

EXPLORING MOTIVATION TO IMPROVE TEACHER
RECRUITMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
FIRST AND SECOND-YEAR TEACHERS IN ONE
MIDWESTERN STATE

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by

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Exploring Motivation to Improve Teacher Recruitment: A Phenomenological Study
of First and Second-year Teachers in one Midwestern State

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July 21, 2023

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**UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION TO IMPROVE TEACHER
RECRUITMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
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MIDWESTERN STATE**

Nichlas Dressel, EdD

Doane University, 2023

Supervisor: Dr. Julie Kozisek

Teacher attrition has been a growing concern in the United States for the past twenty years (Kelly et al., 2008). Teachers leave the profession for various reasons, including retirement, teacher burnout, stress, lack of support, and a desire to change schools or age groups (Berry et al., 2011). School issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic caused more veteran teachers to leave the profession and fueled a national teacher shortage crisis that could negatively impact students, teachers, and the public education system (Berry & Shield, 2017; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Podolsky et al., 2016). The existing body of research related to teacher recruitment was mainly conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and focused on hard-to-staff urban settings and rural southern regions in the United States. Therefore, further exploration was needed to understand post-pandemic motivational factors that influence teachers to accept initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in Midwestern states.

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools in one Midwestern state. Six participants were selected based on meeting the criteria of being a first or second-year teacher in a school located in FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV rural communities located in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. Data was collected from participants through six semi-structured interviews that took

place between October 2022 and April 2003. Four central themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) Sense of Connectedness, (2) Sense of Support, (3) Sense of Belonging, and (4) Sense of Purpose. The findings of this study are intended to support rural school administrators, post-secondary education departments, community organizations, and policymakers as they consider ways to combat the teacher shortage and recruit preservice teachers to accept positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts.

Keywords: teacher recruitment, teacher shortage, rural schools, phenomenology

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and the amazing teachers, administrators, and students who inspired and supported my growth as an educator over the past twenty-two years. I am blessed, and my heart is filled with gratitude.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Teachers leaving the profession has been a growing concern in the United States for the past twenty years (Kelly et al., 2008). Teacher attrition directly impacts student learning and is expensive for school districts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In addition, past research indicated schools with high teacher turnover and fewer experienced teachers negatively impacted student achievement and placed those students at an educational disadvantage (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Research from two case studies estimated the financial cost of teacher turnover for districts was between \$4,366 and \$17,872 per teacher (Barns et al., 2008; Synar & Maiden, 2012). With so much at stake, identifying the causes of teacher turnover, implementing strategies to improve teacher retention, and improving teacher recruitment efforts to hire the right person for the right job is critical.

School administrators are responsible for recruiting and hiring highly qualified teachers. Typically, the hiring process begins in early spring as teachers make contract decisions and teaching positions become available. The traditional approach to teacher recruitment involves building principals and district superintendents attending job fairs, making calls to post-secondary teacher preparation programs, and engaging professional networks to identify potential teacher candidates. Additional efforts typically include routine job postings in newspapers, district websites, social media outlets, and job advertisement databases. Then the wait begins with the hope qualified applicants will apply. This traditional approach to teacher recruitment is insufficient as more teachers leave the profession, fewer people enter the profession, and the number of highly qualified teachers becomes insufficient to meet the demand.

In an effort to fill open teaching positions with highly qualified teachers, some school districts have implemented recruitment incentives such as signing bonuses, housing stipends, loan forgiveness programs, and education stipends with mixed success (See et al., 2020; Tran & Smith, 2019). National teacher recruitment efforts have also proven ineffective, and the research consistently demonstrates the teaching profession is a hyper-local phenomenon. For example, Reininger (2012) found teachers are more likely to live and work within twenty miles of their hometown than other college graduates. In addition, Podgursky et al. (2016) conducted a study of three Midwestern states and found interstate mobility among teachers within these states was less than .01 percent.

Therefore, school districts must develop strategic and focused teacher recruitment plans that highlight the strengths of their schools and communities and target recruitment efforts to hire the best people for the right job (Hammer et al., 2005). These efforts require an awareness of current and future staffing needs, focused recruitment efforts based on data analysis, and regular evaluation of the effectiveness of hiring practices (Engel & Curran, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Teacher recruitment directly impacts school programs and student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Clement, 2009; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Schumacher et al., 2015). The present teacher shortage, fueled by post-pandemic stressors, creates additional challenges to teacher recruitment by promoting an environment of intense competition among school districts to identify and hire teachers from an ever-shrinking applicant pool (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Sutcher et al., 2019). However, rural school administrators often believe they have limited control

over state-level policies that drive certification requirements and school finance authority that impacts teacher salaries (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Given the school finance structure in many states, this belief may be true (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

To remain competitive, rural school districts must move away from deficit thinking and balance the pros and cons of rural education to develop strategic teacher recruitment plans to overcome the real and perceived financial and geographical impediments rural schools face (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Ulferts, 2015). In addition, rural school districts must develop and implement strategic teacher recruitment plans that differentiate their district and align recruitment efforts with school and community factors that motivate teachers to apply for positions in rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Kier & Chen, 2017; Lee, 2005; Tran et al., 2020). Therefore, improving teacher recruitment requires an understanding of what motivates teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. This study focused on the lived experiences of first-year and second-year teachers related to the motivational factors they considered before accepting initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in the Midwestern state selected for this study.

For the purpose of this study, 'teachers' were defined as first-year or second-year certified teachers in their first teaching assignment. For this study, 'hard-to-staff rural

school districts' were defined as school districts located in FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities. The defining characteristics of FAR Level IV communities according to the ERS-USDA (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019) are outlined in Table 1. This study focused on FAR Level IV communities because of their geographic isolation from urban population centers and the perceived impact of geographic isolation on the teacher recruitment process.

Table 1

FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV Community Characteristics

| Population | Rural area under 2,500 people |
|---------------------|--|
| Distance Criteria 1 | 15-minutes or more from an urban area of 2,500-9,999 |
| Distance Criteria 2 | 30-minutes from an urban area of 10,000-24,999 people |
| Distance Criteria 3 | 45-minutes from an urban area of 25,000-49,999 people |
| Distance Criteria 4 | 60-minutes from an urban area of 50,000 or more people |

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the central research question: **What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state?**

Four sub-questions were also investigated. These questions were:

1. How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
2. How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

3. How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
4. Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the terms and concepts below were defined as follows:

Axial Coding: A qualitative research data analysis technique used to organize codes into categories and subcategories to identify relationships (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Composite Descriptions: An integration of structural and textural descriptions to provide a complete picture of the essential components of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Connectedness: Having a relationship or association with a person or group.

Expectancy Value Theory of Motivation: Motivation associated with choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by ability beliefs related to perceived success and the extent to which an individual values an activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities: rural areas with a population under 2,500 people that are 15-minutes or more from an urban area with a population of 2,500-9,999, 30-minutes or more from an urban area with a population of 10,000-24,999, 45-minutes or more from an urban area of 25,000-49,999, and 60-minutes or more from an urban area of 50,000 or more people (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019).

In Vivo Coding: A form of qualitative data analysis that emphasizes the participants' words and phrases in the data as codes (Miles et al., 2020).

Significant Statements: Participant quotations that pertain directly to the central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Structural Descriptions: Provides context by describing 'how' the participant experienced the phenomenon in terms of feelings and emotions (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural Descriptions: Provides context by describing 'what' the participant experienced in terms of thoughts, judgments, or perceptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Scope of the Study

This study used a phenomenological research approach to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. Six first-year and second-year certified teachers in their first teaching assignment were selected to participate in the study. All of the participants taught in FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities located in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. Data were collected during 30-minute semi-structured interviews with each participant. Common themes were derived from interview transcripts and analyzed through the lens of the expectancy-value theory of motivation to identify connections among all participants. The core elements of the expectancy-value theory of motivation include ability beliefs, expectations for success, and personal values related to the importance of the task, the importance society places on task, enjoyment and fulfillment experienced when performing a task, and the effort, financial, and emotional costs associated with performing a task. Ability beliefs and

expectations for success align with individuals' sense of efficacy and are predictors of behavior, effort, and performance (Wingfield & Eccles, 2000).

Methodology and Design of the Study

Purposeful, criterion-based, and convenience sampling methods were used to select participants for this study. In September 2022, twenty-six school principals in twelve school districts located in FAR Level IV communities in the Midwestern state selected for this study were contacted via email to identify potential participants (Appendix A). The email requested principals to provide the names and email addresses of any teachers in their respective buildings that met the participant criterion of being a first-year or second-year teacher in their first teaching assignment. In an effort to improve the number of respondents, an identical email was sent to non-respondents one week after the original email. A total response time of three weeks was provided.

A similar procedure was used to contact participants. An email was sent to the teacher email addresses provided by the school principals (Appendix B). The email stated the purpose of the study and requested the potential participants to complete the electronic informed consent (Appendix C) if they were interested in participating in the study. An identical email was sent to non-respondents one week after the original email was sent in an effort to increase the number of respondents. A total response time of two weeks was provided. The initial response rate from potential participants was ten percent. To address the low response rate, a second email (Appendix D) was sent to potential participants, and a \$25.00 Amazon gift card was offered as an incentive to participate. These changes improved the response rate to eighteen percent.

Data was collected between October 2022 and April 2023 during 30-minute semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews took place online using the Zoom application to meet the participants' needs. Audio recordings of each interview were made using two digital recording devices, and each interview was transcribed using the application otter.ai. Observational notes were recorded during the interview using the interview notes template (Appendix E). Reflective notes and analytic memos were completed after each interview to record vital takeaways from each interview.

The data analysis process for this study included in vivo and axial coding, the reduction of codes into themes, and the development of structural descriptions, textural descriptions, and composite descriptions that described what and how each participant experienced facets of motivation to apply for and accept their current teaching position. Lastly, composite descriptions were analyzed through the lens of the expectancy-value theory of motivation to identify connections across all of the research participants to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools in the Midwestern state selected for this study. These data analysis procedures were recorded and organized using Google Docs and Google Sheets.

Delimitations

A delimitation in this study was the selection of participants from FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities in the western third of one Midwestern state. Narrowing participants to a specific region in one Midwestern state improved the financial feasibility of the study and afforded the opportunity to conduct in-person interviews; however, all participants chose to conduct interviews remotely. In addition, the perspectives shared by the participants provided a glimpse into the motivating factors

considered before they accepted teaching positions in FAR Level IV communities. This study could have been expanded to include participants from school districts located in FAR Level IV communities across the Midwestern state selected for this study.

Another delimiting factor in this study was the inclusion of only first-year and second-year teachers in their first teaching assignment. This study's focus on novice teachers in their first teaching assignment was intended to improve and enhance preservice teacher recruitment efforts in small, rural communities. The study could have been expanded to include teachers with previous teaching experience to determine if essential motivating factors to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts were different for teachers in their initial teaching assignment and those with previous teaching experience.

Limitations

All research has limitations. There may be limitations to this study's findings based on the selected methodology of the study, the sampling methods selected, the sample size, the scope of the study, and researcher bias. The following limitations may have impacted the findings of the study.

1. Qualitative research is subjective and represents multiple realities. Data are subjected to multiple interpretations and may be interpreted differently by other researchers.
2. The use of convenience sampling to narrow participant selection to a geographic region located in the western third of one Midwestern state may be a limitation of this study. Limitations associated with convenience sampling include potential threats to the data, such as bias and lack of generalizability.

3. The sample size for this study was small (n=6). Ideally, phenomenological studies include a sample size of nine to fifteen participants. The low participation rate may have impacted the study's findings. A larger sample size may have produced different results.
4. The scope of this study was narrow and focused on FAR (Frontier and Remote) communities in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. Therefore, a lack of generalizability may be a limitation of this study.
5. Although the distance between school districts ranged between 20 and 260 miles, the relative proximity between the districts increased the probability the researcher and participants could know each other. While there were no personal relationships between the participants and the researcher, participants may have known the researcher's school and his position as a school administrator. This knowledge may have impacted the participants' comfort level during interviews, which could have created bias. Likewise, the researcher's knowledge of the participants' school districts and associations with those school districts could have also created bias.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. At the time of this study, there were concerns the United States was suffering a national teacher shortage crisis that could negatively impact students, teachers, and the public education system (Berry & Shield, 2017; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Podolsky et al., 2016). National trends demonstrated decreasing enrollment

numbers in teacher preparation programs, increasing K-12 student enrollment in hard-to-staff urban areas, and declining populations in hard-to-staff rural regions (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Castro et al., 2018, Nebraska Department of Labor, 2019).

The existing literature demonstrated unique challenges related to recruiting qualified teachers in hard-to-staff rural schools. These challenges included geographic isolation, high levels of poverty, and inadequate physical and financial resources (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). However, the existing research was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and was primarily focused on urban settings and rural regions in the southern United States (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Berry et al., 2011; Kier & Chen, 2017; Tran et al., 2020), creating a gap in the literature.

This research contributed to the existing literature by offering a post-pandemic, Midwestern perspective of essential motivational factors that compel teachers to accept positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts. The targeted audiences for this study included school administrators in hard-to-staff rural school districts, post-secondary education departments, community organizations in FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities, policymakers, and veteran teachers.

