving students to the principal, and they wanted administrators to intervene when necessary to help improve students' behaviors. Additionally, they appreciated when their principals had an open door policy so they could seek help whenever needed. The survey substantiated the findings that support and encouragement were two of the primary influences on teachers' decision-making.

Previous educational research also corroborates these findings by highlighting the importance of school administrators, especially the support they give to teachers. Lack of administrative support was the main school-related reason teachers cited for leaving their positions in New York City (Boyd, Grossman et al., 2011). Numerous researchers have related that principals that provide better behavioral and instructional support, encourage and recognize their staff, and are available to talk and listen are likely to have lower turnover (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Player et al., 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Smith & Johnson, 2015). Teachers have difficult jobs; school leaders need to provide support to make them easier. If they do, then teachers would sacrifice that support if they decided to leave.

The Rural School Organization

While I presented the preceding discussion as discrete themes, these concepts are interrelated, as noted in the section on job embeddedness in Chapter Two. This notion is supported by significant correlations among the dimensions (see Appendix J). These correlations are even present between the community and organizational dimensions, indicating the presence of connections between the school as an organization and the rural context in which it is situated. When principals enact practices to promote increased embeddedness in their organization, it is likely that they will influence multiple dimensions of job embeddedness simultaneously. While the degree to which this occurs is outside of the scope of the present study, it is worth bearing in mind when reviewing the recommendations for rural school principals.

Summary of Themes

In the preceding section, I placed the findings from the current study in conversation with the literature on teacher retention. I noted two community-related themes: rural lifestyle and community connections. Of these two, teachers' desire to live a quieter, slower-paced, rural lifestyle yielded the most definitive effect on their intent to stay in a school. There is not a substantial research base, nor clear findings from the present study, to make a broad claim regarding the impact of teachers' community connections on their career decision-making. Nevertheless, this could be an especially important factor for some teachers, as indicated by the interview data in this study.

In addition to these community themes, there were three organizational themes related to teacher retention: teacher effectiveness and professional aspirations, collegial connections, and working conditions and administrative support. Teachers' effectiveness and whether their professional aspirations could be met working in a school were highly significant factors related to teachers' intent to stay in a school. If teachers have the necessary skills to be successful in the classroom, they are more likely to stay. Likewise, if they have a desire to work in a higher needs school, are provided with autonomy in their classrooms, and are given leadership positions to influence the overall school direction, they have a greater chance of staying in rural schools. The relationships of teachers' collegial connections to their decision-making is less clear. While the research base is supportive of the notion that teachers' connections with each other make a difference in retention, the present study did not support that conclusion. A final theme, that of working conditions and administrative support, was another element essential to

teacher retention. Teachers need an appropriate working environment, free from behavioral disruptions. Furthermore, they require supportive leadership, willing to not only help them instructionally, but also to provide a listening ear for their concerns.

These themes reflect the initial conceptual framework for this study in that they develop the idea that principals' leadership practices influence teachers' job embeddedness which, in turn, impacts their decision-making to stay in or leave schools. The original practices noted in this study represent the literature on what principals can do to influence retention: hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, and providing administrative support. The themes in my study provide a deeper look at the importance of organizational factors as they affect teachers' embeddedness, or how securely they are connected to their job. A major contribution of the present study is that I acknowledge that the organization and employees exist in a broader community context, and that this, too, has the capacity to influence teacher decision-making, a theme that has been scarce in the research base. With these themes in mind, I now provide recommendations for school principals.

Recommendations for Principal Practice to Improve Rural Teacher Retention

I offer six recommendations for practices that principals can implement to improve teacher retention in rural schools. These are based on the findings from this study and the existing literature on teacher retention. My recommendations for principal practices encompass teachers' career spans, from the hiring process to their eventual status as experienced teachers. These recommendations are: prioritize organizational fit when hiring; consider community fit when hiring; provide high quality professional

development for all teachers, including and mentoring for new teachers; provide

sustained administrative support and encouragement; provide classroom autonomy; and

provide opportunities for teacher leadership (see Table 13).

Table 13

Recommendations Mapped to Key Findings

Recommendations	Key Findings
Prioritize organizational fit when hiring	Teachers with higher measures of organizational fit are more likely to stay. Teachers cited perceived effectiveness as a top influence on their decision-making.
Consider community fit when hiring	Teachers with higher measures of community fit are more likely to stay long term. Teachers cited how much they like the place they live as an important influence on their decision-making.
Provide high quality professional development, including induction and mentoring for new teachers	Teachers with higher measures of organizational fit and those who received more induction supports are more likely to stay. Teachers cited perceived effectiveness as a key influence on their decision-making.
Provide sustained support and encouragement	Teachers with higher measures of organizational sacrifice are more likely to stay. Support and encouragement from school leaders were top factors that teachers identified as influencing their decision-making.
Provide classroom autonomy	Teachers indicated classroom autonomy as an important influence in their decision-making to stay. Teachers with higher measures of organizational sacrifice are more likely to stay.
Provide opportunities for teacher leadership	Teachers with at least three years' experience in a school indicated school-wide influence as an important component in their decision-making to stay. Teachers with higher measures of organizational fit and sacrifice are more likely to stay.

Prioritize Organizational Fit When Hiring

The importance of fit has been a repeated theme in both the literature and in this study. A teacher that is a good match for organization is more likely to stay. This may necessitate changes at both the recruitment, selection, and placement phases of the hiring process. Rural schools typically have smaller applicant pools, so finding teachers with the right fit can be a challenge (Beesley et al., 2010; Hammer et al., 2005). Principals should coordinate with their districts to start the hiring process early so they do not have to rush to select teachers (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Moreover, they should attempt to increase the candidate pool to increase their chances of finding candidates that are a good match. Hammer et al. (2005) provide a number of strategies such as using financial incentives, advertising the perks of rural living, and "grow-your-own" teachers programs. While these practices are not necessarily based at the school level, principals should advocate for more effective hiring practices if they are not receiving enough applicants.

