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## Exploring Perceptions Related to Teacher Retention Issues in Rural Western United States

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### Abstract

The rural setting is one that must be better understood because of the broader discussions of changing demographics, growing diversity, the need for economic development, and community engagement. Additional research is needed to understand the interconnection of rural spaces and teacher retention. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of educational stakeholders in a rural region of the western United States as they relate to retaining teachers in rural school communities that are experiencing shifts in the community due to limited rural opportunity and underdevelopment, ageing populations, poverty, out-migration, and shrinking economies. The study collected data from teachers, administrators, parents, patrons, legislators, students, and other educational stakeholders through a survey instrument (n= 806). Data were collected from October of 2017 to January of 2018. The methodological approach was a mixed qualitative and quantitative inquiry. The mixed-method approach was due to several open-ended questions on the survey, along with quantitative, closed-ended survey questions. The findings illuminate the critical role leadership plays in retaining teachers, and the significant need for robust mentoring and support programs for new teachers. Findings also consider the relationship between rural education policies, leadership practices, teacher recruitment and retention, and broader issues related to rural development. In addition to finding ways to better support mentoring, there are several implications for teacher and leadership preparation programs to better support rural placements.

**Keywords:** *teacher retention, rural education, teacher recruitment, leadership*

### Introduction

During the global pandemic a spotlight has shone on the important role of the classroom teacher, and teacher shortages have continued to become more prevalent and widespread. Often the

burdens and the abilities for school systems and communities to deal with the turnover in educators—both teachers and leaders—and the shortage of applications may not fall equitably across demographics or geographic locations.

Rural schools have faced their own pandemics for a good many years—adequate human and fiscal capital—that has led to disproportionate shortages of teachers in rural areas (Tate, 2020; Williams et al., 2021). Educational leaders and policymakers have been concerned about recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers into high-needs schools and certain subject areas, but these concerns have increased in recent years as the labour market for all workers has intensified and the job opportunities available to prospective teachers have increased. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rural schools and communities across the globe were facing challenges. In the United States, there have been concerns that many rural communities were turning into ghost towns. When a place is left without a school, it is left without a population (Gristy et al., 2020). However, Mueller et al. (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic had wide-reaching impacts on rural well-being, especially for those in the expansive, rural American West. Again, these impacts have not been equitable across geographic areas or communities.

During the pandemic, many rural communities across the United States (U.S.) experienced what has been labelled the ‘ZoomTown’ effect (Florida & Ozimek, 2021; Sherman, 2021); real estate booms fuelled by remote workers buying second homes in and/or relocating to smaller cities and rural communities. We are currently experiencing a shift from a time when rural people and rural schooling were not valued as much in an urban-centric, globally networked workforce (Corbett, 2009, 2013) to today when highly educated and mobile knowledge workers are fleeing the high-density cities in search of simple lives, healthy environments, or being closer to nature (Florida & Ozimek, 2021; Sherman, 2021). Although rural places vary, a common feature among them is the role of their school in the community, as Schafft (2016, p. 139) states, they “*function as the centres of the community*”.

We also know more today about the education profession than ever before. Marzano’s (2003) research has been cited thousands of times and shows teachers’ actions in classrooms have twice the impact on student achievement as do school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality, or community involvement. Teacher quality has been consistently identified as the most important school-based factor in student achievement (Rivkin et al., 2005; Rowan et al., 2002). Yet as important as teachers are, on average more and more of them are leaving their positions each year and fewer are entering into teacher preparation programs (Sutcher et al., 2019). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) report that an 8% annual teacher attrition in the United States is noticeably higher than in other high-achieving countries where teacher attrition is half that rate or less. More than two thirds of this attrition is due to reasons other than retirement. The bulk of teacher turnover is labelled as movers and leavers, meaning either a move to another school or district, or departure from the profession altogether. The most disadvantaged students often confront the highest rates of teacher turnover, such as those found in rural communities.

The rural setting for educators is one that must be better understood because of the broader discussions of these changing demographics, growing diversity, the need for economic development, and community engagement. Additional research is needed to understand the interconnection of rural spaces and teacher retention. Given the variety of local contexts and conditions of rural communities this study examines perceptions of various stakeholders related to teacher retention in one western state of the U.S.—Idaho. In this study survey data is used to explore widespread perceptions in the rural school community context, including those of teachers and leaders. This study seeks to add to the existing literature by addressing the research question:

What are the perceptions of various educational stakeholders related to retaining teachers in rural communities in the western U.S.? In this study we are interested in exploring perceptions related to the intersection of leadership and educational policies to support teacher retention at the local level.