Summary

The teaching shortage in the United States is challenging school districts to find new and innovative ways to recruit teachers. As teachers leave the education profession, and fewer people choose to pursue a career in education, competition among school districts to identify and hire teachers is becoming more intense (Carver-Thomas, 2021; Sutchter et al., 2019). In addition, the post-pandemic teacher shortage creates additional

challenges to teacher recruitment by intensifying competition among school districts to identify and hire teachers from a diminishing pool of qualified applicants (Carver-Thomas, 2021; Sutchter et al., 2019)

Challenges related to teacher recruitment in rural schools are myriad (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). To remain competitive, rural school districts must revise teacher recruitment practices to include strategic action plans that address the financial and geographical limitations rural schools face (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Ulferts, 2015). In addition, rural school districts should highlight characteristics that differentiate their district and align recruitment efforts with school and community factors that motivate teachers to apply for positions in rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Kier & Chen, 2017; Lee, 2005; Tran et al., 2020).

The existing literature on teacher recruitment and retention in the United States is extensive and demonstrated unique challenges related to recruiting qualified teachers in hard-to-staff rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Berry et al., 2011; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kier & Chen, 2017; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2020). However, the existing research does not provide a post-pandemic, Midwestern rural school district point of view, creating a gap in the literature.

This phenomenological study focused on first-year and second-year teachers who were in their initial teaching assignment in FAR Level IV rural communities. The study aimed to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. This study was intended to

support teacher recruitment efforts in geographically isolated, hard-to-staff rural school districts.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter two provides a review of literature and contains four main sections: (1) teacher shortage in the United States, (2) teacher attrition, retention, and recruitment, (3) motivation as part of the decision-making process, and (4) current gaps in the literature. Section one highlights the impact of locality, the COVID-19 pandemic, and policy on the present teacher shortage in the United States. Section two examines the causes of teacher attrition, teacher retention strategies for inexperienced and veteran teacher, and potentially impactful recruitment practices such as grow-your-own teacher programs, positive relationships between school districts and education programs at colleges and universities, and developing strategic recruitment plans in rural schools. The third section includes a definition of the expectancy-value theory of motivation. It connects the components of the expectancy-value theory to teacher motivation to understand why individuals become teachers and choose to teach in rural schools. Finally, the literature review concludes with the identification of current gaps in the literature and a summary of critical components in the previous sections.

Teacher Shortage in the United States

Teacher shortages occur when the demand for teachers exceeds the supply and schools cannot fill open teaching positions (Castro et al., 2018). Teacher shortages have serious consequences. An insufficient supply of qualified teachers directly impacts student learning and achievement (Clement, 2009; Ladd & Sorensen, 2017; Schumacher et al., 2015). Teacher shortages also affect the working environment of current teachers, adding to teacher workloads and decreasing overall teacher effectiveness (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

There are concerns the United States is in a national teacher shortage crisis that could negatively impact students, teachers, and the public education system (Berry & Shield, 2017; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Podolsky et al., 2016). Teacher shortages have occurred in the United States before. Researchers have warned the American public education system was primed for a teacher shortage as baby boomers reached retirement age (Lucksinger, 2000). For example, Sutchter et al. (2016) projected the need for 300,000 new teachers by the year 2020 unless major changes in supply and demand occurred.

In addition to the mass exodus of baby boomer teachers, the present teacher shortfall is alarming for several reasons. First, national trends show decreasing enrollment numbers in teacher preparation programs (Berry & Shields, 2017). Second, data indicates increasing K-12 student enrollment, especially in high-poverty urban areas, and declining populations in high-poverty rural regions (Castro et al., 2018; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Nebraska Department of Labor, 2019). Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified long-standing issues with the teacher labor market in the United States (Lieberman, 2021; Podolsky et al., 2019).

Impact of Locality on Teacher Shortage

Multiple factors impact teacher supply and demand; however, most experts agree teacher shortages are typically a local phenomenon focused on hard-to-staff urban and rural localities and specific content areas such as special education, science, foreign language, and mathematics (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). Characteristics of hard-to-staff schools include high levels of poverty, a large population of minority students, limited physical and financial resources, and in the case of rural schools, geographic isolation from population centers, which limits services such as shopping centers, restaurants, and

health care (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Monk, 2007).

Therefore, attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is more challenging in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools (Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019).

The Nebraska Department of Labor (2019) reported population projections through the year 2050 for urban and rural counties across Nebraska. The projections included select rural counties in Wyoming and South Dakota bordering rural areas in the Nebraska panhandle and north-central Nebraska. These data revealed several significant findings. First, urban counties in Nebraska generally have younger populations than rural counties, especially in the 25 to 44-year-old age range. Second, there was a concentration of people 65 years old and older in rural counties. Third, the Nebraska Department of Labor projected an increase in population for mostly urban counties and a continued and steady population decline in rural counties, saying, “By 2030, Nebraska’s mostly and completely rural counties are projected to have 21,151 fewer total residents than in 2020” (p. 15). These data mirror national population growth trends and support the urgency to address teacher shortages, especially in hard-to-staff school districts (Castro et al., 2018; Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Impact of COVID-19 on Teacher Shortage

The COVID-19 pandemic has directly and indirectly impacted the present teacher shortage. Indirectly, the influx of federal pandemic relief money into the economy has created a time of economic expansion (Van Dam, 2021). Dee and Goldhaber (2017) reported, "teacher shortages are cyclical, spiking during times of economic expansion and tightening labor markets, and decreasing during economic downturns" (p. 5), suggesting

fewer people may choose to pursue teaching as a career when other economic opportunities are available.

The direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is more acute. It includes increased teacher turnover, changes in educational programs, and a decline in the attractiveness of the teaching profession, all of which Sutchter et al. (2019) identified as significant factors that cause teacher shortages. During the pandemic, schools lost instructional time, and students returned to classrooms without the necessary skills to succeed. As students returned to classrooms, teachers were met with uncertainty about how the increased social-emotional needs of students would impact behavior and classroom management interventions and modifications (Lachlan et al., 2020). The pivot to remote teaching resulted in a decline in teachers' perceived sense of success (Kraft et al., 2021). In addition, teachers missed more time at work because of illness or exposure to the COVID-19 virus. As a result, teachers have picked up extra duties, covered classes during planning periods, and spent more time after school to help students recover academically (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Lachlan et al., 2020; Lieberman, 2021).

These conditions created a more stressful work environment for teachers, resulting in higher levels of teacher burnout and causing more teachers to leave the profession (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021). Survey data from more than three thousand NSEA (Nebraska State Education Association, 2021) members revealed 63.63% of Nebraska teachers and education support professionals felt more stressed than they did one year ago, and 30.19% of teachers planned to leave the profession. Of that 30.19%, 1.63% said they planned to retire because of the pandemic, 3.60% said they

planned to retire but not because of the pandemic, and 24.97% said they planned to leave the profession, but not due to retirement.

As more teachers leave the classroom, the teacher shortage worsens, forcing school administrators to fill vacant positions with unqualified teachers or leaving positions vacant due to a lack of applicants (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Lachlan et al., 2020). The national teacher shortage appears even more alarming when the data includes the number of teachers who do not meet the highly qualified requirements, such as certification and years of experience (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Citing 2011-2016 teacher certification statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Garcia and Weiss (2020) reported increased numbers of teachers not fully certified or with alternative certification. Furthermore, Garcia and Weiss (2020) found,

In high-poverty schools, the shares of teachers without these credentials were even higher: 9.9% were not fully certified, 18.9% took an alternative route into teaching, 24.6% had five years or less of experience, and 33.8% did not have an educational background in the subject they were teaching (p. 1).

Impact of Policy on Teacher Shortages

Federal policies like No Child Left Behind changed the landscape of teacher recruitment in public education by creating highly qualified teacher mandates, which increased the demand for highly-qualified teachers and made it more difficult to recruit teachers in rural schools (Reeves, 2003). The rural teacher recruitment problem is also due to inequity of financial resources, and, therefore, a disparity in teacher salaries between rural schools and their urban and suburban counterparts (Rural School and Community Trust, 2000). The discrepancy in funding is partially a result of inequitable

state funding models that rely on property tax as the primary source to fund public education (Reeves, 2003). Policies that increase the financial burden on school districts and require district patrons to pay more in property tax exacerbate teacher shortages.

Ultimately, the responsibility of recruiting and retaining highly-qualified teachers falls on school administrators; however, the impact school administrators have on teacher shortages may be limited. For example, in a study of metro and rural superintendents in West Virginia, McHenry-Sorber and Campbell (2019) found district leaders believed teacher shortages were related to state contexts, salaries, and other policies beyond their control. Therefore, state legislatures and state education departments feel substantial pressure to address teacher shortages. In response, some states have relaxed certification requirements, offered alternative pathways to certification, and increased certification reciprocity between states to entice people to join the teacher workforce (Aragon, 2018). However, reducing teacher certification requirements negatively affects teacher quality and efficacy, which directly impacts student learning and achievement (Castro et al., 2018; Lachlan et al., 2020; Torff & Sessions, 2009).

While efforts like these seem to lessen the impact of teacher shortages to some degree, the challenges rural schools face are not uniform, making broad policy changes at the state and federal level ineffective. Reeves (2003) commented on the futility of one-size-fits-all policies to improve teacher recruitment and retention in rural schools:

It makes little sense to address the broad range and diversity of problems faced by schools and districts through one-size-fits-all policies. The unique challenges faced by rural schools and districts require federal, state, and district policies specifically targeted to their needs (p. 16).

Similarly, Boe et al. (2008) found substantial improvement in teacher retention “would require massive systemic changes in the culture of public schooling and an even greater allocation of public funds” (p. 25).

To effectively address the problem of teacher shortages, Garcia and Weiss (2019) suggested, "We must tackle the working conditions and other factors that contribute to the growing teacher shortage, especially in high-poverty schools" (p. 11). Specific policy actions recommended by Garcia and Weiss (2020) included raising teacher pay, developing stronger learning communities, and improving student and family support to reduce barriers to teaching and learning. However, policy changes take time, and schools are left to find immediate ways to fill teaching positions. Therefore, developing an argument to enhance current teacher retention and recruitment practices is necessary to create a sense of urgency for change.

Teacher Attrition, Retention, and Recruitment

Teacher Attrition

There is no debate; teacher attrition has been a growing concern for the past twenty years (Boe et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015). There are many factors related to a rise in teacher attrition in the United States, including accelerated retirements, an increased focus on student achievement, a lack of resources, a lack of administrative and parent support, limited planning time, and undesirable working conditions (Algozzine et al., 2007; Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2007; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Initiatives to reduce teacher attrition rates have produced mixed results; however, “the cumulative effects have not been sufficient to halt the steady growth of turnover at a national level” (Boe et al., 2008, p. 23).

Teacher retention and recruitment challenges in rural schools differ from urban and suburban schools. For example, a study from Stephens (1998) indicated rural districts typically have less money, fewer administrative services, lower salaries, fewer benefits, more out-of-content teachers, and fewer evaluation supports than urban and suburban school districts. In addition, rural districts face geographic isolation from social and cultural activities (Brownell et al., 2005). A study by Ingersoll and Tran (2023) found hard-to-staff rural schools have more difficulty filling open teaching positions than their urban and suburban counterparts. These findings may be due in part to the unique challenges rural teachers face concerning geographic isolation, including long travel distances for professional development, inadequate professional development, and a lack of qualified substitute teachers (Harmon et al., 2007; Sundeen & Wienk (2009).

Teacher turnover directly impacts student learning and is expensive for school districts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Past research indicated schools with high teacher turnover and fewer experienced teachers had a negative impact on student achievement and placed those students at an educational disadvantage (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Barns et al. (2008) conducted a case study that examined seven teacher turnover cost elements, including recruitment and advertising, incentives, administrative costs, new teacher training, induction and mentoring programs, inter-district transfer costs, and student learning. The study estimated the financial cost of teacher turnover could range between \$4,366 and \$17,872 per teacher, depending on the school district. Another case study examined similar turnover cost elements, including separation costs, hiring costs, training costs, and performance productivity loss, and estimated the average turnover cost in the district studied was \$14,508 per teacher (Synar

& Maiden, 2012). With so much at stake, identifying the causes of teacher turnover, implementing strategies to improve teacher retention, and improving teacher recruitment efforts to hire the right person for the right job is critical.

Retention Practices for Inexperienced Teachers

Inexperience is a primary factor leading to high levels of teacher turnover. Consequently, younger teachers are more likely to leave the profession than older, more experienced teachers (Minarik et al., 2003). There are many possible reasons for this phenomenon; however, a growing body of research suggests the leading cause of attrition among inexperienced teachers is a lack of self-efficacy (Banghart, 2021; Reitman & Karge, 2019). Low levels of teacher self-efficacy correlate to multiple factors, including insufficient induction and administrative support, inadequate professional development, teaching in localities and demographics that are unfamiliar, feelings of isolation, and a general feeling of burnout (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jung, 2010; Minarik et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Therefore, providing support to build self-efficacy in inexperienced teachers is crucial to retain these young professionals.

Teacher induction programs and targeted professional development are among the most impactful ways to build teacher efficacy (Hammer et al., 2005). Induction programs formally introduce new teachers to the processes and procedures used in an organization, and the components of these programs may vary from school district to school district. Effective induction programs are highly structured, include mentoring, and focus on professional learning with an emphasis on collaboration (Nielsen et al., 2007). Fry and Anderson (2011) suggested the need for specialized induction programs for teachers in rural schools that include explicit instruction related to the culture and social norms of the

community to reduce feelings of isolation. Lowe (2006) and Wong (2005) suggested induction programs should begin immediately and continue for longer than one year. These findings suggest impactful induction programs are less about district processes and procedures and more about developing relationships to build community and reduce feelings of isolation.