When selecting teachers, principals should attempt to assess applicants' degree of fit. In addition to asking questions to determine an applicant's potential for classroom effectiveness, principals should include interview questions that ascertain the alignment of a candidate's values with the needs of the school. Principals should also consider asking questions about candidates' professional goals to see if they can be met in their school. Additionally, they should provide an information-rich process that gives an accurate job preview for applicants; this will help ensure the fit is appropriate for employee and organization (Ellis et al., 2017). Finally, teachers should be assigned positions by grade level and content that are suited to their knowledge and abilities.

Placing them outside of their area would likely limit their effectiveness, increasing the potential for teachers to leave.

Consider Community Fit When Hiring

To further increase the chance of a new hire staying for the long term, principals should consider asking about candidates' willingness to live and work in a rural area. In the survey, teachers cited how much they liked the area in which they lived as a relatively important influence in deciding whether to stay in their schools. Moreover, the measure of their community fit served as a predictor of their intent to remain in the school for at least five years. Teachers' response to this prompt could provide insight into their likelihood of staying for a longer period of time.

Provide High Quality Professional Development

As the literature base and the present study suggest, professional development aimed at improving teacher effectiveness has the potential to improve teacher retention. As the survey data showed, teachers with higher measures of organizational fit and those who received more induction supports are more likely to stay. Furthermore, teachers cited perceived effectiveness as a top influence on their decision-making.

Accordingly, school leaders must develop the fit of new and existing faculty members. Principals should provide an array of induction activities—and especially mentoring—for younger teachers. New teachers need mentors to help them learn and refine the rudiments of teaching; this will increase their person-job fit. Principals need to schedule time for mentors and mentees to meet as it is unlikely they will find time to meet spontaneously amidst the bustle of a typical school day. Additionally, all teachers

can benefit from appropriate professional development activities to help them stay current with pedagogy. By doing so, principals can develop the fit of teachers in accordance with the needs of their classrooms and the school.

Provide Sustained Support and Encouragement

Teaching is a challenging profession; educators not only provide instruction, they also must manage the behavior of their students. Principals need to provide them with sustained support—Boyd, Grossman et al. (2011) refer to this as making "teachers' work easier" (p. 307)—so they can be successful. While the exact type of support may look different for each teacher, in general, principals must maintain an orderly behavioral environment among students, provide instructional leadership, be available to talk and listen, and provide encouragement.

Principals should implement consistent discipline policies and address student behavior infractions (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009), trusting in the classroom management decisions teachers make. Teachers cannot work effectively in chaotic environments. Furthermore, instruction will be difficult if they are constantly working to control a classroom.

Additionally, principals should provide instructional support. This is especially important for novice teachers who often need guidance for improving their practice, but is also necessary for experienced teachers as well. Principals can do this by observing teachers and providing constructive feedback and by helping them to analyze data that can be used to guide their instruction. Not only will this help teachers feel supported, it will improve their sense of efficacy.

Perhaps the simplest way principals can support teachers is by keeping an open door. Teachers feel supported when principals make themselves available to listen; sometimes, teachers just need help talking through classroom problems. In their interviews, teachers mentioned that it was important for principals to have an open door so they could seek this type of support as needed.

Finally, principals should create a positive environment in which teachers want to work by encouraging them and recognizing their efforts and successes. In the survey and interviews, teachers noted that encouragement was integral to their decision-making to stay or leave as they wanted to feel appreciated. Teachers want to feel that they are valued and contributing members of a school community.

Provide Classroom Autonomy

As teachers develop experience and gain confidence in the classroom, the need for their professionalism to be honored grows stronger. Consequently, principals should be attuned to experienced teachers' increasing need for autonomy. Barring any performance concerns, they should give experienced teachers independence in their classrooms, trusting them as professionals who can make sound instructional decisions based on their years of experience. The balancing act of giving teachers autonomy is admittedly a fine line. Principals are required to monitor teachers' work, but this monitoring should be reasonable and should not bring about a sense of micromanagement. They should instead give credence to experienced teachers' sense of internal accountability and give them instructional latitude within their classrooms.

Provide Opportunities for Teacher Leadership

While teachers want control over what they do in their classrooms, they also want opportunities to influence the broader school organization. Principals can meet this need by recruiting teachers for leadership teams, soliciting feedback via surveys when making decisions, and by involving current teachers in the hiring process. This last suggestion also supports the prior recommendation of hiring for organizational fit. If current teachers are involved in attending recruiting fairs, interviewing, and decision-making, they can help principals identify which applicants may be a better fit for their teams. Additionally, providing leadership opportunities not only gives teachers school-wide influence, it could also help some of them attain their professional goals if they want their responsibilities to extend beyond their own classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further Study Teacher Retention using Job Embeddedness

There is a wealth of research on teacher retention. Only a handful of these studies (e.g., Burke, 2015; Watson, 2011; Watson, 2018), however, use the theoretical construct of job embeddedness—which captures factors that buffer employees against leaving jobs—as a lens for examining why teachers choose to stay in schools. As prior research indicates (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2001), and the present study reinforces, employees who are more embedded are more likely to stay. Findings from the current study indicate the significance effects of community fit, organizational fit, and organizational sacrifice. Watson (2011), however, found a significant effect with community sacrifice, but not with organizational sacrifice. Further research on job embeddedness among teachers

should continue to examine the strength of the six dimensions in an attempt to better understand the importance of each in teachers' decision-making.

Additionally, this study only examined those school-based leadership practices that can influence teachers' embeddedness. Future researchers may want to broaden this idea to look at the influence of district-based leadership practices with the potential to increase job embeddedness. For example, a number of interviewees in this study discussed topics such as salary and benefits, and these factors are influenced by district leaders.