The sections that follow provide a brief context on teacher retention in a specific geographic area of the rural American west known locally as the ‘Magic Valley’. Then a discussion of the literature on teacher identity in the rural context, broader issues related to teacher retention, as well as leadership and their role in retaining teachers. Followed by a description of the methods used in the study and conclusion of the findings and implications.

### **Teacher Retention in Rural Idaho: The Magic Valley Context**

The quality of the educator workforce will improve if low-performers leave and are replaced with higher-performing individuals. However, as Katz (2018, p. 3) points out, “... *both of these conditions must be met for turnover to yield a net benefit with respect to teacher quality*”. And the degree to which teacher turnover is a problem is a matter of perspective and is a nuanced discussion that takes into account mobility, access to higher education and teacher preparation, and policies to increase teacher retention, as well as other factors including teacher attributes and school/community attributes. According to a report by the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, “*Idaho’s Educator Landscape: How is the State’s Teacher Workforce Responding to Its Students’ Needs?*” (Hanson & Yoon, 2018), longitudinal data from 2012 to 2017 reveals more than 20 percent of Idaho’s teachers did not return to low-performing and high-poverty schools. On average, 22 percent of novice teachers, 19 percent of early-career teachers, and 18 percent of teachers with four or more years of experience did not return to their schools the year following data collection. Across Idaho, 30 percent of teachers leave the profession by their fourth year (Hanson & Yoon, 2018).

Hanson & Yoon (2018) point out that these trends have placed a unique and tenuous strain on those Idaho school districts that have the largest growth of economically, disadvantaged students; the highest percentage of students who are identified as English language learners; and the largest number of schools that are identified as Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools. CEP is a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provision that allows the nation’s highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students because of community wide indicators of poverty.

The area of Idaho perceived by policymakers and school leaders alike as being most impacted by the teacher shortage is rural, south-central Idaho—aka the Magic Valley. The region serves approximately 39,000 public school students distributed across nine counties and throughout 22 traditional school districts and 4 charter school LEAs (Local Education Agency).

The local economy of Magic Valley is predominantly driven by agriculture. In addition, the region has a strong, internationally recognized tourism economy. The world-famous, Sun Valley ski resort is located in Blaine County and other natural conditions of Magic Valley bring countless tourists to the area. Magic Valley also has the highest percentage of Hispanic and Latinx families – 24.2 percent, double the state-wide percentage of 12.02 percent and five percentage points higher than the nation based on data from the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs. The area continues to struggle with overall educational attainment. Levels remain below figures for the rest of Idaho and the U.S.

Previous studies highlight the growing concern that students from low-income and minority backgrounds have relatively less access to teacher quality, and the lack of enough teachers systematically short-changes the most vulnerable learners (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Glazerman & Max, 2011; Isenberg et al., 2013; Office for Civil Rights, 2014). To add to the context

of this area, according to data publicly reported by the Idaho State Department of Education, in 2016-2017 Magic Valley led the state in filling teaching positions with alternative and non-traditional routes to certification teachers. The area accounted for about 25 percent of all the alternative authorizations to certifications in Idaho; 24 percent of all provisional authorizations for teachers without certification in Idaho; and about 17 percent of teachers seeking non-traditional routes to certification (American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence - ABCTE) in Idaho. Research indicates that the pathway to certification also plays a role in turnover rates. Teachers who enter the profession through alternative certification programs are more likely to turnover relative to teachers who follow a traditional preparation route (Boyd et al., 2005; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Kane et al., 2008). Further, teacher preparation is one of the strongest links between student achievement in reading and mathematics, regardless of socio-economic and language status (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

### **Rural Context and Teacher Identity**

Schafft (2016, p. 138) states, “*Although a quarter of American public-school students are classified as rural, about one third of all schools and 57% of school districts are considered rural*”. However, rural-specific literature (Collins, 1999; Hammer et al., 2005) identifies three challenges related to recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas: (1) lower pay; (2) geographic and social isolation; and (3) difficult working conditions, such as having to teach classes in multiple subject areas. In addition, remoteness is especially unattractive to young, beginning teachers (Proffit et al., 2002). Researchers (Collins, 1999; Harris, 2001) have suggested those teachers who stay in rural areas are more likely to have grown up in rural communities or are committed to living in the area. On the other hand, conditions cited by teachers as contributing to their decisions to leave rural teaching positions include: lack of basic resources and materials, lack of a strong professional community, ineffective leadership, and discipline issues (Crews, 2002; Harris, 2001).