Targeted professional development designed to strengthen pedagogy is another way to help inexperienced teachers build self-efficacy (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Yoo, 2016). Darling-Hammond (2010) found ongoing, content-focused, and embedded professional development improved teacher performance and resulted in positive student outcomes. A 2006 study by Cochran-Smith suggested school conditions where new teachers felt supported and were provided with opportunities to collaborate with peers improved retention rates for new teachers. Failure to invest in quality professional development results in higher attrition rates among new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Cuddapha & Burtin, 2012).

A 2021 study from Guskey confirmed past research advocating for targeted professional development and found school administrators who provided teachers with regular and specific feedback focused on research-based instructional strategies improved teacher and student performance. In addition, ongoing and targeted professional development, such as being a member of professional organizations and coursework related to specific-content area teaching methods, seemed to decrease new teacher attrition (Kelly, 2004). Targeted professional development combined with specific feedback from administrators creates opportunities for teachers to self-reflect; and makes teachers more aware of situations where their work has a positive impact on students,

which reduces feelings of inadequacy and burnout. Self-awareness of strengths and deficits builds self-efficacy (Guskey, 2021).

Retention Practices for Veteran Teachers

There is a growing body of research that provides reasons teachers leave the profession, including insufficient support, poor working conditions, classroom management, inadequate professional development, poor pay, and lack of resources (Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2007; Coronado, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Flanagan & Fowler, Jr., 2010; Greenlee & Brown, Jr. 2009; Lynch 2012). A sense of efficacy in veteran teachers is also essential. However, research from Booth et al. (2011) found experienced teachers desire more self-directed professional development opportunities, suggesting veteran teachers value autonomy regarding their professional development and career progression. For example, a study conducted by Sims (2013) found the following:

Increased levels of effective professional development are associated with a reduced desire for teachers to move schools. More specifically, a one standard deviation improvement in effective professional development is associated with a significant 63% reduction in the odds that a teacher wants to move to another school (p. 38).

Hence, professional development that values teachers' needs leads to increased teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, teacher effectiveness, and retention rates.

In a study of rural school special education teachers, Berry et al. (2011) found teachers leave the profession for various reasons, including retirement, teacher burnout, stress, and a desire to change schools or age groups. Research from The Center for the

Future of Teaching and Learning (2007) found 42% of teachers leave the profession due to a perceived lack of administrative support. Interestingly, Berry et al. (2011) found, “less than six percent of the teachers mentioned issues cited by administrators: (a) salary, (b) benefits, (c) remote locations, and (d) paperwork” (pp. 7-8).

A 2021 survey of NSEA (Nebraska State Education Association) members revealed 74.07% of Nebraska teachers and education support personnel regularly cover classes for their colleagues, and 75.90% of those educators cover classes weekly. In addition, 60% of the responding members believed they did not have enough planning time. Therefore, school administrators may not understand the job-related factors teachers find essential to job satisfaction. Thus, school administrators may place unnecessary emphasis on salary and benefits when developing and implementing teacher recruitment practices to fill vacant teaching positions.

Teacher Recruitment Practices

School districts are beginning to implement strategies designed to improve teacher retention, but the issue of teacher recruitment, especially in hard-to-staff rural schools, remains a concern (Harmon, 2001). Research from Fry and Anderson (2011) found rural areas have higher rates of teacher attrition than other school districts. Therefore, rural school districts have begun implementing incentives such as signing bonuses and housing stipends to improve teacher recruitment (Aragon, 2018; Barley & Bringham, 2008; Fry & Anderson, 2011; Lowe, 2006; McClure & Reeves, 2004; Tran & Smith, 2019; Ulferts, 2015). Others have included loan forgiveness programs and subsidies for teachers to pursue advanced degrees (See et al., 2020). McClure and Reeves

(2004) also indicated improved building level support and increased technology could enhance teacher retention and recruitment.

The base salary was the number one factor preservice teachers considered when accepting a teaching position (See et al., 2020; Tran & Smith, 2019; Ulferts, 2015). A study by Kelly (2004) found the effect size on salary and teacher attrition was minimal, indicating salary may have a closer relationship to teacher recruitment. Other financial incentives such as benefits, signing bonuses, and loan forgiveness were not significant factors preservice teachers considered when accepting an initial teaching position (See et al., 2020; Ulferts, 2015).

National teacher recruitment efforts have also proven ineffective. The research consistently demonstrates the teaching profession is a hyper-local phenomenon. For example, Reininger (2012) found teachers are more likely to live and work within twenty miles of their hometown than other college graduates. Furthermore, Reininger (2012) suggested a potential correlation between high school students who value living close to home and the likelihood they become teachers. Podgursky et al. (2016) conducted a study of three Midwestern states and found interstate mobility among teachers within these states was less than .01 percent. In addition, teachers in this study were more likely to move to another school district if they taught in an urban school, economically disadvantaged area, or low-performing school district.

These data demonstrate the ineffectiveness of national teacher recruitment efforts and suggest teacher surpluses in some states cannot offset teacher shortages in others. The hyper-locality of teaching raises further concerns for teacher recruitment efforts in hard-to-staff schools. Students from these schools and communities are less likely than

their peers to graduate from college and their teachers are more mobile, making it more difficult to hire qualified teachers in these already hard-to-staff districts. (Reininger, 2012).

Grow-Your-Own Programs

Some school districts have started "grow-your-own" teacher programs to address the problem (McClure & Reeves, 2004; Reininger, 2012). These programs identify teacher prospects within the local community, thus reducing feelings of isolation new teachers often experience (Irvin et al., 2020; McClure & Reeves, 2004). Grow-your-own teacher programs work in multiple ways. Ideally, school districts identify high school students interested in pursuing teaching as a career, nurture their interest through a school-based grow-your-own program, and recruit them to return as certified teachers. These programs may include high school classes or designated times when students can work as teacher aides to develop a sense of what it is like to be a teacher (Hammer et al., 2005; Kay, 2021; Mancenido, 2021). Although data on the success of these programs are limited, survey results from one South Carolina study found students who participated in the program were 60% more likely to become teachers, and 35% of students who completed the program had plans to pursue teaching as a career (Berry et al., 2011). The primary drawback of these grow-your-own teacher programs is they do not fill school districts' immediate staffing needs.

Another way districts have implemented grow-your-own teacher programs is by identifying adults in the community who are interested in switching careers to teaching (McCullough & Johnson, 2007). These adults often include paraeducators or other support staff already working in schools. School districts and teacher preparation

programs work together to help individuals obtain alternate certification or a provisional teaching license, and over time they earn full certification (Hammer et al., 2005). This type of grow-your-own teacher program may fill the immediate staffing needs in school districts, but there are potential drawbacks. For example, partnerships with college and university teacher preparation programs are a critical feature of these career-switching programs, which reduces the direct control schools may have within the program.

Another potential drawback is the fast-tracked nature of these programs. Allowing adults to teach under a provisional license before the completion of a preservice teacher education program can negatively impact teacher efficacy and student learning and achievement, leading to higher levels of teacher turnover (Minarik et al., 2019; Podolsky et al., 2019).

Relationships with Colleges and Universities

Positive relationships between K-12 schools and post-secondary teacher preparation programs improve the ability of schools to recruit teachers (Lee et al., 2015; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). A study by Ingersoll et al. (2014) found preservice teachers who received more training in teaching methods and pedagogy related to practice teaching, observation of other classrooms, and quality feedback were significantly less likely to leave the profession after their first year. In addition, teacher preparation programs that highlighted the unique challenges and benefits of living and working in rural communities and provided intentional experiences in rural schools improved teacher recruitment efforts in hard-to-staff rural schools (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Barley, 2009; Booth et al., 2021; Irving et al., 2020; Monk, 2007; Tran et al., 2020). These findings support research conducted by Engel and Curran (2016) that indicated K-12 schools that

encouraged higher levels of preservice teacher engagement had fewer teacher recruitment and hiring issues than schools with lower levels of engagement.

Hiring preservice teachers before they graduate to fill vacant teaching positions is a growing trend in hard-to-staff rural schools (Rich et al., 2020). In a study exploring the effectiveness of preservice teachers as the teacher of record, Rich et al. (2020) found targeted support from a cohesive support network of school administrators, university professors, and mentor teachers had a positive impact on preservice teacher efficacy and classroom performance. The relationships developed through these support networks create the conditions for effective and timely communication about school staffing needs and preservice teacher performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

Developing Strategic Recruitment Plans in Rural Schools

Aragon (2018) and Lachlan et al. (2020) identified common teacher recruitment strategies used in the United States, including grow-your-own programs, modifications to teacher preparation and certification requirements, financial incentives, and initiatives to bring retired teachers back to classrooms. One-size fits all recruitment practices should be replaced with strategic recruitment plans focused on finding the right person for the right job by emphasizing the specific needs of hard-to-staff rural schools (Hammer et al., 2005; McClure & Reeves, 2004).

Therefore, rural school districts must be aware of current and future staffing needs by conducting regular needs assessments, providing exit interviews to better understand why teachers leave, focusing recruitment efforts on data analysis, developing partnerships with colleges and universities to enhance teacher recruitment, offering targeted incentives, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of hiring practices (Engel & Curran,

2016; Ulferts, 2015). In addition, rural schools should leverage technology to enhance teacher recruitment by using web-based platforms to communicate information about the community, improve professional development, and increase resources for classroom instruction (McCullough & Johnson, 2007).

In hard-to-staff urban school districts, large bureaucratic systems can result in non-strategic hiring practices such as late job postings and slower application review processes. These practices often prevent school administrators from interviewing candidates promptly, resulting in a high percentage loss of qualified teacher applicants (Levine & Quinn, 2003). In contrast, hiring inefficiencies in hard-to-staff rural school districts often stem from one person being responsible for every aspect of the hiring process, which can lead to non-strategic practices, such as an overreliance on out-of-date and ineffective recruitment methods, including teacher job fairs, generic job advertisements on school district websites, and broad incentives like signing bonuses (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Engel & Curran, 2016).

To improve teacher recruitment efforts in rural schools, Ulferts (2015) suggested rural school leaders begin by differentiating between recruitment and retention factors:

Rural educational leaders need to recognize the spheres of influence that determine whether a teacher will accept a rural teaching assignment are not the same influence spheres that determine whether a teacher will remain in their rural teaching assignment (p. 20).

Family, job security, smaller class sizes, and a desire to live in a rural community are critical factors that attract teachers to rural schools (Tran et al., 2020; Ulferts, 2015).

Therefore, rural school leaders should consider highlighting these factors as a part of strategic teacher recruitment plans.

There is a growing body of research school districts can access to assist in the development of strategic recruiting methods to attract highly qualified teachers (Engel & Curran, 2016; Lee, 2005; Stoko et al., 2007; Ulferts, 2015). Strategic teacher recruitment plans should include targeted marketing strategies that distinguish the school district from others and highlight what the district has to offer teachers, such as innovative teaching methods and curriculum, collegial work environment, supportive school and district leadership, competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, and evidence of learning outcomes using student assessment data (Lee, 2005; Malloy & Allen, 2007). In addition, school districts must find ways to publicize the benefits of living and working in the community and leverage positive relationships with colleges and universities (Lowe, 2006). School districts that do not employ strategic recruitment efforts and use inefficient hiring practices consistently struggle to recruit qualified teachers (Engel & Curran, 2016; Stoko et al., 2007).

School administrators often believe they have limited control over teacher salaries (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Given the school finance structure in many states, this belief may be true (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Union negotiations focused on the array of teacher salaries, legislative policies limiting how school districts spend money, and state and local tax structures are examples of how district leaders and school boards are limited in their ability to control teacher salaries (Tran, 2018). These issues are particularly acute in rural communities because there is often a smaller tax base to fund public schools (Bowling et al., 2019). Furthermore, some

of these limitations may perpetuate the perception of teaching as a less prestigious profession, which Tran and Smith (2019) noted as a significant barrier rural schools must overcome.

Efforts to improve teacher recruitment in rural schools must begin with a move away from deficit thinking and finding a balance between the pros and cons of rural education to develop strategic teacher recruitment plans to overcome the real and perceived financial and geographical obstacles rural schools face (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Ulferts, 2015). For example, a study by Tran et al. (2020) found the most impactful teacher recruitment strategies for rural schools include highlighting the advantages of living and working in rural communities and focusing on altruistic and other intrinsic motivators. Therefore, building comprehensive and strategic teacher recruitment plans requires rural school districts to understand the essential factors that motivate teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools.

Motivation as Part of the Decision-Making Process

Motivation has a powerful influence on the decision-making process. Expectancy-value theory is an achievement motivation theory that argues, "...an individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 68). Therefore, the probability of achieving the desired outcome increases as self-efficacy and the value of the desired outcome increase.

The core elements of the expectancy-value theory of motivation include ability beliefs, expectations for success, and values. Ability beliefs and expectations for success align with individuals' sense of efficacy and are predictors of behavior, effort, and

performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Watt and Richardson (2007) explained the concept of values in expectancy-value theory as (1) personal utility value, which emphasizes the personal importance of a task, (2) social value, which emphasizes the importance society places on a task, (3) intrinsic value, which emphasizes the enjoyment and satisfaction an individual experiences when performing a task, and (4) cost value, which emphasizes the effort, financial, and emotional costs associated with performing a task.