Explore the Process by which a Teacher Settles Down

Interview respondents in this study alluded to a process of deciding whether or not to settle down in a community and make it their home. Researchers should examine this decision-making process to determine how teachers make these decisions and what determinants factor into their decision-making. An additional idea is to compare the processes for native and non-native teachers, who may have different reasons for choosing a community as their home.

Further Examine the Role of Community Links in Teacher Retention

In this study, all of the native interviewees noted the importance of their family connections in choosing to stay in their current school. In contrast, however, the regression analysis did not reveal a significant relationship between community links and teachers' intent to stay. Future research could be used to more clearly determine whether school administrators should focus on hiring native teachers, or whether they could cast

the recruitment net more widely in an attempt to focus on community and organizational fit.

Summary

Teacher retention is a complex issue; the reality is that each person who stays or leaves does so for their own web of individualized reasons. In this study, I have advanced the notion that if principals implement practices to increase teachers' job embeddedness, then they will also increase the probability of more teachers choosing to stay. Over time, this has the potential to lift the experience, and thereby, effectiveness, of teachers in a building, to the ultimate benefit of student achievement.

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings from the current study in the context of the existing literature on teacher retention. I then offered six recommendations for practice for school principals looking to increase teacher retention in rural schools. It is my hope that principals will implement these recommendations to retain teachers so that students in rural schools have more equitable access to experienced, effective teachers.

Action Communication Products

The next section includes two action communication products for leaders in rural schools. First, I provide a short memo for principals that briefly summarizes the study, then outlines the findings and recommendations for practices. The second product is a collection of slides for presenting to groups of school leaders, such as at conferences. As I noted when I first undertook this study, my hope is that these practical recommendations will be put to use in rural schools to increase teacher retention, and thereby increase students' achievement.

Action Communication 1: School Leader Briefing

Teacher Retention in Rural Schools: Considerations for School Principals

Subject: Recommendations for school principals to improve teacher retention in rural schools, based on a research study conducted in 37 rural schools located throughout the state of Virginia.

Problem of Practice: Teacher turnover is a pervasive problem in many schools nationwide, with high-minority, high-poverty, and rural being among the most affected. Researchers assert that high teacher turnover broadly harms student achievement, impacting all students in a school, not just those directly affected because they have a new teacher. Turnover can also be costly in terms of time and money as administrators expend both while recruiting, hiring, and mentoring new teachers. Moreover, rampant turnover can lead to teacher shortages, with many school leaders unable to fill all vacancies and instead relying on under-qualified teachers or long term substitutes. While school leaders are unable to eliminate all turnover, mitigating the loss of teachers will yield more experienced and cohesive faculties in rural schools.

Study Design: Teacher retention is a complex problem of practice; therefore, I focused my research on principals' leadership practices that influence teachers' career decisions—district level factors, such as salaries and benefits, are excluded from this study. This study is grounded in the theory of job embeddedness, which posits that employees who are more embedded in their jobs are more likely to stay. This web of connections focuses on both community and organizational factors that compel employees to remain in their jobs. Among teachers, job embeddedness encompasses their fit with their school and community; the connections they have with colleagues, friends, and family; and what they would give up were they to leave a job. To discern which principal practices have the greatest capacity to increase teachers' job embeddedness—and probability of retention—I collected data from teacher surveys ($N = 369$), teacher interviews ($N = 18$), and principal interviews ($N = 4$).

Major Themes and Findings: Findings from the surveys and interviews yielded themes related to both the broader rural community and the school as an organization. In other words, teachers might choose to stay in their workplace for reasons inside of, and external to, their organization.

> **Community:** Two themes emerged relative to the rural community: whether or not teachers are amenable to living a rural lifestyle, and whether they have connections within their communities. My analysis of the data suggests that teachers who enjoy the quieter, slower pace of rural living are more likely to stay in a rural school. Whether or not a teacher was native to their current community and had family in the area, however, did not yield a statistically significant effect on teachers' career decision-making.

Organizational: I also examined three organizational themes: teacher effectiveness and their professional aspirations, collegial connections, and working conditions and administrative support. Teachers who are effective at their jobs and feel that they can reach their professional goals in a small, rural school are less likely to leave. Teachers' working conditions and the amount of administrative support they receive had moderate effect sizes that positively influenced retention. In contrast to much of the literature on retention, however, my study did not provide statistical support that teachers' relationships with their colleagues influence their decision-making.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study, I make the following recommendations for principal leadership practices to improve teacher retention:

- **Prioritize organizational fit when hiring.** Principals should create an information-rich interview process to discern an applicant's potential classroom effectiveness and to provide an accurate depiction of their future job duties and the school's working conditions. They should also consider candidates' long term goals and whether they can be met in their school. Moreover, principals should determine job placement based on teachers' skills by grade level and content area as this can impact their effectiveness.
- **Consider community fit when hiring.** When interviewing, principals should consider candidates' willingness to live and work in a rural area. Some are actively looking for smaller, rural schools; others are simply looking for a job.
- **Provide high quality professional development.** New teachers need effective mentors to help them learn or refine the rudiments of teaching. Additionally, all teachers can benefit from appropriate professional development activities to help them stay current with pedagogy. These activities can increase teachers' effectiveness, which, in turn will improve their possibility of retention.
- **Provide sustained support and encouragement.** In essence, principals need to work to make teachers' jobs less onerous so they can be successful. While this support should be differentiated for teachers, in general, principals must maintain an orderly behavioral environment among students, provide instructional leadership, be available to talk and listen, and provide consistent encouragement.
- **Provide classroom autonomy.** As teachers develop experience and gain confidence in the classroom, they have an increased need for independence. Principals are required to monitor teachers' work, of course, but this monitoring should be reasonable and should not bring about a sense of micromanagement. They should instead give credence to experienced teachers' sense of internal accountability and give them instructional latitude within their classrooms.
- **Provide opportunities for teacher leadership.** Teachers want opportunities to influence the broader school organization. Principals can meet this need by recruiting teachers for leadership teams, soliciting feedback via surveys when making decisions, and by involving current teachers in the hiring process.