In a landmark study, Goodlad (1984) pointed out the issue of teacher isolation and the lack of opportunities to collaborate with peers as being an important and influencing factor to teacher attrition in rural schools. The rural context often compounds teacher retention issues because in rural communities the school is the heart of the community. White and Reid (2008, p. 2) describe it as the “*focal point of external economic and social influences, as well as political requirements for change and renewal, and therefore functions as the barometer of community well-being*”.

The growing number of studies on factors contributing to the formation of teacher identity in preservice teachers suggests that the development of a teacher identity is an important process in becoming a teacher and believing in the ability to teach well. Identity building helps beginning teachers gain a sense of control and have a sense of resilience (Bieler, 2013). Encouragement and support, open communication, and feedback were the three main components identified by National and State Teachers of the Year as ingredients of a good mentoring relationship (Izadinia, 2015). These factors also contribute to teacher retention, and lack thereof leads to teacher stress and burnout (Bieler, 2013).

Geographic isolation, weather, distance from family, and inadequate shopping facilities are among the reasons teachers give for leaving rural areas (Collins, 1999). Similarly, for preservice teachers, fears about access to resources, isolation, and cultural differences are the main reasons associated with not wishing to teach in rural areas (Sharplin, 2010). Page (2006) asserts that securing quality teachers for rural and remote schools should be the responsibility of teacher education. As preservice and early career teachers work to form their professional identity, it is important that

teacher education programs provide contexts for candidates to experience the benefits of rural schools consistent with those cited by Osterholm et al. (2006) such as: fewer disciplinary issues, lower cost of living, and heightened status within a tight-knit community.

### **Teacher Retention**

There is substantial evidence of teacher recruitment, retention, and mentoring challenges overwhelming school systems. Economically disadvantaged and rural schools, often face these issues at higher rates. Discussions of teacher shortages across the nation have been prevalent for several years (Aragon, 2016; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll, 2001), concerns have continued to build that there are not enough educators to meet school and district hiring demands. To add to the trend, Carroll and Foster (2010) claim the rate at which new teachers leave the profession has been increasing over the last 15 years. Furthermore, attrition rates are higher among high poverty schools, teachers with higher test scores, those with more experience, and teachers that serve minority and lower-achieving students (Boyd et al., 2005; Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005; Loeb et al., 2005; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Research suggests it takes three to seven years for a beginning teacher to become experienced enough to be considered highly qualified (Long, 2010). More than one-third of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Many new teachers abandon the field of teaching, often feeling defeated. According to Hughes (2012), experienced teachers are better teachers, and able to produce higher rates of student achievement. A study of teachers in New York (Boyd et al., 2008) found that student achievement gains were most enhanced by having a fully certified teacher who had graduated from a competitive university program, had a strong academic background, and had more than two years of experience. In the same study, student achievement was harmed most by having an inexperienced teacher on a temporary licence, which is the teaching profile most common in high-minority, low-income, and rural schools with ongoing teacher turnover.

Researchers in education report that teacher retention is the greatest challenge facing schools today (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In comparison, teaching has a relatively high turnover compared to many other occupations and professions, such as lawyers, and engineers. (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). Research findings shows that 14% of new teachers leave by the end of their first year; 33% leave within three years of beginning teaching; and almost 50 % leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2003). These turnover rates translate into students learning from inexperienced teachers and the fact that schools suffer higher economic costs of hiring and training new teachers. Some research findings point to the issue that school staffing problems are largely due to a 'revolving door', whereas large numbers of teachers depart teaching long before retirement (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Ingersoll & Strong (2011) note that beginning teachers report that one of the main factors behind their decisions to depart is a lack of adequate support from the school administration.

### **Role of Leadership**

Prior studies have shown that school leadership typically emerges as a noticeable factor in teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Katz, 2018). In this study, we did not confine leadership only to school administrators, as we believe it also includes teacher leaders and mentors. During the past 20 years, numerous studies provide support for the hypothesis that *“teachers with mentors from the same field were less likely to leave after their first year”* and districts



that “*bundled or packed supports*” were more successful in increasing the job satisfaction, efficacy, and retention of new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 38). High-quality induction and mentoring have been linked to first-year teachers showing student performance gains equivalent to those of fourth-year teachers who did not have this support (Strong, 2006).