When applied to teacher motivation, the expectancy-value theory provides a framework to help understand how past educational behaviors and actions lead to positive or negative educational experiences. Thus, these educational experiences provide the foundational belief among teachers that teaching is a profession worth pursuing. Furthermore, expectancy-value theorists may argue the motivation to apply for and accept a teaching position is dependent on ability beliefs related to the probability of success in the position. In addition, motivational factors pertaining to personal utility and intrinsic values related to the attainment of subjective factors like personal enjoyment and fulfillment; social utility values related to a sense of altruism or duty to improve society; and cost values such as the perceived usefulness for future goals impact the likelihood of applying for and accepting teaching positions (Thompson & Palermo, 2018; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Therefore, exploring these values as motivation to pursue a career in education, and more specifically, rural education as a career, is necessary to improve teacher recruitment in hard-to-staff rural school settings.

Motivation to Become a Teacher: High School Students

Many factors influence the decision to become a teacher. For example, Christiansen et al. (2019) found the two most significant predictive factors of high school students entering the teaching profession were self-efficacy and encouragement by family and others to consider teaching as a career. Conversely, the same study reported the significant factors most predictive of high school students not entering the teaching profession included the belief teachers lacked support and an absence of encouragement from family and others to consider teaching as a career. In a 2021 study investigating why high achieving high school students do not consider education as a viable career option, Mancenido posited, “negative conceptions of teaching are likely already well-developed by the time students are finishing college and considering post-graduation careers” (p. 452).

Changing negative conceptions about the teaching profession requires a shift in the discourse about teaching through intentional programs and policies that highlight the positive aspects of teaching (Mancenido, 2021). For example, high school students who demonstrate an interest in the teaching profession must be encouraged to consider teaching as a career by providing opportunities to develop relationships with teachers and helping them understand teachers are appreciated and supported. Efforts like this support the long-term potential of grow-your-own teacher programs in high schools to improve teacher recruitment (Hammer et al., 2005; Irving et al., 2020).

Motivation to Become a Teacher: Nontraditional and Traditional College Students

The motivation to pursue the teaching profession among nontraditional prospective teachers is similar to those who take a more traditional path. For example,

Thomson and McClannon (2018) found a sense of self-efficacy and encouragement from family and others were influential in the decision to switch careers to teaching. However, the findings demonstrated social utility values related to altruistic motivations, such as the desire to positively impact students and feeling like they are making a difference in society, were more powerful motivational factors among nontraditional prospective teachers. A study by Thompson and Palermo (2018) found previous work experiences positively influenced nontraditional preservice teachers' motivation to become teachers, especially when the work experience related to teaching. Therefore, appealing to altruistic values and identifying adults in the community who have experience working with children in teaching-related environments are critical to the long-term potential of grow-your-own teacher programs for career switchers (Hammer et al., 2005; Irving et al., 2020; Kier & Chen, 2019; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020).

Self-efficacy, encouragement from family and others, and a sense of altruism are consistent motivational themes in the literature that influence the decision to become a teacher. However, other motivational factors are also significant, especially among traditional college students studying education. For example, in studies by Watt and Richardson (2007) and Lee et al. (2015), intrinsic value, especially related to a clear vision of future goals, and ability beliefs related to positive prior teaching and learning experiences were among the highest-rated factors that influenced college students' decision to pursue education as a career.

Daniels et al. (2017) studied factors that predicted professional outcomes of preservice teachers and found college coursework focused on the achievement of mastery goals to develop competency skills related to teaching and learning correlated with the

ability beliefs of the participants. A study by Torsney et al. (2017) suggested a strong relationship between personal utility value and the decision to study education in college. In this study, personal utility value included factors such as job security, job transferability, and work flexibility related to family obligations. The study also revealed a strong and positive relationship between the desire to work with children and social utility value (providing a service to society). The findings suggest a broad array of factors that motivate individuals to pursue a career in education.

Motivation to Apply for Rural Teaching Positions

Motivational factors influencing the decision to pursue teaching as a career differ from motivational factors that drive the decision to actually apply for teaching positions, especially in hard-to-staff rural schools. There are advantages and disadvantages to living and working in rural settings. Positive associations with teaching in rural settings include smaller class sizes, more teacher autonomy, the ability to develop close relationships with students, and a sense of connectedness to the community (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Kier & Chen, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). However, studies from Fishman (2015) and Oyen and Schweinle (2020) found negative and significant variables associated with teaching in rural communities, including geographic and cultural isolation and lack of economic opportunities. Research from Goodpaster et al. (2012) and Oyen and Schweinle (2020) suggested being from a rural community is a significant variable that influenced preservice teachers to apply for and accept rural teaching positions. In addition, the studies found past experiences with living in a rural community had a positive impact on rural teachers' self-efficacy and job performance.

Providing financial incentives such as salary compensation, benefits, signing bonuses, and loan forgiveness programs are ways for school districts to enhance teacher recruitment efforts (See et al., 2020). A study by Tran and Smith (2019) suggested base salary was the primary factor preservice teachers considered when accepting positions at hard-to-staff rural schools. However, the same study found other financial incentives such as benefits, loan forgiveness, and signing bonuses were less impactful. Altruistic motivational factors were significant for some participants, but it were not deemed as effective as an improved base salary as a recruitment strategy.

Current Gaps in the Literature

There is a considerable body of research on teacher recruitment in hard-to-staff schools in the United States (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Berry et al., 2011; Kier & Chen, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). The existing research revealed federal and state policy solutions to improve teacher recruitment efforts, including loan forgiveness programs, alternative certification pathways, relaxed certification requirements, and increased certification reciprocity between states (Aragon, 2018; Castro et al., 2018; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Lachlan et al., 2020). The existing research also offered teacher recruitment solutions that could be carried out at the local level including grow-your-own programs, improved relationships between rural K-12 school districts and post-secondary institutions to enhance rural teacher preparation programs, and improved teacher recruitment plans (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Booth et al., 2021; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Irving et al., 2020; Kier & Chen, 2017; Tran et al., 2020; Ulferts, 2015).

Significant to this study, the existing body of research related to teacher recruitment was mainly conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and focused on hard-

to-staff urban settings and rural southern regions in the United States. Therefore, further exploration is needed to understand post-pandemic motivational factors that influence teachers to accept initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in Midwestern states.

Summary

There are concerns the United States is in a national teacher shortage crisis that could negatively impact students, teachers, and the public education system (Berry & Shield, 2017; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Podolsky et al., 2016). National trends show decreasing enrollment numbers in teacher preparation programs, increasing K-12 student enrollment in hard-to-staff urban areas, and declining populations in hard-to-staff rural regions (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Castro et al., 2018; Nebraska Department of Labor, 2019). In addition, attracting and retaining qualified teachers in hard-to-staff rural schools presents unique challenges related to geographic isolation, higher levels of poverty, and limited physical and financial resources (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019).

Teachers leave the profession for various reasons, including retirement, teacher burnout, stress, lack of support, and a desire to change schools or age groups (Berry et al., 2011). However, most teachers who leave the profession are inexperienced, and the research cites a lack of self-efficacy as the primary cause (Banghart, 2021; Reitman & Karge, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the number of teachers leaving the classroom for other job opportunities (Carver et al., 2021; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2019; Pressley, 2021). Therefore, teacher recruitment in hard-to-staff rural schools remains a concern.

The research consistently names base salary as the primary factor preservice teachers consider when accepting teaching positions (See et al., 2020; Tran & Smith, 2019). However, simply raising the base salary is often impossible, given the school finance structure in many states. Legislative policies designed to control how school districts spend money and state and local tax structures that fund public schools are examples of how district leaders and school boards are limited in their ability to control teacher salaries (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021; Tran, 2018). In addition, rural school administrators specifically cite issues related to geographic isolation as barriers to teacher recruitment (Fishman, 2015; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020).

To overcome the actual and perceived limitations rural schools face, school districts must move away from deficit thinking and align teacher recruitment efforts with factors that motivate teachers to apply for positions in rural schools such as smaller class sizes, more teacher autonomy, the ability to develop close relationships with students, and a sense of connectedness to the community, family, and job security (Azano & Stewart, 2015; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kier & Chen, 2017; Tran et al., 2020; Ulferts, 2015). Strategic teacher recruitment plans should also highlight innovation, a collegial work environment, supportive school and district leadership, competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, and evidence of teaching outcomes (Lee, 2005).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter three provides a description of the research methodology for this study. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study and research questions. It is then divided into seven sections: (1) characteristics of qualitative research design, (2) research approach, (3) role of the researcher, (4) data collection procedures, (5) data analysis procedures, (6) data verification strategies, and (7) ethical considerations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. This study focused on the lived experiences of first-year and second-year teachers related to the motivational factors they considered before accepting initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in the Midwestern state selected for this study.

For the purpose of this study, 'teachers' were defined as first-year or second-year certified teachers in their first teaching assignment. For this study, 'hard-to-staff rural school districts' were defined as school districts located in FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities. The defining characteristics of FAR Level IV communities according to the ERS-USDA (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019) are outlined in Table 1. This study focused on FAR Level IV communities because of their geographic isolation from urban population centers and the perceived impact of geographic isolation on the teacher recruitment process.

Table 1*FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV Community Characteristics*

| Population | Rural area under 2,500 people |
|---------------------|--|
| Distance Criteria 1 | 15-minutes or more from an urban area of 2,500-9,999 |
| Distance Criteria 2 | 30-minutes from an urban area of 10,000-24,999 people |
| Distance Criteria 3 | 45-minutes from an urban area of 25,000-49,999 people |
| Distance Criteria 4 | 60-minutes from an urban area of 50,000 or more people |

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the central research question: What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state? In addition, four sub-questions were investigated.

These questions included:

1. How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in rural school districts?
2. How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in rural school districts?
3. How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in a rural school district?
4. Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in a rural school district?

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6). Qualitative researchers begin

with assumptions and use theoretical frameworks to inform the study, and through a process of inquiry and inductive reasoning, collect and analyze data to establish themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the nature of qualitative research is to explore human experiences to develop an understanding of complex situations, giving voice to the research participants while adding to the existing literature or making a call for change (Creswell & Creswell Báez, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative research approach is appropriate when exploring a problem to understand complexities and details beyond predetermined information and results from the literature and other studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To acquire this level of understanding, qualitative researchers employ multiple data collection methods typically involving direct interactions between the researcher and research participants. These interactions often happen in the participants' communities, homes, or places of work to foster a sense of comfort when sharing stories and perspectives related to the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated qualitative research data collection typically occurs through observations, interviews, documents, and digital materials. However, the data collection methods used in any given qualitative study may vary based on the research approach. The research approach researchers choose depends on the purpose of the study and impacts the research question, participant sample selection, data collection procedures, data analysis, and the final write-up of research results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Phenomenology Approach

Phenomenology is a research approach that describes lived experiences to uncover meaning in everyday phenomena typically overlooked or assumed (Vagel,

2018). Phenomenology is distinguished from other forms of social inquiry because it does not necessarily aim to explain phenomena, but rather to understand the way individuals experience phenomena (Van Manen, 2014). Therefore, phenomenologists are not concerned with objective, quantifiable measures to categorize or generalize phenomena, nor are they interested in reducing phenomena into theory or conceptual structures (Van Manen, 2014). Instead, phenomenologists aim to describe and interpret phenomena through individual perceptions and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vagel, 2018). The collective description and interpretation of multiple perceptions and experiences reveal the essence of a lived experience leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Phenomenological studies provide a rich description of lived experiences and are appropriate when studying universal concepts and emotions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, the concept of motivation is universal in its attempt to explain actions and behaviors. However, the complexities of individual motivation make it difficult to generalize and quantify. A phenomenological research approach was appropriate for this study because exploring individual teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts through the description of participants' lived experiences revealed insights to uncover an intrinsic understanding of personal motivation. Furthermore, the description of live experiences, individual perceptions, and formative experiences collectively resulted in common themes to better understand the essence of teacher motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state.

Qualitative researchers view the world through an interpretive lens, or interpretive framework, that grounds their research in, "...a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 5). The present study was grounded in the social constructivist interpretive framework. Social constructivists believe individuals construct social reality by interpreting an event and recognizing there are multiple interpretations of any single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, individuals construct an understanding of the world by applying subjective meaning developed through their own lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the social constructivist interpretive framework is applicable to a phenomenology research approach because the exploration of different lived experiences within the same phenomena may reveal the intrinsic nature or essence of the constructed reality of an event.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative studies. Consequently, qualitative researchers must be aware of personal biases that may impact the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researcher reflexivity is a term used in qualitative research to describe the process of self-examination researchers use to reveal and disclose personal perspectives, backgrounds, and biases that influence the study (Vagel, 2018).

Phenomenological researchers use unique techniques to practice researcher reflexivity. These techniques include the processes of epoché and bracketing. Epoché is a process of consistent self-examination of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions to open the researcher to receive new information in preparation to acquire

new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Through the epoché process, the researcher brackets, or temporarily sets aside, personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions to remain objective when studying the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Practicing these techniques throughout the study allows the researcher to remain open to the lived experiences of those who experienced the phenomena (Van Manen, 2014).