Action Communication 2: Presentation Slides

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to address a gap in the literature—a lack of research surrounding why some teachers choose to stay in rural schools—and to provide practical recommendations for principals to increase teacher retention.

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Research Questions

Research question #1:
What principal practices are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools?

Research question #2:
What factors do principals identify as most influential to teachers' retention in rural schools?

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Conceptual Framework

The Rural Context
Principals' Leadership Practices

Hiring for Fit | Providing Induction & Mentoring | Influencing Working Conditions | Providing Administrative Support

Job Embeddedness

Fit | Links | Sacrifice

Teachers' Career Decisions

Stay | Leave

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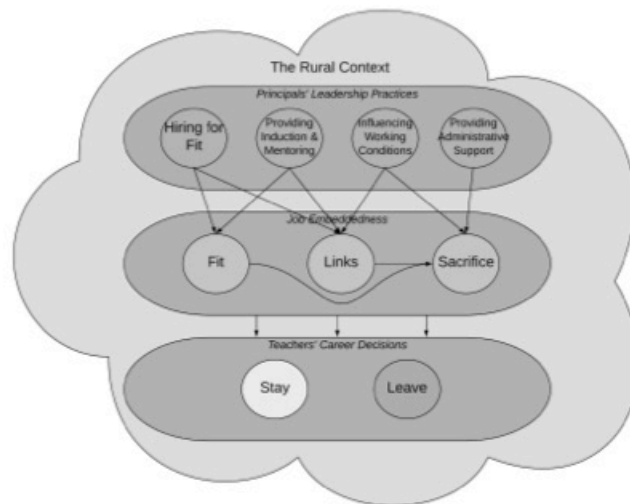
Study Design – Design, Participants, & Data Collection

- **Mixed Methods Design**
  - **Teacher surveys**
    - Job embeddedness measure comprised of 37 indicators
    - Amount of influence of 40 factors on teachers' career decisions
    - Teachers' career plans (12 months, 3 years, 5 years, and how often they think about leaving)
  - **Teacher and principal semi-structured interviews**
    - Questions and probes related to the principals' leadership practices and the six dimensions of job embeddedness

- **Survey Participants**
  - Teachers in 37 rural schools throughout the state of Virginia (N= 369)

- **Interview Participants**
  - Teachers in six schools (N = 18), with at least three years of experience in their current school
  - Principals in four of those schools (N = 4)

- **Data Collection**
  - March through June 2020

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Study Design – Data Analysis

- Surveys
    - Calculated means of the 40 influences to determine which factors teachers considered to be the most important in their decision-making to stay or leave
    - Regression analysis to determine relationship between teachers' levels of job embeddedness and their career plans
- Interviews
    - Transcribed the interviews
    - Coded using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software

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Findings and Themes

- **Community**
    - Rural lifestyle
    - Community connections
- **Organizational**
    - Teacher effectiveness and professional aspirations
    - Collegial connections
    - Working conditions and administrative support

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Community Themes

Rural Lifestyle: Teachers who value a quieter, slower-paced, rural lifestyle are more likely to intend to stay in a rural school for at least five years.

Community Connections: In interviews, numerous native teachers spoke of the importance of being from the area; this was one factor keeping them in their schools. Survey data analysis, however, yielded no statistical connection between teachers' community connections—whether they are from an area or have family nearby—and their intent to stay in or leave a school.

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Organizational Themes

Teacher Effectiveness and Professional Aspirations: Effective teachers, those who have a commitment to working in a high needs school, and those who feel like they can reach their professional goals within a particular school, are more likely to stay. Additionally, teachers are more likely to stay when they are given classroom autonomy and school-wide influence commensurate with their experience.

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Organizational Themes

Collegial Connections: In interviews, numerous teachers spoke of the importance of their collegial relationships as one factor keeping them in their schools. Survey data analysis, however, yielded mixed results. Teachers indicated these relationships had a moderate amount of influence when self-reporting factors. When analyzing data with a regression analysis, the strength of their organizational links did not have a significant relationship with their intent to stay or leave.

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Organizational Themes

Working Conditions and Administrative Support: Findings from this study indicate that working conditions and administrative support—including encouragement, instructional support, and behavioral support—is one of the most important determinants in whether teachers decide to stay in a school.

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Recommendations

- **Prioritize organizational fit when hiring.**
  - Look at potential for teacher effectiveness.
  - Provide an accurate depiction of future job duties and working conditions.
  - Consider candidate's long term goals and whether they can be met in this school.
  - Provide appropriate job placement.
- **Consider community fit when hiring.**
  - Consider their willingness to live and work in a rural area.
- **Provide high-quality professional development.**
  - Provide effective mentorships for new teachers and quality professional development for experienced teachers, geared towards increasing effectiveness.

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Recommendations

- **Provide sustained support and encouragement.**
  - Provide instructional and behavioral support.
  - Be available to talk and listen.
  - Provide consistent encouragement.
- **Provide classroom autonomy.**
  - Give teachers discretion to make instructional decisions about their own classrooms, proportional with their experience and ability.
- **Provide leadership opportunities.**
  - Allow teachers to influence school-wide decision-making.

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Questions and Feedback

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Appendix A

Initial Letter to Superintendents Requesting Consent to Conduct Research

Dr. _____,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia studying educational leadership. I will complete my coursework in the summer of 2019 and will then begin my research phase in the fall. The focus of my research is teacher turnover in rural school divisions. Traditionally, research on teacher turnover has focused on why teachers leave schools. I will instead aim to understand why some teachers choose to *stay* in rural school districts.