Factors such as workload, school situation, and salary affect teachers’ decisions to leave, early positive experiences in teacher induction, leadership support, and clinical training have been considered strong motivational forces in teachers’ decisions to continue to teach (Ewing & Manuel, 2005). For instance, feeling valued, self-perception of success as a teacher, and a sense of self-worth correlate with teacher retention (Blase, 2009). Adequate supervision, evaluation, mentoring, and induction programs help give new teachers the confidence they need to be successful in the classroom. Research has indicated that instilling confidence in new teachers directly correlates with their decision to stay in the teaching profession during the first few years of teaching (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Research also indicates that self-identity is a determining factor in teacher motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to work (Izadinia, 2015). Also, quality leaders help teachers connect with parents (Allensworth et al., 2009), develop classroom autonomy (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009), share decision-making (Allensworth et al., 2009), and support teacher development (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). All these strategies improve teacher retention.

### **Methods and Data Collection**

This study utilised survey data to investigate perceptions of stakeholders related to the area’s teacher shortage. This study targeted stakeholders from the geographic area that is identified as Magic Valley. This geographic area encompasses twenty-two (22) traditional school districts and four (4) charter schools. A link to an anonymous online questionnaire was widely distributed to survey teachers, administrators, school board trustees, K-12 students, community college students, parents, and patrons about their beliefs/perspectives related to the teacher shortage. The survey link was provided to regional school districts and charters, the regional leaders of the Idaho School Boards Association, the Idaho Association of School Administrators, and the Idaho Education Association with a message to distribute it widely to stakeholders within the area. This distribution strategy resulted in 806 unique responses over the period from October of 2017 to January of 2018. The questionnaire followed a mixed-method approach by including both qualitative and quantitative inquiry to develop a better understanding of the beliefs and perceived issues related to teacher retention.

The questionnaire was formatted into four sections to better organise responder thoughts while answering posed questions. In total the survey consisted of 54 questions. Prior to distributing the survey link, the survey design was reviewed and edited by three faculty peer members and ten public school superintendents who worked in rural Idaho school districts. As suggested by Willis (2005) the survey underwent cognitive pretesting and question wordings were subsequently changed to eliminate misinterpretations and minimize respondent confusion and lack of clarity of meaning.

The survey included questions about participants’ roles as they relate to: education (i.e., teacher, principal, parent, school board member, etc.); past experiences and certifications (if any) in education; questions about their local school community; questions about their perceptions related to teacher preparation, recruitment and retention; as well as reasons why people leave the teaching profession. Demographic data were also collected. The survey was designed to take approximately 30 minutes of the participants’ time. In addition, if participants needed to stop for any reason, they could restart the questionnaire where they left off.

## Data Analysis

Informal feedback indicate that the survey link was shared with district personnel and educational leaders and presented on school websites. After the close of the survey, responder data were collected and organised using an Excel spreadsheet resulting in one data file with single-file scores for each survey question. Next, the captured data were cleaned and examined for errors and missingness. Frequency distributions were used to examine the range and possible clustering of scores for each question. The research team used statistical software to calculate summary statistics, including the percentage of respondents who selected each option and the associated standard errors for the multiple-choice and rating scale items.

Descriptive analysis was then used to examine trends in the data and measure central tendencies and variability. Finally, the open-ended survey questions were coded using a qualitative coding process as described by Creswell (2018). The word length of the corpus of the open-ended responses was small and varied between 1 to 895 words per question. First, the text was read through to get a sense of the whole, and then codes were assigned based on in vivo codes and text segments. In vivo coding as discussed in Saldaña (2012) places the emphasis on the verbatim words used by participants instead of coding to pre-established codes. This structure of coding was used to highlight the voices of participants to gain a greater understanding of the regional culture. Similar codes were clustered into themes to construct a narrative description of the survey data.

## Findings

To review, the study considered the following research question: What are the perceived issues held by educational stakeholders that relate to retaining teachers in rural communities in the western United States? Participant comments demonstrate that local stakeholders are invested in solving the teacher shortage and retention issues locally and the sample favoured traditional teacher preparation over alternative certification routes. The biggest perceived influencers related to teacher retention continue to be administrative support, compensation, collegial support, facilities, and the ability to manage or address student behavioural and academic needs. Table 1 provides an overview of how participants self-identified their primary role in the community.