As a qualitative researcher, it is necessary to examine and disclose past experiences and beliefs that may bias the present study. I grew up in a rural community, attended a rural high school, and studied education at a rural college. Therefore, I consider myself a product of rural communities and rural education. My experiences in these rural settings were largely positive, and these experiences fundamentally shaped my values and beliefs. My opinions about the importance of family, the interconnectedness of community, and the significance of personal relationships are paramount in my decision-making process.

In addition, I have spent my entire professional life serving students, teachers, and patrons in rural schools and communities. I began my career as a teacher in a high school with fewer than two hundred students and class sizes under fifteen students. This intimate learning environment allowed me to personally know each student, learn about their backgrounds and culture, and understand their hopes and dreams. When I became a rural school administrator, I felt more connected to the larger community. I began to understand a more extensive perspective related to the benefits and hardships rural communities and rural schools face. The joys and heartaches, successes and failures, and relationships found and lost through these experiences left an indelible impression that shaped my world-view.

Undoubtedly, these experiences impact my assumptions and beliefs about rural communities and rural education. I also recognize these experiences as formative in the development of my personal and professional ethos, which intersects every aspect of my life. I acknowledge a personal belief rural schools and rural communities are superior in many ways to urban and suburban schools and communities, and this bias may impact the present study. Therefore, I attempted to bracket these biases at the onset of this study and kept a journal of my thoughts and opinions throughout the research process (Appendix F) to identify potential biases and remain open to the lived experiences and perspectives of the research participants.

Data Collection Procedures

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative data collection involves “a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p. 148). Qualitative data collection activities include locating sites or individuals for the study, selecting participants through purposeful sampling procedures, minimizing field issues through collecting data using qualitative methods such as interviews, recording and storing data, and always attending to ethical considerations throughout the process (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Data collection procedures specific to phenomenology used in this study included identifying individuals who experienced the phenomenon, conducting interviews with a range of people, conducting pilot interviews to minimize field issues, bracketing personal experiences through the epoché process, recording and maintaining accurate data, and ensuring secure data storage procedures. Table 2 provides an overview of the data collection and management procedures used in this study.

Table 2*Overview of Data Collection and Management of Procedures*

| <i>Method:</i> | <i>Characteristics:</i> | <i>Duration/Time</i> |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Sampling: | Criterion-based and convenience sampling procedures | Determined Spring 2022 |
| Participant Criteria: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) First or second-year teachers in their first teaching assignment 2) School located in FAR Level IV communities 3) The communities were located in the western third of the state | |
| Identifying Participants: | Identified FAR Level IV communities using the 2019 ERS-USDA EXCEL file (Appendix G) | Spring 2022 |
| | Emails were sent to twenty-six principals in eleven schools (Appendix A) | Sent September 2022 |
| | | Identical email sent to non-respondents one week later (total of three weeks provided to respond) |
| | Emails were sent to the teachers' emails provided by the principals (Appendix B) | Sent one week after the principal email response time |
| | | Identical email sent to non-respondents one week later (total of two weeks were provided to respond) |
| | Second email sent to potential participants to improve the response rate. A \$25.00 Amazon gift card was offered as an incentive (Appendix D) | February 2023 |
| | A sample of six male and female participants were selected from multiple schools, grade levels, and disciplines | September 2022 - April 2023 |

Table 2 Continued*Overview of Data Collection and Management of Procedures*

| <i>Method:</i> | <i>Characteristics:</i> | <i>Duration/Time</i> |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Electronic Informed Consent: | <p>The initial email to teachers included a link to a Google Form that contained the Informed Consent (Appendix C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Was also used to track the number of respondents and email addresses of respondents | <p>Sent one week after the principal email response time</p> <p>Identical email sent to non-respondents one week later (total of two weeks were provided)</p> |
| Interviews: | <p>Pilot interview conducted</p> <p>Interviews with each participant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Semi-structured using interview protocol (Appendix I) ◦ Copy of interview questions provided prior to the interview (Appendix J) ◦ Audio recordings on two digital audio recording devices <p>Follow-up interviews if needed to gather more information or get clarification</p> | <p>January 2022</p> <p>October 2022 - April 2023</p> <p>Approx. 30 minutes</p> <p>Emailed one week before the interview was conducted</p> <p>Duration was based on purpose and need</p> |
| Interview Notes: | <p>Recorded on the interview notes template to capture observational notes during the interview (Appendix E)</p> | |
| Transcription: | <p>The application Otter.ai was used for transcription</p> | <p>Audio recordings were uploaded the same day of the interview</p> |
| Memos: | <p>Audio notes and analytic memos were used to capture vital takeaways after each interview</p> | <p>Audio recordings after each interview</p> |

Table 2 Continued*Overview of Data Collection and Management of Procedures*

| <i>Method:</i> | <i>Characteristics:</i> | <i>Duration/Time</i> |
|----------------|--|--|
| Member Checks: | Member checking was conducted for each participant interview using the interview verification form (Appendix K) | Sent after interview was completed |
| Bracketing: | A reflection journal of the researcher's thoughts and opinions were kept to identify potential biases throughout the study. Those biases were acknowledged by the researcher and bracketed (Appendix F) | The duration of the study |
| Data storage: | All digital transcripts and recordings were housed on the Doane University Google server and transferred to an external hard drive Hard copy documents (notes and journal) were kept in a locked file cabinet | All data will be stored for five years following the study |

Participants

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling refers to the methods used to identify and select research participants to “frame who and what matters in the data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 186). This study used criterion-based and convenience sampling procedures to purposefully select participants whose lived experiences provided a better understanding of the central research question of this study. Criterion-based sampling is a purposeful sampling procedure in which the researcher identifies specific criteria crucial to the study and then finds participants who meet those criteria (Creswell & Báez, 2021).

In contrast, convenience sampling is based on limiting logistical factors such as time, money, and location. In reference to convenience sampling, Merriam and Tisdell

(2016) noted, “Although some dimension of convenience almost always figures into sample selection, selection made on this basis alone is not very credible...” (p. 98). The researcher acknowledged the limitations of convenience sampling and recognized potential threats to the data. Specifically, sampling from a specific geographic region in the Midwestern state selected for this study narrowed the sample to a relatively small group of participants, which increased the potential for bias and lack of generalizability.

Participants were selected using the following criteria: (1) participants were certified teachers in the first year or second year of their first teaching assignment in their current school district, (2) the participants were teachers in a school district located in a Level IV FAR (Frontier and Rural) community (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019), and (3) The FAR Level IV community was geographically located in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. These criteria were critical to the study for several reasons. First, the teachers selected for the study recently accepted positions in a Level IV FAR community. Understanding teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in these communities is the purpose of the present study. Second, the participants had experience living in a Level IV FAR community. Third, studying teachers who work in Level IV FAR community schools provided the researcher with more communities to study in the geographic region selected for this study. Lastly, limiting the geographic region to the western half of the Midwestern state selected for the study made it logistically and financially possible for the researcher to conduct in-person interviews. However, all of the participants chose to conduct interviews remotely.

To identify potential participants, an introductory email (Appendix A) was sent to twenty-six principals from twelve school districts located in Level IV FAR communities in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. These schools were identified using the ERS-USDA (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019) EXCEL file (Appendix G) containing the community's name and corresponding FAR levels. The EXCEL sheet was sorted by the Midwestern state selected for this study (column B) and by (column F), which indicated the community was designated FAR Level IV. The email stated the purpose of the study and requested principals provide the names and email addresses of first-year and second-year teachers in their respective schools who were in their first teaching assignment. An identical email was sent to non-respondents one week after the original email in an effort to improve participation numbers in their respective buildings. A total of three weeks was provided for principals to respond to the email request. Twelve of the twenty-six principals responded with a return rate of forty-six percent.

Next, emails were sent to the thirty-eight teacher email addresses provided by the school principals (Appendix B). This email stated the purpose of the study and asked the potential participants to complete the electronic informed consent (Appendix C) if they were interested in participating in the study. An identical email was sent to non-respondents one week after the original email in an effort to improve participation numbers. Initially, a total response time of two weeks was provided. The initial response rate from potential participants was ten percent. To address the low response rate, a second email (Appendix D) was sent to potential participants and a \$25.00 Amazon gift card was offered as an incentive to participate. These changes improved the response rate

to eighteen percent. Six of the seven respondents agreed to participate in the study. Additional email communications between the participants and the researcher were sent to finalize interview dates, times, and locations.

The researcher planned to expand the participant search beyond the original geographic area of the convenience sample to other FAR Level IV communities in the Midwestern state selected for the study if there were not enough interested participants in the specified geographic area to conduct the study. Likewise, if there were more than fifteen interested participants, the researcher planned to intentionally select participants to include a cross-section of male and female participants from different school districts and different endorsed areas to limit the study to between nine and fifteen participants.

Interviews

Qualitative researchers often interview participants to collect data. This study used a semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured interviews include open-ended questions designed to explore a topic with participants, allowing the researcher flexibility to respond and help the participant expand on meaningful experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

An interview protocol (Appendix H) was developed and piloted in January 2022 with a student-teacher who was in the process of searching for a teaching position. The pilot interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and included a debriefing session with the participant at the end of the interview. After the pilot interview was analyzed, the researcher determined the original nine questions were insufficient to elicit the data needed for this study. This conclusion was made because the questions did not clearly address the central research question, which was evident from the participant's responses

and feedback from the researcher's dissertation chairperson. A new interview protocol (Appendix I) was developed in March 2022. The new protocol was centered around four sub-questions based on the review of the literature.

There is no set number of required interviews in qualitative research because data collection ends when data saturation is reached. Saturation in qualitative data collection is achieved when continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the studied phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The present study included six interviews conducted between October 2022 and April 2023. Participants were emailed a copy of the interview questions one week before the interview (Appendix J). Providing the questions in advance allowed participants time to think about the questions and provide detailed responses during the interview. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and took place on Zoom to meet participants' needs.

Audio recordings of each interview were made using two digital recording devices and the application Otter.ai for transcription purposes. Observational notes were recorded on the interview notes template (Appendix E) during the interview to capture details related to the interview site and non-verbal responses from the participants. Reflective notes and analytic memos recorded vital takeaways from each interview. Participants were informed of possible follow-up conversations after the initial interview to gather more information to understand or clarify the participant's perspectives, and any follow-up interactions were optional. However, additional contacts were not needed.

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

This study aimed to answer the central research question: What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school

districts in one Midwestern state? Tables 3-6 show the research sub-questions and the corresponding interview questions. Each table is followed by a paragraph describing the rationale for the sub-questions with supporting research.

Table 3

Research Sub-Question 1

How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

1. Describe a past educational experience or influential educator that impacted your decision to teach in a rural school.

Probing interview questions:

- 1a. Describe how that experience/person made you feel?
 - 1b. What other past experiences or people influenced your decision to teach in a rural school?
-

Many factors influence the decision to become a teacher. For example, Christiansen et al. (2019) found the two most significant predictive factors of high school students entering the teaching profession were a sense of self-efficacy related to school and encouragement by family and others to consider teaching as a career. Another study from Torsney et al. (2017) found a strong and positive relationship between the desire to work with children and social utility value (providing a service to society). Research sub-question one and the corresponding interview questions were intended to understand if past educational experiences and influential educators were important motivators to teach in a rural school district. These were selected as the first questions to help open participants to share their lived experience as it relates to their decision to teach in a rural school district.

Table 4*Research Sub-Question 2*

How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

2. In what ways did your family or friends support your decision to apply for your current teaching position?

Probing interview questions:

- 2a. Why or why not is support from family and friends important to you in relation to your profession?
 - 2b. How did geographic proximity to family and friends impact your decision to accept your first teaching position?
-

Research suggests the teaching profession is a hyper-local phenomenon; that is, teachers tend to be less mobile as compared to other professions. For example, Reininger (2012) found teachers are more likely to live within twenty miles of their hometown than other college graduates. Another study by Podgursky et al. (2016) found the interstate mobility of teachers in three Midwestern states was less than .01 percent. Research sub-question two and the corresponding interview questions were designed to understand if relational factors such as family and friends impact the hyper-local nature of the teaching profession among the research participants.

Table 5*Research Sub-Question 3*

How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

3. What community characteristics were you looking for when you were applying for your first teaching job?

Probing interview questions:

- 3a. What are some examples of services and community resources you considered important?
- 3b. How often do you travel to larger population centers to access goods and services?
- 3c. How does the need to travel to larger population centers impact your feelings about living and working in a rural community?
-

Characteristics of hard-to-staff schools include high levels of poverty, limited physical and financial resources, and in the case of rural schools, geographic isolation (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Therefore, the ability to attract highly qualified teachers is more challenging in hard-to-staff rural schools (Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). FAR (Frontier and Remote) communities are determined by the population density of an area combined with the distance from urban areas where goods and services can be accessed (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). Research sub-question three and the corresponding interview questions were designed to understand the importance of proximity to population centers with goods and services among the research participants.

Table 6*Research Sub-Question 4*

Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

4. What school-based factors did you consider before accepting your current teaching position?

Probing interview questions:

4a. Why were these school-based factors important to you?

4b. Where did you learn about these school-based factors?

4c. What other factors did you consider before you accepted your current teaching position?

Positive associations with teaching in rural settings include smaller class sizes, more teacher autonomy, the ability to develop close relationships with students, and a sense of connectedness to the community (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Kier & Chen, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). Tran and Smith (2019) found base salary was the primary factor preservice teachers considered when accepting positions at hard-to-staff rural schools. However, other financial incentives such as benefits, loan forgiveness, and signing bonuses were ineffective recruitment strategies. Research sub-question four and the corresponding interview questions were designed to understand which school-based factors were important to the research participants when choosing to teach in rural school districts.