I would like to invite your participation and that of your district in my research. I would be happy to set up a time to talk with you about the project, but also thought that I'd take this opportunity to provide a little insight.

I am examining teacher turnover through the theoretical framework of *job embeddedness,* which argues that employees stay in a job because of their *connections* and *fit* within their organization and community, and because of the *sacrifices* they would make to leave their job. I am drawn to exploring why teachers "stay" because it is more of a strengths-based approach to this problem of practice.

My primary research questions are: What factors are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools? and, How can principals leverage these factors to foster teacher retention? I intend to use a mixed methods approach to answer these questions. So if you were to agree to participate, I would want to administer surveys to teachers and to interview teachers and principals in your district.

I'm currently putting together my research proposal for submission to my committee, and I hope to begin my research in the fall of 2019. If you are interested in participating or learning more about my research and how the findings will benefit you and your district, I would be pleased to set up a meeting either by phone or in person at your earliest convenience.

Of course, all data from the divisions, schools, and teachers that participate in this study will be anonymized. I will share my findings, to include recommendations for improving teacher retention, with participating school divisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Rob Wright
Ed.D. candidate, University of Virginia

Appendix B

Survey Correspondences with Principals and Teachers of Participating Schools

[Principal Name],

I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia studying educational leadership. I am currently working on my capstone project; the focus of my research is teacher turnover in rural school divisions. My research questions are: What factors are most influential in teachers' retention in rural schools? and, How can principals leverage these factors to foster teacher retention?

Your division's superintendent has agreed to allow me to conduct research within your school. Will you please forward the following email to all of the teachers on your staff? They will be asked to complete a 10–15 minute survey. Teachers' participation is voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential. No teacher will be required to provide any identifying information unless they elect to do so. At the end of the survey, teachers will be asked if they would be willing to participate in an hour-long interview. If they agree to participate, I will contact them directly to schedule an interview. I will use pseudonyms for any data that I use in my research report. At the conclusion of my research project, I will supply participating divisions and schools with a research brief that includes the findings from my study and recommendations for principals and district leaders.

I will re-contact you in two weeks and in four weeks to send out reminder emails to teachers to take the survey. Thank you for your assistance, I greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,
Rob Wright
Ed.D. candidate, University of Virginia

****

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia studying educational leadership. I am currently working on my capstone project; the focus of my research is teacher turnover in rural school divisions.

Your division's superintendent has agreed to allow me to conduct research within your school. I am asking you to please complete the linked survey to provide data for my research. The survey should take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions you choose to not answer. All responses will be kept confidential. Five survey respondents will be randomly selected to receive $25 Amazon.com gift certificates. Winners will receive their gift certificates via email. Thank you for your time and for your hard work serving the students in Virginia's rural schools.

<u>Qualtrics Survey Link</u>

Sincerely,
Rob Wright
Ed.D. candidate, University of Virginia

Correspondences with Principals and Teachers to Recruit for Interviews

[Principal or Teacher Name],

I am a doctoral student at the University of Virginia studying educational leadership. I am currently working on my capstone project; the focus of my research is teacher turnover in rural school divisions.

Your division's superintendent has agreed to allow me to conduct research within your school. I am contacting you because I am interested in interviewing you as part of my data collection. If you choose to participate, I will set up a time to video conference with you (via Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom). The interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes and would be audio recorded. Interview questions will focus on principal leadership practices that are directed at retaining teachers.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may skip any interview questions you choose. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Additionally, I will use pseudonyms for interview data that I use in my research report.

There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study. As a thank you for your time, each interview participant will receive a $25 Amazon.com gift card. Additionally, it is my hope that my research will be used to improve principal practices with respect to teacher retention in rural schools.

At the conclusion of my research project, I will supply participating divisions and schools with a research brief that includes the findings from my study and recommendations for principals and district leaders. If you are willing to participate in this interview, please respond to this email and include a few dates with one-hour blocks of time that you are available. My greatest availability during the week is generally between 3pm and 5pm. I am also available to schedule evening or weekend interviews. If those time slots do not work for you, let me know what does and I will do my best to accommodate your availability. Thank you for your consideration, I greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,
Rob Wright
Ed.D. candidate, University of Virginia
UVA IRB-SBS Protocol #3347

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Teacher Survey

TEACHER SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT
Please read this carefully before you decide to participate in this online survey.

This is a study on teacher retention in rural schools. As part of this study, I am conducting a confidential online survey about teachers' career choices and how principal practices influence their decision-making process to stay in a school or leave. The survey is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions you choose. You will not have to provide any identifying information unless you choose to do so. The survey is expected to take between 10 and 15 minutes. There are no anticipated risks; all data will be kept confidential and results will only be reported in aggregate. Finally, five survey respondents will be randomly chosen to receive a $25 Amazon.com gift certificate. Winners will receive their gift certificates via email.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, simply close your browser window. If you have any questions about the purposes of this study or if you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Rob Wright at jrw2qp@virginia.edu or faculty advisor, Dr. David Eddy Spicer, at dhe5f@virginia.edu. If you have any questions about your rights in this study, contact:

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr. Suite 500
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392 Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392
Telephone: (434) 924–5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs
IRB-SBS #3347

I look forward to your perspectives and hope they will provide rural school leaders with a better understanding of how to retain teachers in rural school districts. I value your insights and hope you will participate.

Sincerely,
Rob Wright
Ed.D. candidate, University of Virginia

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:
• you have read the above information
• you voluntarily agree to participate

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

Agree   **Disagree**

You may print out a copy of this page for your records.