**Table 1: Primary Role of Participants in the Community**

Primary Role	Number
Preschool -12 grade (P-12) teacher	362
P-12 administrator	63
Parent of P-12 student	202
P-12 support staff (paraeducator)	47
Education other (university, private sector, etc.)	18
Policymaker (legislator, school board, etc.)	9
Other stakeholder (including students)	105

### **Perceptions Related to Retaining Teachers in Rural Communities**

We start by analysing just those responses from school administrators about their perceptions

related to the teacher shortage in their area. The results of those completing the survey included:

- Seventy-six (76) percent of school administrators agreed or strongly agreed that in general, a certified teacher is more qualified than an alternative or non-traditional route certified teacher.
- Only 6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that hiring provisional authorization teachers is an effective way to improve student outcomes.

Those participants identifying themselves as teachers, including those certified through alternative routes, agreed that traditionally prepared teachers were better able to handle the classroom and improve outcomes for students, than alternative certification teachers. Example quotes included:

*A million times yes. The person literally has no idea what the job entails and ends up bringing needless drama and churn.*

*I do believe it is more challenging than a traditionally certified teacher because they have not had the supervised experience they gain during their final semesters at the university.*

*Yes, I am struggling with how to set up my classroom to be successful and manage student behaviours.*

However, there were other statements that seemed to point to the issue being more about the individual, than perhaps the system or type of certification:

*Depends on the individual. Some with education and training are not well equipped for the profession.*

*For me, it wasn't a problem stepping into the classroom and things have gone well. For others, it has been overwhelming, and they don't make it a full year. It is very individual and past experience, that is telling.*

*No, I don't believe certification or how one obtains a certification, or type of certification is at all related to the problems within education.*

Beyond how teachers are prepared and a commitment to solving the teacher shortage in Magic Valley, perceptions vary widely and are best explained by a few categories that emerged from the data: major challenges keeping schools from recruiting or retaining teachers (see Table 2); strategies schools are perceived to be using to recruit or retain teachers (see Table 3); as well as policy and leadership themes (see Table 4 in the next section) that emerged from the study.

**Table 2: Major Challenges Related to Recruiting or Retaining Teachers in Rural Communities**



Themes	Example Quotes
Lack of social opportunities for young adults	<i>"... this is a remote rural community that lacks fun things for young adults."</i>
Geographic location- lack of support (childcare, resources for schools, medical care, technology infrastructure, other services)	<i>"Location makes it hard to find childcare and internet for our homes, so most people do not want to live here."</i>
Lack of teacher pipeline	<i>"... not enough education majors in our state."</i>
Lack of administrative support	<i>"Principals and administrators need to enforce policies – especially when it comes to high-needs families."</i>
Low pay and high responsibilities	<i>"... too much stress in the job, teachers get blamed for many problems in society today, and it's not worth the hassle."</i>
Competition from neighbouring districts	<i>"We are next door to one district that pays more and to several districts with a 4-day week. We cannot compete with either."</i>

**Table 3: Strategies Schools are Perceived to be Using to Recruit or Retain Teachers in Rural Communities**

Themes	Example Quotes
Create a positive culture	<i>"Try to support teachers and make it a fun place to work."</i>
Grow-your-own to get high school students into education or paraeducators certified	<i>"Helping paraeducators who already work here and like it become certified."</i>
Professional development and mentoring	<i>"Make sure new teachers and those new to our community get some help to be successful."</i>
Lower barriers for application process	<i>"Streamline the application process so it was just easier to apply."</i>
Increasing compensation, benefits, and community support	<i>"Offer good benefits and increase the pay for teaching in rural schools. Provide loan forgiveness to teach in rural schools."</i>
Partnering with higher education and alumni to bring people back to the community or allow them to stay and get traditionally certified	<i>"Recruit former students back and partner with higher education programs so students can come back home easier, or not leave the area to begin with."</i>

### **Policy Themes and Perceived Role of Leadership in Retaining Teachers**

There were some comments related to issues of housing and community conditions for teacher belongingness. Many believed that improved HR practices would help, including recruitment materials that identify the work-life balance benefits of working in rural spaces. Stakeholders were aware that they needed to create social opportunities for new teachers early on, both within the school and with the community. Table 4 provides a comparison of perceptions of school employees to three key questions related to mentoring new teachers.