Data Analysis Procedures

The goal of qualitative data analysis is to derive meaning from data collected during the study. Analyzing qualitative data is primarily an inductive process and involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting data from interviews, observations, and artifacts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, qualitative data analysis does not follow a

fixed linear process; instead, the process is highly intuitive and requires continual reflection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Van Manen (2014) posited two conditions must be in place before conducting phenomenological analysis. First, a quality phenomenological question must guide the analysis; and second, the data requires vivid experiential detail for the researcher to reflect on and analyze. Moustakas (1994) developed a more structured phenomenological data analysis approach, which included: (1) identification of significant statements, sentences, or quotes to understand how participants experienced the phenomenon, (2) development of themes to create clusters of meaning, (3) development of structural and textural descriptions to describe what and how participants experienced the phenomenon, and (4) development of composite descriptions to present the essence of the phenomenon.

The data analysis steps in this study followed Moustakas' (1994) approach and specifically included: (1) in vivo coding for transcript analysis, placing emphasis on the participants' words to construct meaning from the data, (2) the identification of significant statements to understand the participants' experience, (3) axial coding to reduce in vivo codes and significant statements into categories to provide structure and identify relationships in the data, (4) the reduction of axial codes into themes, (5) the development of thick, rich structural and textural descriptions to report what and how the participants experienced motivation to teach in their current schools, and (6) the development of composite descriptions analyzed through the lens of the expectancy-value theory of motivation to identify connections across all of the research participants to better understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-

to-staff rural schools in the Midwestern state selected for this study. These data analysis procedures were recorded and organized using Google Docs and Google Sheets.

Data Verification Strategies

There are a variety of validation strategies in qualitative research; however, the researcher's comfort with the strategies and validation terms determines the language used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data validation and reliability demonstrate the study's rigor and indicate the findings are true to the researcher, the readers, and other researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To meet these standards, qualitative researchers strive to demonstrate trustworthiness in their research methods and include measures that address internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

In qualitative studies, internal validity reflects the accurate measurement of the instrument used to collect and analyze data. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative studies. Consequently, qualitative researchers must engage in reflexivity to clarify personal biases that may impact the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vagel, 2018). A common reflexivity method used in phenomenology is the epoché process. Epoché is a consistent self-examination of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions to open the researcher to receive new information in preparation to acquire new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the process began with the disclosure of the researcher's past experiences and personal beliefs. This reflective process continued throughout the study. The researcher tracked the epoché process in a reflective journal (Appendix F) and recorded thoughts and opinions to identify potential biases. These biases were acknowledged and bracketed to

remain open to the lived experiences and perspectives of the research participants (Van Manen, 2014).

Quantitatively, external validity strategies check for the generalizability of the findings from a small sample to a larger population. This study used three external validity strategies: (1) triangulation by gathering information from multiple sources, (2) the use of thick, rich descriptions of the data, and (3) the identification of themes as reflected in the thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher recognized potential concerns with bias and generalizability related to the narrow geographic area of the participant sample. However, the study's design demonstrated reliability and replicability through the detailed description of data collection procedures and data analysis procedures.

Data verification strategies safeguard the credibility of the findings. Data verification strategies in this study included triangulation by gathering information from multiple sources, the use of two digital recording devices to make audio recordings of interviews, and the use of an online transcription application called otter.ai to ensure accuracy. In addition, member checking through the use of a transcript verification form (Appendix K) allowed each participant to review and approve the interview transcripts.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative studies, researchers are responsible for informing and protecting participants from potential harm they may encounter during the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, researchers are obligated to reflect on and predict any foreseeable risks or discomforts participants may experience as a result of their

participation in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Therefore, qualitative researchers must consider potential ethical concerns throughout the study.

Before conducting the present study, a request for research approval was submitted to the Doane University IRB (Institutional Review Board) (Appendix L). All participants were informed of the purpose of the study. Electronic informed consent forms (Appendix C) were emailed to each participant before the interview. Participants gave or withheld informed consent by clicking the corresponding button in the form. In addition, the informed consent was reviewed with each participant on the day of the interview. The following ethical considerations were outlined in the informed consent form:

1. Anticipated interview format and time commitment, including the methods that were used to make an audio recording of interviews for transcription purposes.
2. Potential risks and discomforts associated with the study, including the possibility the participant's identity or the identity of a school district could be discovered, resulting in loss of anonymity.
3. Benefits the participants may receive if they participate in the study, including insights into trends that may impact teacher recruitment efforts.
4. Assurance information obtained during this study that could identify the participants will be kept strictly confidential; pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' names.
5. Assurance participation in this study is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their relationship with the researcher or affiliated institutions.

6. Attainment of the participant's consent to create an audio recording for the purpose of interview transcription.

In addition, participants were informed the researcher would keep any recordings and transcripts of the interviews for a period of five-years following the interview. All digital data were stored on the Doane University Google server and on an external hard drive. The external hard drive and all hard copy documents were kept in a locked file cabinet. The informed consent notified participants the information obtained through this study would be published in the researcher's dissertation and could be published in educational journals or presented to the public. The researcher took great care in treating all research participants with respect and expressed gratitude for their participation verbally and in writing by emailing thank-you notes with the \$25.00 digital Amazon gift card after each interview (Appendix M).

Summary

Chapter three discussed the qualitative methodology used to address the central question: What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state? A phenomenological research approach was used to describe the individual perceptions and formative experiences of the participants. The researcher engaged in a process of self-reflection to identify potential biases that may impact the study. These biases were intentionally bracketed to create an openness to the participants' lived experiences and to derive new ideas through an inductive process of inquiry.

Data collection procedures were described and included sampling procedures. Furthermore, interview protocols were developed from the review of the literature. Data

analysis methods described in the chapter included post-interview memos, in vivo and axial coding, and the reduction of codes into themes until the point of data saturation. Finally, themes were interpreted and composite descriptions were developed to identify the essence of each participant's motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts in the Midwestern state selected for this study. In addition, strategies designed to ensure data validity and reliability were outlined, and ethical considerations related to participant privacy, anonymity, and data storage were addressed.

CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of first-year and second-year teachers to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. This chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the participants, giving context and meaning to the study.

The study included six participants, three males and three females, with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Four participants were traditional college students who began their teaching careers after graduating. The other two participants were career switchers, meaning they worked in different career fields before starting their teaching careers. All participants held a Bachelor's degree and were state certified to teach in their grade-level content areas. Three participants were certified in music, foreign language, or special education, which are hard-to-staff content areas most impacted by the teacher shortage (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). During individual interviews, participants shared unique perspectives and formative experiences that motivated them to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools in Level IV FAR (Frontier and Rural) communities in one Midwestern state (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019).

Table 7 provides information about each participant, including the pseudonyms assigned to them, their educational background, and whether or not they were a career switcher. The table also provides years of experience. Participants' years of experience include the academic year during the study.

Table 7*Participants in the study*

| <i>Pseudonym</i> | <i>Educational Background</i> | <i>Years of Experience:</i> | <i>Career Switcher:</i> |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Layla | Bachelor's K-12 Music | One | No |
| Jimmy | Bachelor's K-12 Spanish | Two | Yes |
| Molly | Bachelor's K-12 PE | Two | No |
| Amie | Bachelor's Elementary Ed. | One | No |
| Jeremy | Bachelor's K-12 PE | One | No |
| Joey | Bachelor's K-12 SPED | One | Yes |

Layla

At the time of the study, Layla was a first-year teacher. She held state certification in K-12 music education and taught K-12 music in a consolidated school district. Layla was a traditional college student and earned her Bachelor's degree from a post-secondary institution in a neighboring state. She completed her student teaching experience in the same neighboring state before accepting her current teaching position.

Layla grew up in a city located in the western half of the United States. She never lived in a rural community. However, she visited family living in smaller, rural communities during childhood. Family was important to Layla. She shared memories of her grandfather, who was also a K-12 music teacher, and remembered examples of former students telling him how much he meant to them:

We'd be camping, or we would be out somewhere, and someone would magically appear in the small world we have and say, you know, I don't know if you remember me, but you taught me to play the clarinet, and I just loved your class so much, and I found a joy and a love for music I never thought I would have.

Stories like these sparked Layla's interest in becoming a K-12 music teacher. Layla was unmarried and had no children at the time of the study.

Jimmy

At the time of the study, Jimmy was a second-year teacher. He held state certification in K-12 world language-Spanish education and taught K-12 Spanish in a consolidated school district. Jimmy switched careers from social work to education. His first degree was from a university in a U.S. Territory. He completed the requirements for a state teaching certification at a post-secondary institution in the state where he worked. He completed his student teaching experience in the school where he currently teaches while on contract as the school's Spanish teacher. Jimmy was older than the other participants and had older children who attended school in his district.

Jimmy grew up in a city located in a U.S. Territory outside of the continental United States. After a devastating hurricane, his daughters moved to the town where he currently lives to stay with family. Jimmy and his spouse remained in the U.S. territory for about six months before moving to their current home. Before moving to the continental United States, Jimmy ran an independent after-school program with his spouse.

Jimmy's perspective on rural education and rural living differed from the other participants because of his experience living in a city outside the continental United States. He enjoyed not dealing with traffic every day. He also shared the technology and resources in his current school exceed those in the schools where he came from:

I can say I'm, you call this a rural school, but compared to where I come from, [U.S. Territory], this is a high-tech school—and school lunches. Oh my God, that's fabulous. Like, all the food that the kids can eat in the morning. Oh, I'm impressed [voice inflection]. I'm really liking it.

Molly

At the time of the study, Molly was a second-year teacher. She held state certification in K-12 health and physical education and taught K-12 health and physical education in a consolidated school district. Molly was a traditional college student and earned her Bachelor's degree from a post-secondary institution in the state where she worked. Molly completed her student teaching experience in the district where she is currently employed.

Molly grew up in a rural community located in the western half of the United States. Her hometown was slightly larger and is forty miles from where she currently lives. Molly decided to become a teacher during her junior year in high school after developing a positive relationship with her coach and teacher:

But, he just, [um], really played an influence, like, like, you could make a difference. Like, it just mattered. Like him being there to a lot of us just really mattered. And I really wanted to, kind of, be that person for the kids that, like, don't feel like they have anybody that cares. So that was a big influence just to kind of be the person that mattered.

At the time of the study, Molly was married, and the school district where she worked was located in her spouse's hometown. Molly shared her parents were supportive of her decision to teach in a small, rural town, but they also encouraged her not to limit her options:

They kind of never really let me forget that it's okay to go out and see the world and kind of step out of your comfort zone and maybe take on a bigger, like inner-city school.

Amie

Amie was a first-year teacher at the time of the study. She held state certification in elementary education and taught 5th grade in a non-consolidated rural school district.

Amie was a traditional college student and earned her Bachelor's degree from a post-secondary institution in the state where she works. Amie completed her student teaching experience in the district where she is currently employed.

Amie grew up in a larger rural community located about 20 miles away from the community where she worked. Amie attended a private Catholic school through 8th grade and then attended a public high school. Amie chose to live in her hometown and commuted to school daily. Family was important to Amie. Her brother and sister-in-law are educators, and they influenced her decision to become a teacher. Amie shared:

So, seeing how many [students] want to take his class because of how he is as a teacher, I think, influenced me too. I hope kids like coming to my class, even though it's required, but seeing that he has so many who want to because they love what he does and how he teaches.

Amie was unmarried and had no children at the time of the study.

Jeremy

At the time of the study, Jeremy was a first-year teacher. He held state certification in K-12 physical education and health and taught those subjects in a non-consolidated rural school district. Jeremy was a traditional college student and a college athlete. He graduated from a post-secondary institution in the state where he worked. Jeremy completed his student teaching experience in the district where he is currently employed. Jeremy's father was a teacher and administrator, so he grew up around the education profession. During the interview, Jeremy described this experience and said:

And my dad, I just grew up with my dad. I'd go to the school with him. I did all of this while he did all of his late-night work at the office, and we'd always just walk around the school with him. We'd get, he dropped us off at school when we go there, and we'd meet with all of his other co-workers and everything.

During his youth, Jeremy attended three public school districts and graduated from a mid-sized public high school. However, he was undecided about becoming a teacher until his junior year of high school, when he developed a close relationship with his coach and PE teacher:

I was more involved in sports and I [inaudible] I loved football, and so my football coach was also my PE teacher, and so I had three classes a day with him and so just getting to know and play for someone like that, who just was so passionate about everything that really just and just the difference that they can make in my life and everyone else's life.

Family was important to Jeremy, and he talked to his parents daily. At the time of the study, Jeremy was unmarried, and he did not have any children.

Joey

During the interview, Joey shared he frequently moved as a child. His parents were not certified educators, but they taught English in China for a while during his childhood. Joey attended a rural Chinese school for three years before returning to the United States. He attended several school districts before graduating from a large public high school in a Southern state.

Joey's first college degree was from a southern university, where he majored in social science with minors in philosophy and Chinese. After college, he moved to China, where he taught English in a poor rural area, "after I graduated from college the first time, I went back to China, and when I was there, I taught for six years. I was an English teacher." When Joey returned to the United States, he thought he could teach in public schools; however, he soon realized he needed to complete a teacher preparation program.