Appendix D

Teacher Survey Questions

Teacher Survey

Job Embeddedness Measure

1. How long have you been a teacher?
0 years, 1–2 years, 3–4 years, 5–9 years, 10+ years

2. How long have you been in your present position?
0 years, 1–2 years, 3–4 years, 5–9 years, 10+ years

3. Thinking about the following statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.
Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

- **Links to Community**
  - I live and work near my hometown
  - My family lives nearby
  - My close friends live nearby
  - I have connections to organizations/churches/community groups in the area
  - My roots are in this area
  - I like the house or apartment in which I live
- **Links to Organization**
  - I feel a connection to my school
  - I have high quality collegial relationships
  - I have a high quality grade level or department team at work
- **Fit to Community**
  - I really love the place where I live
  - The weather/climate where I live is suitable for me
  - The community in which I live is similar to the one in which I grew up
  - This community is a good match for me
  - I think of the community where I live as home
  - The area where I live offers the leisure activities that I like
- **Fit to Organization**
  - I like the members of my work group
  - My coworkers are similar to me
  - My job utilizes my skills and talents well
  - I feel like I am a good match for this school
  - I fit with the school's culture
  - I like the autonomy and influence I have at this school
  - My values are compatible with the school's values
  - I can reach my professional goals working for this school
  - I feel good about my professional growth and development
- **Community-Related Sacrifice**
  - Leaving this community in which I live would be very hard
  - People respect me a lot in my community
  - My neighborhood is safe
- **Organization-Related Sacrifice**
  - I have a lot of freedom on this job to decide how to pursue my goals
  - The perks on this job are outstanding

- I feel that people at work respect me a great deal
- I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job
- My promotional opportunities are excellent here
- I am well compensated for my level of performance
- The benefits are good on this job
- The health-care benefits provided by this school division are excellent
- The retirement benefits provided by this school division are excellent
- The prospects for continued employment with this school are excellent

Factors that Influence Decision-Making

4. To what extent do each of these factors influence your decision to stay from year to year (or will influence whether you return next year)?
Not at all, A little, A moderate amount, A lot, A great deal

- **Links to Community**
  - Whether or not I work near my hometown
  - Proximity to family
  - Proximity to non-work friends
  - My connections to organizations/churches/community groups in the area
- **Links to Organization**
  - My connection to my school
  - The quality of my collegial relationships
  - My grade level or department team at work
- **Fit to Community**
  - How much I like the place where I live
  - The community being a good match for me
  - The weather/climate where I live
  - The leisure activities and amenities offered in this area
- **Fit to Organization**
  - The similarity of my coworkers with me
  - How effective I perceive myself to be at my job
  - My school's culture
  - The autonomy and influence I have at this school
  - The congruence of my values and the school's values
  - My ability to reach my professional goals working for this school
  - My professional growth and development
- **Community-Related Sacrifice**
  - The sacrifices I would have to make to leave the community in which I live
  - The respect of people in my community
  - The safety of my neighborhood
- **Organization-Related Sacrifice**
  - The freedom I have on this job to decide how to pursue my goals
  - The respect of people at work
  - Opportunities for promotion
  - The compensation
  - The benefits
  - The health-care benefits
  - The retirement benefits
  - The prospects for continued employment with this organization
- **Influencing Working Conditions**
  - Availability of classroom resources
  - The autonomy I have in my classroom
  - The influence I have in my school

- Professional development opportunities
- Student discipline
- Facility conditions
- Work/life balance
- **Providing Leadership and Administrative Support**
  - The competence of my school's leadership
  - The support I receive from my school's leadership
  - Encouragement I receive from my school's leadership
  - My administration's approach to student discipline

Providing Induction and Mentoring

5. Which of the following induction programs did your school or division provide when you began teaching in your current position?
   - Workshops for new teachers
   - Orientation seminars
   - Collaborative planning time with other teachers
   - Reduced preparations
   - Reduced workload
   - Additional resources
   - A teacher's aide
   - A mentor
- If you were provided with a mentor, please check the characteristics of your mentor, choosing all that apply:
  - grade-matched mentor
  - content-matched mentor
  - retired teacher mentor
  - practicing teacher mentor
  - 1 year mentorship
  - 2 year mentorship
  - 3 year mentorship

Career Plans

6. How likely is it that you will leave the organization in the next 12 months?
   - *Very unlikely, Unlikely, Neutral, Likely, Very likely*
- Three years?
  - *Very unlikely, Unlikely, Neutral, Likely, Very likely*
- Five years?
  - *Very unlikely, Unlikely, Neutral, Likely, Very likely*
- How often do you think about leaving your current position?
  - *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently, Constantly*

For teachers that have 3 or more years in the same school:

7. Would you be willing to participate in an approximately hour long interview to help me better understand your reasons for choosing to stay in your school from year to year?
- If so, what is your email address?

Appendix E

Informed Consent for Teacher Interviews

TEACHER INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT
Please read this carefully before you decide to participate in this interview.

This is a study on teacher retention in rural schools. As part of this study, I am conducting interviews about teachers' career choices and how principal practices influence their decision-making process to stay in a school or leave. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions you choose. Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Additionally, I will use pseudonyms for interview data that I use in my research report. I will record the interview using GarageBand on my password-protected personal computer and will not share the audio files with anyone. I will transcribe the audio recordings into NVivo data analysis software, redacting any identifying information, and will delete the audio files upon completion of my project.

The interview is expected to take approximately 60 minutes. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study. As a thank you for your time, each interview participant will receive a $25 Amazon.com gift card. Additionally, it is my hope that my research will be used to improve principal practices with respect to teacher retention in rural schools.

You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about the purposes of this study or if you would like to withdraw your information after your materials have been submitted, please contact Rob Wright at jrw2qp@virginia.edu or faculty advisor, Dr. David Eddy Spicer, at dhe5f@virginia.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this study, contact:

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr. Suite 500
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392 Charlottesville, VA 22908–0392
Telephone: (434) 924–5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs
IRB-SBS #3347

I look forward to your perspectives and hope they will provide rural school leaders with a better understanding of how to retain teachers in rural school districts. I value your insights and hope you will participate.