**Table 4: Perceptions of School Employees**

Survey Question	Strongly Agreed or Agreed
Do schools have the expertise to mentor new teachers?	Superintendents: 82% Principals: 88% Teachers: 75%
Do schools have the resources to mentor new teachers?	Superintendents: 22% Principals: 44% Teachers: 39%
Do teachers have the bandwidth to mentor new teachers?	Superintendents: 50% Principals: 40% Teachers: 44%

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions related to teacher retention in the western U.S., and specifically focused on one area of rural Idaho. Results identify salient categories and themes defining challenges and strategies that stakeholders perceive related to retaining teachers in their local schools. Each of these are important considerations and provide further insights into the existing literature. Findings also suggest the need to consider underlying beliefs about teacher preparation pipelines in rural communities. Findings should be held in the context of this study. This sample is from one survey and given at one distinct point in time. Many things have changed in the world and in education since the data was collected. Future research could examine the impact of providing preservice teachers from traditional preparation programs with rural experiences that include travel allowances and/or housing incentives to see if this helps with recruitment and retention to the area. In addition, the field seems ripe for a deeper understanding of community conditions necessary in post-COVID-19 ZoomTowns to understand teacher belongingness in rural schools.

Several policy themes emerged from the data in this study including the need for loan forgiveness programs, as well as incentives for higher education partnerships to streamline, or bring in traditional teacher preparation programs to place bound students. Our analysis suggests the number of teachers with alternative and non-traditional routes to certification are widespread across grade levels and content areas; and there is a significant need for robust mentoring and support for district induction programs.

The data analysis exposes the need for resources to support and mentor new teachers and those seeking alternative routes to certification. Training effective mentors and fostering a school culture that values the expertise of veteran teachers is a critical first step. A school culture that appreciates the resources required to develop and maintain a strong mentoring program is also a key element that comes from strong and visionary leadership. Teachers' perceptions are at the heart of this study, and teachers made up the largest group of respondents. Conditions wherein teachers feel enabled to succeed with students—including administrative support, strong colleagues, and opportunities to participate in decisions all stem from an administrative staff that is committed to instructional leadership and research-based practices. A poll by the Public Agenda Foundation found that almost 80% of teachers would choose to teach in a school where administrators supported

them, as opposed to only about 20% at one where there were significantly higher salaries (Rochkind et al., 2008). Dee and Goldhaber (2017) also found that teacher salaries would have to increase significantly to impact teacher retention decisions. However, Feng and Sass (2018) found that modest amounts, such as \$2500, in direct payments were more effective than loan forgiveness programs to early career teachers who taught in critical shortage areas or subjects.

In addition to finding ways to better support mentoring, there are several implications for teacher and leadership preparation programs to better support rural placements. The authors agree with Hanson & Yoon's (2018) claims that Idaho must explore policies to support teacher recruitment and retention because they estimate it costs the state \$6 million each year to replace the teachers who leave. Recent research has debunked the notion that the teacher shortage is due to low numbers of students graduating from the teacher preparation programs in Idaho. Data indicates that teacher shortage problems are due to the 'revolving door' syndrome where large numbers of teachers depart teaching long before retirements (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010).

Our findings also support the Ingersoll and Strong (2011) study showing that beginning teachers cite the main factor behind their decisions to depart is a lack of adequate support, which may include orientation sessions, faculty collaboration sessions, meetings with supervisors, developmental workshops, extra classroom assistance, reduced workloads, and especially, mentoring. Our study provides insight on teacher perceptions about district support. The perception differences between the findings presented in Table 4 are profound. It is perceived by principals and vice principals that schools have the expertise but not the resources to support and coach up new teachers which might include time for collaboration, time for research and training, access to good training materials or materials for use in the classroom, and access to experts in the field of mentoring and support. It is important to note, willingness of a district or district leader to give support and what is actually given might not be the same. Nor did the study investigate the barriers for teachers to engage with supports – whether those barriers are created by the district, school, or teacher. Policy makers must also dedicate themselves to the promotion of successful school culture-building. To build the culture and capacity for needed reforms, schools must in turn, build the culture and capacity of teacher identity and a sense of professionalism through strong mentoring relationships. This takes time, and the attrition rate of newly hired teachers makes this an even more difficult and tough process to build a successful school culture.

Rural spaces are complex in nature and so are their schools. There appears to be a tension between teacher belongingness and fitting in with the school community while also having autonomy in their classroom and work. Leaders are key to helping them navigate this landscape. In order to procure the changes needed to create high quality and firm devotion to student achievement, it requires a dedication to the success of the classroom teacher. According to Shaw and Newton (2014, p. 101), "*If the most precious product developed in education is the student, then our most prized commodity should be the classroom teacher*". In order to make the changes needed to public education in rural western America, there must be collaboration between rural communities, education systems (including higher education and P-12 systems), as well as policymakers that results in a deliberate and calculated process for developing and retaining highly qualified teachers.

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