Joey explained:

I did have a college degree. You know, I have six years of experience. I have good recommendations and should be able to find a teaching job, with no

problem. And then it turns out that [Midwestern state] has some of the if not the highest requirements in the world, well, the in the country.

Eventually, Joey moved to a rural town in the Midwestern state where this study was conducted. He began working as a paraeducator at a consolidated public school district in that town. He completed a paraeducator-to-teacher program at a post-secondary institution. At the time of the study, Joey was a first-year teacher. He held state certification in K-12 special education and taught high school special education at the same school where he was a paraeducator. Joey also completed his student teaching experience in the same school district. Joey was married and had one child.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. The study included six participants with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. During individual interviews, participants shared their unique perspectives and experiences that motivated them to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools in Level IV FAR (Frontier and Rural) communities in one Midwestern state (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). Chapter Five focuses on the study's findings, including critical themes and sub-themes developed through the analysis of participant interviews.

CHAPTER 5: DISCOVERY OF THEMES

A central assumption in phenomenology is that there is an essence, or underlying structure, to shared experiences (Patton, 2015). To understand the essence of shared experiences, phenomenological studies use interviews as the primary data collection method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in this study to develop themes from participant interview data. In addition, the chapter presents an overview of the four themes and eight sub-themes that emerged. These themes and sub-themes represent the essence of the participants' motivation to accept initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools located in Frontier and Remote (FAR) Level IV communities in one Midwestern state (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019).

Overview of Methodology

Six participants were selected and interviewed, creating 113 pages of transcripts from six semi-formal interviews. All participants had the option of interviewing in person or remotely using the Zoom application. All participants chose to participate remotely. A research framework was developed based on four interview questions to understand the motivational factors that influenced each participant's decision to accept their initial teaching position in hard-to-staff rural schools. In addition, probing questions were asked to gather more information. Reflective memos were completed after each interview, and a reflection journal was kept throughout the study (Appendix F). Interviews were transcribed using the application otter.ai. The interview transcripts were transferred to Google Docs for ease of editing and sharing with participants. After completing edits, the transcript was shared with each participant for review and approval.

The data analysis steps in this study followed Moustakas' (1994) approach and specifically included: (1) in vivo coding for transcript analysis, (2) the identification of significant statements, (3) axial coding to reduce in vivo codes and significant statements into categories to identify relationships in the data, (4) the reduction of axial codes into themes and sub-themes, (5) the development of thick, rich structural and textural descriptions to report what and how the participants' experienced motivation to teach in their respective schools, and (6) the development of composite descriptions analyzed through the lens of the expectancy-value theory of motivation to identify connections across all of the research participants to better understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools in the Midwestern state selected for this study.

Overview of Themes

From these data analysis procedures, four themes and eight sub-themes emerged. The four primary themes were: (1) sense of connectedness, (2) sense of support, (3) sense of belonging, and (4) sense of purpose. The themes and sub-themes are displayed in Table 8 and described in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 8

Themes and Sub-Themes

| Theme One | Theme Two | Theme Three | Theme Four |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Sense of Connectedness | Sense of Support | Sense of Belonging | Sense of Purpose |
| (1) Rural Connection | (3) Emotional Structures | (5) Belonging in the School Community | (7) Opportunities for Impact |
| (2) Personal Connections | (4) Resource Structures | (6) Belonging in the Local Community | (8) Opportunities for Advancement |

Theme One: Sense of Connectedness

The first theme that emerged from the data was a sense of connectedness. For the purpose of this study, connectedness is defined as having a relationship or association with a person or group. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of connectedness” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (1) rural connections, and (2) personal connections. Rural connections were described by the participants as a link between them and the rural community where they lived and worked. This link was often a family connection or personal history with the geographic area that grounded them in the town or school district. Personal connections were described as relationships with trusted individuals who provided guidance and encouragement when deciding which teaching position to accept.

Sub-Theme One: Rural Connections

The first sub-theme that emerged from the data was rural connections. Five participants described living and visiting rural communities as children. They believed these experiences prepared them to teach in small rural communities. Participants also shared generalized assumptions regarding rural communities based on their experiences.

Molly grew up in a rural community with a population near 3000 people. Her hometown was near where she lived and worked at the time of the study. Molly believed her experience growing up in a small town prepared her better for life in a rural community:

I think if they're [people not from a rural community] looking to take a job in a rural community, they got to understand that it's small, and you have to learn to kind of adapt with the town being really small.

Molly further explained, “But I don't think other people have that insight when they take a job in, like, a rural school. So, it's kind of a culture shock.” In addition, Molly’s experience growing up in a small town led to her belief that small communities are safer than larger communities:

I wanted to be able to feel safe if I wanted to walk around town or be out and about, but where it’s so small, like, I can go out and walk by myself and not be, like, afraid that something is going to happen.

Amie grew up on a ranch near the community where she lived and worked at the time of the study. Amie said she was “pretty familiar” with small towns because of where she grew up. Like Molly, Amie also believed her experience growing up in a rural area provided her with unique insights into living and teaching in a rural school:

I don't know, just growing up in [home town] was just a small town and then knowing the schools around like [listed several neighboring small towns] and all that stuff, and I wanted to stay in this area just because my family's from here.

Jeremy also grew up in a rural community, but it was several hundred miles away from where he worked at the time of the interview. His family moved to a larger community after he completed 8th grade, which led to some generalized comparisons between cities and rural communities:

And so, it was a much smaller school. It's about the size of [rural town]. It's about 950 people, and so we were there up until my freshman year. And so, I just, I got to really experience [brief pause] how much someone [in a small school] can care about what they do in the school and everything, they can see everything that, you can see the positive influence that he's making in the school or what differences he can make.

Jeremy said he did not “have anything against big cities,” but he “loves local, small communities.” Jeremy explained he loves small communities because “Everyone’s happy to see each other, waiving and whatever. I like the politeness that kind of comes with it.”

Layla grew up in a western city located about 80 miles away from the community where she lived and worked at the time of the interview. Although she did not grow up in a small, rural town, she shared she did have some rural experiences growing up:

I had family that lived in smaller rural areas. So, like, grandparents and stuff I would visit that lived in smaller areas. So, I had a kind of experience of small-town living through visiting and through my extended family, but a majority of my life was spent kind of in that larger metropolis of a city. And there wasn't, like, a ton of small-town-like educational experience for me, so I had only known, like, the large school experience.

Joey moved around when he was a child, and he spent part of his childhood in a rural community in China, where his parents taught English as a second language. Joey's family eventually moved to a Southern state, where he graduated from a large public high school. However, his childhood experiences in rural China gave him some generalized assumptions about the needs in rural communities, "I feel like there is a lot more need for teachers out in the countryside. I feel like, um, there is a lot less support for students. There's a lot less resources available."

Sub-Theme Two: Personal Connections

The second sub-theme that emerged from the data was personal connections. Each of the six participants described personal relationships, including family, friends, coaches, college professors, colleagues, and school administrators that influenced their decision to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools.

Molly and Amie had family connections to the rural communities where they lived and taught during the study. These family connections were among the most powerful motivators for them to accept their first teaching positions. Molly said:

My husband is actually from [rural midwestern town], um, my husband was very

supportive, obviously, because we have kind of settled here. So, that played a lot of influence on why we decided to, like, live here and start here because he was already here.

Amie shared:

My brother got married to my sister-in-law, and they have my niece. They moved away to [large Midwestern town] when they first got married because they both had teaching jobs in the area. And then a position opened up for him in [hometown], so they moved back. And so, I just like being with my family and being around them.

Furthermore, Amie said:

So, I also, like my boyfriend, lives in [neighboring town] and grew up in [same neighboring town]. So that played a role as well, like, I wanted to be close to him because eventually when we start a family, both our families are here.

Jimmy and Joey said they had no intention of moving to a small, rural

Midwestern town. Jimmy said, "I didn't even know where [Midwestern state] was on a map before I got here." However, life circumstances created the need for Jimmy and Joey to relocate. They both had family connections in the rural communities where they lived and worked during the study. Jimmy shared:

I could say that a hurricane brought us here. Back in 2017, hurricane [name of the hurricane] hit [U.S. territory], and we sent our daughters to [Midwestern rural town] because my mom and sister lived there.

Joey said:

Basically, my parents moved here [Midwestern rural town]. And then, once my wife and I had our daughter, and we both lived in China at the time. We both agreed that, as much as we love living here, we don't really want our daughter growing up in a Chinese education system. And we definitely do want our daughter to grow up knowing who her grandparents are.

Unlike the other participants in the study, Layla and Jeremy did not have family in the communities where they accepted their initial teaching positions. However, they

shared the importance of choosing a teaching position in a community near family and friends. Layla said:

It was, it was a large factor. I had looked at a ton of positions just in the general vicinity of my family, and those were a lot of the ones that I was even just applying to. Family is really, really important to me, so being close to them was a huge factor in what I was even just looking for in the first place. I'm only about an hour, just over an hour away from my family, which was a huge plus when I was looking at this district. Um, there were some further away that I considered, but a large plus, and a large weight into what I was considering, was that proximity to my family.

Jeremy is a former college athlete, and although his family was not nearby, he had strong personal connections with teammates who were still playing college football at a post-secondary institution located 20 miles away from the rural community where he worked at the time of the study:

And so, I was kind of just on the fence about everything [use last year of eligibility or take a teaching position], but I still wanted to keep living... I live with [roommate's name], who's the center, and so I wanted to get and play with him.

In addition, participants also described how much they appreciated when individuals reached out to them, especially during their initial job searches. This personal touch resonated with these participants and helped them feel more comfortable and connected. Jeremy described a mentor-like relationship when talking about his cooperating teacher and how this relationship influenced his decision to accept his first teaching position:

And so, I get to [rural public school] and talk to [cooperating teacher], and I just really enjoyed talking to him. And so, we just would talk, and I just asked him questions, and he just talked about everything. And he asked me if I was gonna apply [when the cooperating teacher accepted a position at another school]. And I said, oh, like, I don't know. And so, I really, I slept on it and slept on it, and it just, I felt like [pause] it was just the perfect opportunity.

Amie also shared a positive relationship with her cooperating teacher and explained her cooperating teacher's experience was similar to hers, which influenced her decision to accept her teaching position:

She, like, hyped it up. She made it sound like it was gonna be perfect, and it has been so far. Just the way she is from [hometown] and her move to [rural Midwestern town], and her experience with that played a huge role in me wanting to be here.

Theme Two: Sense of Support

All of the participants expressed a belief teaching is a demanding and stressful profession. Therefore, a second theme that emerged from the data was a sense of support. Participant descriptions within the theme "sense of support" resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (3) emotional support structures, and (4) resource support structures. Each participant shared the importance of emotional support structures in their personal and professional lives. Participants included family, friends, and colleagues as their primary structures for emotional support. Administrative support, extra duties, salary, and benefits such as retirement, vacation, and stipends were described as important resource support structures.

Sub-Theme Three: Emotional Support Structures

The third sub-theme that emerged from the data was emotional support structures. Emotional support structures are characterized as trusted people who can provide emotional support during challenging times or stressful situations. Participants included colleagues, family, and friends as their primary emotional support structures. The participants described the people in their emotional support structures positively, and their verbal description was often matched with positive body language such as a smile, laugh, voice inflection, or leaning forward toward the microphone.

Layla shared her family was among the most influential people in her life. She described her mom as her best friend and said she had a close relationship with her siblings. Layla said she felt supported by her family as she pursued her first teaching position, and, more than anything, she felt like her family wanted her to be happy and satisfied with her decision. Layla further explained the importance of her family and friends as her primary emotional support structure, especially when she experienced stressful days at work:

And I feel like family and friends are the ones that, like, help you get through that. You know, they're the ones that support you or listen to you, or you know, offer to bake you that cake if you need the extra carbs [laughing] to help you feel good about your life or, um, or just kind of, kind of, that extra support as you kind of get through those rough days because as much as education is amazing, there are those days when it's not so, not so easy.

Molly also described a positive and supportive relationship with her parents. She explained how they supported her decision to accept her current teaching position. However, her parents encouraged her not to settle and to remain open to other possibilities that may push her outside her “comfort zone.” Molly explained during her first year of teaching, the support her family and co-workers provided was essential to her ability to persevere through difficult times and stressful situations:

The first year is always the roughest. And because you are just learning and making mistakes [smiling], and you have to, like, kind of figure out how to push through it. They [family] were really supportive of just the fact to, to kind of pick you back up and just tell you that, like, you're there for the kids, like, you're important. They, like, want you to be there. Your being there matters to them. So, it was really important to have that support circle of family and co-workers.

Amie described herself as a “family person.” She said her dad is her “best friend” and explained she was unsure she would be a teacher today if she did not get a teaching job close to home. Amie explained how she relied on her family and friends, especially

her brother and sister-in-law, who are also teachers, as a support system when she has stressful days in the classroom:

So teaching is stressful [laughter]. And it's so different, that having, like, someone to vent at the end of the day, like, just telling them the things you see in education now that weren't there when we grew up. So, I still have all those friends that I can talk to and like relate back to what had happened [when we were kids] and compare it to now. So, I think a lot of the time, just having someone there to listen to what happened today [laughter]. Also, just somebody there to talk to. I think it would be different if I was far away because I would be limited, I feel, on who I could talk to compared to the fact that I see my brother and sister-in-law every day, and we talk about what happened.