Agreement:
I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix F

Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Retention Teacher Interview Guide

Date of Interview:

Role: Teacher

Interviewed by: Rob Wright

Start Time: End Time:

Place: Duration:

Audio filename:

Transcript filename:

The primary research question this mixed methods study will set out to answer is:
    What principal practices are most influential in teachers' retention in rural
    schools?

Purpose of Interview: I would like to understand teachers' perspectives on teacher
retention, focusing on which leadership practices encourage them to stay. I'm focusing
my interviews on teachers who have been in the same rural school for at least three years
in an attempt to discern what motivates them to continue to work there.

Logistics: I'd like to record this interview if it is okay with you. As I work on my project,
I'll need to refer to the transcript so that I have accurate information. The only people
who will have access to the recording and transcript will be myself and my professor. I'd
also like to take notes as this will help me to keep my thoughts organized during the
interview.
Recording OK?   Y/N
Note-taking OK?   Y/N

[Consent reminder.] If at any point in the interview you don't wish to answer a question,
please let me know. I'll use pseudonyms for you and the school division in my class
project.

Turn on recorder and test.

Interview Questions

Teacher Decision-Making
• How long have you been at this school?
• What would you say are the top three reasons you've stayed in this school for as long as you have? What other factors influence your decision-making?
  • *probes: as opposed to moving to another school; another profession*
• Of your colleagues who have been here for a few years, do you think they would respond similarly? If not, how do you think they would respond?
• How does your principal influence your decision-making to stay or leave?
  • *probes: influencing working conditions, providing leadership and administrative support*
• From your perspective, what actions does your principal take to retain teachers?
  • *probes: hiring for fit, providing induction and mentoring, influencing working conditions, providing leadership and administrative support*
• Are there times you've thought about leaving?
  • *probes: What prompted those thoughts? What kept you from deciding to leave?*
• What will it take for you to continue to stay in your current position for another three to five years or even longer?
• Is there anything that I haven't asked that you think I need to know to understand why teachers choose to stay in or leave your school?

Additional Probes
• Hiring for Fit
  • location/rural background/proximity to family and friends
  • ability to do the job
  • organizational values
• Induction and Mentoring
  • influence on fit, links
• Working Conditions
  • student behavior, school safety
  • facility condition
  • availability of resources
  • collaboration
• Providing Leadership and Administrative Support
  • competence
  • vision
  • encouragement and recognition
  • student discipline
  • availability to talk and listen
  • ability to provide instructional support

Appendix G

Informed Consent for Principal Interviews

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT
Please read this carefully before you decide to participate in this interview.

This is a study on teacher retention in rural schools. As part of this study, I am conducting interviews about teachers' career choices and how principal practices influence their decision-making process to stay in a school or leave. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions you choose. Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Additionally, I will use pseudonyms for interview data that I use in my research report. I will record the interview using GarageBand on my password-protected personal computer and will not share the audio files with anyone. I will transcribe the audio recordings into NVivo data analysis software, redacting any identifying information, and will delete the audio files upon completion of my project.

The interview is expected to take approximately 60 minutes. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study. As a thank you for your time, each interview participant will receive a $25 Amazon.com gift card. Additionally, it is my hope that my research will be used to improve principal practices with respect to teacher retention in rural schools.

You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about the purposes of this study or if you would like to withdraw your information after your materials have been submitted, please contact Rob Wright at jrw2qp@virginia.edu or faculty advisor, Dr. David Eddy Spicer, at dhe5f@virginia.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this study, contact:

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
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Telephone: (434) 924–5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs
IRB-SBS #3347

I look forward to your perspectives and hope they will provide rural school leaders with a better understanding of how to retain teachers in rural school districts. I value your insights and hope you will participate.

Agreement:
I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix H

Principal Interview Protocol

Teacher Retention Principal Interview Guide

Date of Interview:

Role: Teacher

Interviewed by: Rob Wright

Start Time: End Time:

Place: Duration:

Audio filename:

Transcript filename:

The primary research question this qualitative study will set out to answer is:
        What principal practices are most influential in teachers' retention in rural
        schools?

Purpose of Interview: I would like to understand principals' perspectives on teacher
retention, focusing on which leadership practices encourage them to stay. I'm interested
in your perceptions of why teachers choose to stay and work in your school, and the
practices you enact to encourage them to do so.

Logistics: I'd like to record this interview if it is okay with you. As I work on my project,
I'll need to refer to the transcript so that I have accurate information. The only people
who will have access to the recording and transcript will be myself and my professor. I'd
also like to take notes as this will help me to keep my thoughts organized during the
interview.
Recording OK?   Y/N
Note-taking OK?   Y/N

[Consent reminder.] If at any point in the interview you don't wish to answer a question,
please let me know. I'll use pseudonyms for you and your school in my class project.

Turn on recorder and test.

Principal Interview Questions

Principal Perspective
• How long have you been at this school?
• How would you characterize the teacher turnover in your school?
• Why do you think some teachers choose to stay and teach in this school for years when others leave after a year or two? or Why do you think teachers choose to stay in your school?
• What influences their decision-making?
• What influence do you think you as a principal have on teachers' decision-making to stay or leave?
  • *probes - influencing working conditions, providing leadership and administrative support*
• What actions—if any—do you take to retain teachers?
• Is there anything that I haven't asked that you think I need to know to understand why teachers choose to stay in or leave your school?

Additional Probes
• Hiring for Fit
  • location/rural background/proximity to family and friends
  • ability to do the job
  • organizational values
• Induction and Mentoring
  • influence on fit, links
• Working Conditions
  • student behavior, school safety
  • facility condition
  • availability of resources
  • collaboration
• Providing Leadership and Administrative Support
  • competence
  • vision
  • encouragement and recognition
  • student discipline
  • availability to talk and listen
  • ability to provide instructional support

Appendix I

Interview Analysis Code List

- Principal practices

    - Hiring for fit

        - Value alignment

        - From here v. come here

        - *Rural lifestyle

    - Providing induction and mentoring

        - Workshop/seminars

        - Mentorships

    - Influencing working conditions

        - Student behavior

        - Safety

        - Facilities

        - Availability of resources

        - Teacher collaboration

        - *Autonomy and influence

        - *Morale

        - *Time and paperwork

        - *Professional development and teacher effectiveness

    - Providing leadership and administrative support

        - Competence

- Vision

- Encouragement and recognition

- Discipline

- Availability to talk and listen

- Instructional support

- Job embeddedness

    - Links

        - Organizational links

        - Community Links

    - Fit

        - Person-job fit

        - Person-organization fit

        - Community fit

    - Sacrifice

        - Organizational sacrifice

        - Community sacrifice

- Decision-making

    - Stay

    - Move

    - Leave

* - Added during interview data analysis.

Appendix J

Pearson Correlation Coefficients

	TimeProfession	TimeCurrentJob	ComLinks	OrgLinks	ComFit	OrgFit	ComSac	OrgSac	Job Embeddedness	# IndSup	Leave 12mths	Leave 3yrs	Leave 5yrs	Leave Think
TimeProfession	1													
TimeCurrentJob	.63***	1												
ComLinks	.14**	.23***	1											
OrgLinks	.06	.09	.38***	1										
ComFit	.08	.09	.61***	.53***	1									
OrgFit	.08	.07	.30***	.74***	.55***	1								
ComSac	.11*	.18***	.50***	.46***	.66***	.51***	1							
OrgSac	-.05	-.05	.21***	.48***	.41***	.65***	.43***	1						
Job Embeddedness	.10	.15**	.71***	.78***	.83***	.80***	.77***	.67***	1					
# IndSup	-.18***	-.22***	-.08	.10	.04	.07	-.03	.20***	.05	1				
Leave 12 months	-.16**	-.08	-.20***	-.33***	-.26***	-.43***	-.24***	-.39***	-.40***	-.07	1			
Leave 3 years	-.15**	-.05	-.24***	-.31***	-.32***	-.41***	-.28***	-.42***	-.43***	-.09	.74***	1		
Leave 5 years	-.05	.03	-.22***	-.27***	-.33***	-.35***	-.28***	-.41***	-.40***	-.18***	.56***	.83***	1	
Leave Think	.11*	.14**	-.14**	-.35***	-.32***	-.50***	-.23***	-.56***	-.44***	-.22***	.62***	.60***	.57***	1

$*p \leq .05, **p \leq .01, ***p \leq .001$

Appendix K

Teacher Perceptions of Influences on their Decision-Making to Stay

To what extent do each of these factors influence your decision to stay from year to year?	$\bar{X}$	SD	Dimension
The support I receive from my school's leadership	4.15	1.05	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Adminstrative Support)
Encouragement I receive from my school's leadership	4.08	1.10	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Administrative Support)
How effective I perceive myself to be at my job	4.07	0.97	Organizational Fit
The competence of my school's leadership	4.05	1.08	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Administrative Support)
The autonomy I have in my classroom	3.87	1.09	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
My administration's approach to student discipline	3.85	1.21	†Organizational Sacrifice (Leadership and Administrative Support)
How much I like the place where I live	3.84	1.19	Community Fit
My school's culture	3.84	1.16	Organizational Fit
The respect of people at work	3.83	1.12	Organizational Sacrifice
The congruence of my values and the school's values	3.80	1.07	Organizational Fit
The prospects for continued employment with this organization	3.80	1.17	Organizational Sacrifice
My connection to my school	3.79	1.13	Organizational Links
The autonomy and influence I have at this school	3.75	1.10	Organizational Fit
The community being a good match for me	3.75	1.15	Community Fit
The freedom I have on this job to decide how to pursue my goals	3.75	1.18	Organizational Sacrifice
The safety of my neighborhood	3.73	1.25	Community Sacrifice
My grade level or department team at work	3.71	1.23	Organizational Links
Work/life balance	3.68	1.15	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
My ability to reach my professional goals working for this school	3.64	1.14	Organizational Fit
The influence I have in my school	3.63	1.10	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)

My professional growth and development	3.62	1.10	Organizational Fit
Student discipline	3.60	1.28	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
The sacrifices I would have to make to leave the community in which I live	3.44	1.38	Community Sacrifice
Facility conditions	3.43	1.20	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
The respect of people in my community	3.42	1.23	Community Sacrifice
Proximity to family	3.40	1.54	Community Links
The quality of my collegial relationships	3.36	1.28	Organizational Links
Whether or not I work near my hometown	3.34	1.53	Community Links
Availability of classroom resources	3.31	1.22	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
The retirement benefits	3.25	1.26	Organizational Sacrifice
The weather/climate where I live	3.23	1.29	Community Fit
The similarity of my coworkers with me	3.20	1.19	Organizational Fit
The benefits	3.20	1.24	Organizational Sacrifice
The compensation	3.19	1.30	Organizational Sacrifice
The health-care benefits	3.16	1.35	Organizational Sacrifice
Professional development opportunities	3.15	1.21	†Organizational Sacrifice (Working Conditions)
The leisure activities and amenities offered in this area	3.01	1.27	Community Fit
My connections to organizations/churches/community groups in the area	2.92	1.44	Community Links
Opportunities for promotion	2.88	1.30	Organizational Sacrifice
Proximity to non-work friends	2.62	1.38	Community Links

Note. Teachers responded to each factor using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*A great deal*).