Jeremy described a close relationship with his parents, saying, "I talk to my parents, like, every day. I just always run things by them." Therefore, when he was deciding whether or not to apply for his first teaching position or keep playing college football, his parent's input was important to him:

And so, [um], I decided, [um] after lots of conversations with my parents, who still kind of wanted me to, wanted me to keep playing football, wanted me to move closer to home, I finally decided, you know, it just, it just felt like it was an opportunity I just didn't want to turn down.

Jeremy also discussed the job opportunity with his college football coach before he decided to accept his initial teaching position:

I met with [football coach], and I said, you know, I have this opportunity and, you know, [cooperating teacher] is leaving, and there a lot of shoes to fill. He said, go ahead and apply.

As Jeremy gathered his application materials and prepared for the interview, he continued to rely on his parents for support:

I sat and made my resume with my mom. I talked to my dad about what to say, like, what the questions would be, and like, they really just kind of... all through everything, they just kind of, like, coached me, not coached me, but like showed me, like how, and what to expect and everything.

Jeremy's family lived several hundred miles from where he lived and worked during the study. Although Jeremy said he spoke to his parents every day, a local system of support was still important to Jeremy, which for him was his college teammates and roommates, "I also was able to still live in [rural midwestern town] with my roommates."

Jimmy was a social worker before becoming a teacher. He described how his job as a social worker impacted him negatively and how switching professions reduced his stress levels:

I had very bad, bad nights of no sleep, just thinking about how people are the way they are. And that was really affecting my health (right). And then suddenly, I got an opportunity. One of the school's Paras met me at the grocery store here in [Midwestern rural town 1]. They told me that the Spanish teacher was not, was not renewing her contract, and is leaving to [Western city] or something like that. And they say you should apply, you should apply.

Jimmy described his decision to switch careers as positive and how his wife supported his decision:

And yeah, she influenced me a lot into getting into this, into this job. She says, like two months of vacation, hello [voice inflection]! Get it! You know, having the same vacation time, you know [voice inflection]? She said it's better for my, you know, mental health. If I go to school, it's, it's different. The stress has gone down a lot. It's a different kind of stress, but it's quite a change.

Joey also said his primary support system was his family. Like Jimmy, Joey switched careers and was a non-traditional college student before becoming a teacher.

Joey explained how his parents supported his decision to study political science in college instead of education:

My parents are wonderful. They've always been very supportive. And even when I was going into college, I was like, my whole life, I want to be a teacher, I want to be a teacher. And then I'm in college, I'm like, no, I want to do poli-sci. And they're like, well, I think you'd be better as a teacher, son, but you know if that's what you want, we'll support it.

In addition to his parents, Joey said his aunt was also a supportive figure in his life when he was growing up and someone he “looked up to and admired.” Joey acknowledged teaching is a demanding and emotionally draining profession. He said he relied on his family and colleagues to help him get through difficult days:

You know, teaching is a really hard job. It's emotionally draining, you know [smiling]? No matter how hard I try to keep an even keel, you know, like some days just get to you, and having a base of support who, you know, are there to help you get through the difficult days that everything that is important.

Sub-Theme Four: Resource Support Structures

The fourth sub-theme that emerged from the data was resource support structures. Resource support structures included community resources such as health care, grocery, and retail stores. It also included school-based resources such as salary, benefits, and administrative support. A wide variety of resource support structures were deemed important by the participants; however, there was consensus among all participants that certain resources, such as benefits and mentoring support, were less important than other factors, such as salary and administrative support. In addition, all six participants said having more local community resources would be convenient. Still, a lack of community resources and the need to travel to other communities to access resources was not a factor they considered before they accepted their initial teaching position.

Layla grew up in a Western city with many resources and services. Interestingly, during her job search, she did not prioritize the services available in the community, saying, “I don’t think services were a huge considering factor for me.” As a result, Layla had to travel to a larger community to access basic services like groceries:

We don't have a grocery store. So, if I need any groceries or anything like that, I have to travel to [larger Midwestern town] to get those things. So yeah, I'd say

probably about once a week. Sometimes I make about once every two weeks, but for the most part, I probably think most frequently once a week.

Layla also discussed the downside of having to travel outside of her community:

I think the biggest thing for me with the fact that I have to travel so much to different places just to get entertainment or to get groceries or to get, you know, things outside of that. A lot of times, it definitely makes it feel like I do love my positioning and where I am, but it definitely feels like this isn't the place that I would stay for all eternity, you know, especially as I were to grow and to create a family and to just kind of grow outside of myself. Kind of the smaller town, while it's nice, sometimes it does make it harder for, say, planning when to go get your groceries, planning when to go get gas or (inaudible) planning to go, handle just like the basic necessities of life.

During her initial job search, Layla was interested in finding a vibrant community that offered opportunities for community engagement, “I was looking for places that were not necessarily, like, extremely sleepy, like nothing to do in the town. Communities that had groups that I could get engaged with.” She also focused on intangible factors within the school, like school culture and administrative support:

I was looking for unity, especially within the school district and within that mission. I wanted to feel like the school district itself was working towards a goal. That was a huge thing communicated to me within the administration and within the few students I did get to speak with. And I definitely felt, as I was coming into the school district like there's a lot of backing between administration and teachers and willingness to support the teachers as they grow and try new things.

Molly also shared the need to travel outside of their community to access services like groceries and entertainment:

Um, well, we don't really have a grocery store. So, to get groceries, we have to travel to, like, [rural Midwestern town 3], sometimes [rural Midwestern town 4] or [larger Midwestern town], and that's usually about once or twice a month. There's just not a lot to, like, as far as like, things to do here.

Molly said the need to travel to larger communities to access goods and services did not impact her decision to accept her initial teaching position:

So, it didn't impact my decision because that was how I grew up. It was normal for me because you still had to drive over an hour to get to anything. I just grew up having to find things to entertain myself with the resources that we kind of had.

Molly considered school-based resource support structures, including salary, before deciding which teaching position to accept,

One factor was definitely the pay. Because I was going to be paying, like, my bills and just trying to make sure that I can make, we can make ends meet and things like that.”

Another school-based resource support structure she considered was extra duty assignments:

And then, just like the extra duty assignments, I didn't want to be way overloaded, especially in my first year of teaching, and if they were okay with me, like, taking a step back or not saying yes to certain things that I maybe wasn't as comfortable with taking on right away.

Molly further explained the school where she accepted her initial teaching position was more flexible than some other schools regarding extra duty assignments:

But they were willing to work around me getting married and having some extra support to help me through some of the other things, and [rural Midwestern town 2] was not willing to do that. So that kind of eliminated that option altogether.

Molly was a second-year teacher and did not have a formal mentor program during her first year of teaching. However, she still felt supported by the school administration and colleagues:

Admin has, like, gone out of their way to make sure that you are, like, comfortable, and you're part of the team. I was really lucky enough that the staff took me in and mentored me. And they still do.

The community where Amie worked also lacked a grocery store:

I consider [name of store] to be like half a grocery store here. Yeah, so I know that I have to go somewhere else if there's something specific I'm looking for.

However, Amie lived in a larger community and commuted about forty miles daily. Amie shared, “So those aren't necessarily what impacts me the most. I live in [hometown] and drive every day to [rural Midwestern town].” Amie said the cost and time to travel every day impacted her more:

I'm just like, this is the worst, especially with like gas prices and [pause] the [rural Midwestern school district] is really good about calling like snow days, but there's some days that I'm just like, I probably shouldn't be on the highway right now [laughter]. If it was a farther distance, I would definitely probably have reconsidered where I was going.

Amie further explained:

And like, the price of things today is just ridiculous. And then that adds so much extra time to my day. Like, I spend almost an hour a day in the car.”

Amie considered living in the same community where she worked; however, housing was difficult to find, “You have to kind of know somebody to figure out where to live here.”

Amie shared specific school-based resource support structures she deemed important to her decision to accept her initial teaching position. However, she explained her school had a low teacher turnover rate, and she shared her belief that quality schools have low teacher turnover:

And so, just knowing that a good school district makes it to where people want to stay is something that I valued and I saw here. Like, you know, some of my friends in high school, their moms are teachers here, and they still are teachers here.

Like Amie, Jeremy did not live in the community where he worked. Jeremy lived in a larger rural community twenty miles from his school and commuted forty miles daily. Jeremy did not share any details about the resources in his school's community or comment on the commute. Instead, Jeremy's comments focused on his future plans and

how school-based resource support systems, including salary and benefits, could help him achieve his goals:

I didn't realize until I interviewed that they gave a stipend if you don't take insurance. They give you a stipend, [inaudible] like \$11,000! And so, I really thought, I was 22, and so my parents, you know, my dad's a superintendent, so I have really good insurance, you know, I'm on their plan. So, I was like, you know what, this is a, once again, like, not only is this a great spot to build my curriculum, it's a great spot to, you know, get ready for, like, the actual real world, and you know, buying a house, and buying a car, and maybe having a family, and everything.

Jeremy was focused on saving money to put himself in a position to move on to other opportunities later in his life:

Right now, I make about, I want to say, I make north of \$50,000 with the \$11,000 stipend and head football coach job right now. I live with two roommates, so my utilities and rent are \$275 total a month. I'm just trying to live, live it up, trying to save up as much money as I can. And so, by the time, hopefully by the time I complete my master's when I move to a new school, I won't be really losing much because I'll be, I'll be right back up to what I would be making that way.

Jeremy also said the opportunity to coach was important to him, which played a significant role in his decision to accept his initial teaching position, "I would say, you know, as a football player in college, coaching was huge. That was a huge aspect of it."

Joey said his family travels several times a month to a larger community forty miles away to access certain goods and services. He said they also travel to a larger city located 125 miles away about every six weeks. When asked about how the need to travel impacted him, Joey said:

Oh, I mean, it isn't convenient. You know, there's no way of getting around that. But, um, you know, it has, like, a slight negative impact, but compared to the other really nice things that I really do love about living here, it's, you know, not enough to deter. That being said, you know if we did have bigger stores or more options, and you know, more things to do, I think it would be better, obviously.

Joey also explained the importance of healthcare resources and the need to access many of those resources outside of his community:

Um, and then another thing is just health resources. You know, I love [rural Midwestern town], but you know, there's, there's so many, so many things, not just for me, but for students where it's like, you know, yes, we're going to refer you to a place two and a half hours away, you know because we have a hard time doing that here. And that particularly goes for, you know, mental health, any kind of behavioral disorder, stuff like that. Um, those are all really important. Yeah. And if you don't have them, it becomes even more apparent how important they are.

Joey did not share his thoughts about how school-based resource support structures like salary, benefits, or extra-duty assignments impacted his decision to accept his initial teaching position. However, he explained the importance of liking the people he worked with and feeling supported by the administration:

I like the teachers [pause] and administration a lot. We're very blessed in that regard. So, um, for example, one reason why I really admire the administration here is because, um, I mean, this is the only school in America I've ever worked in, but from what I've read and what I've heard from people in other schools and what I've seen, it definitely seems that the administration here goes above and beyond to be supportive. And that kind of willingness to be part of the team and be like, yes, you know, we're all teachers, we all have important jobs.

Joey said these positive and supportive relationships resulted in mutual respect and teamwork: "For teachers, um, having just a sense of respect. They know that I know what they're doing in class, and they know that I have an idea of the content."

Jimmy said he goes to larger communities whenever he can to access shopping and restaurants, "Whenever I can just to go shopping, right, pretty much good restaurants because not even [larger Midwestern town] and has like, like, just a Country Kitchen."

Jimmy is from a large city in a U.S. Territory, so he was not accustomed to traveling far distances to access goods and services. However, since moving to a rural community, he

became used to traveling and felt like it is easier than driving in a city because there is no traffic:

I guess I'm used to [U.S. Territory], where there's like shopping malls everywhere. But [driving] two hours now, I don't think is a lot. When I lived in [U.S. Territory], I would say two hours! Driving sucks because it's two hours with traffic. But here it's just easy, breezy, two hours with no traffic at all. Nobody likes to deal with traffic and all that stuff. But now I don't mind at all. I got the travel experience here.

Jimmy accepted the fact that traveling to larger communities is a part of living in a rural area:

Well, you have to travel, maybe, you live here. If you want to go to the hospital. You have to travel. If you want to go got groceries, you gotta travel because you could buy in [Midwestern rural town 1]. But you know, it'll probably cost twice as much as going to Walmart.

Jimmy worked as a social worker before becoming a teacher. He said the pay was better as a teacher, and he loved having summers off and being able to spend time with his family:

My wife is a teacher. She influenced me a lot to get into this job. She says, like, two months of vacation, hello [voice inflection]! Having the same vacation was big. And the salary compared to what I was getting in DHHS was a lot better. A lot better!

Jimmy was also impressed with the resources the school district has for students:

I, I can say I'm, you call this a rural school, but compared to where I come from, [U.S. Territory]. This is a high-tech school. And school lunches. Oh my God, that's fabulous. Like, all the food that the kids can eat in the morning. Oh, I'm impressed [voice inflection]. I'm really liking it.

Theme Three: Sense of Belonging

The third theme that emerged from the data was a sense of belonging. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of belonging” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (5) belonging in the local community, and (6) belonging in the school

community. Each participant shared the importance of feeling welcomed in their local communities. None of the participants provided specific examples of ways they were welcomed into their communities; however, they described their communities as friendly and tight-knit. Participants also explained the importance of feeling a sense of belonging in their school. All of the participants described their school administrators and colleagues as friendly and supportive, which created a welcoming school environment.

Sub-Theme Five: Belonging in the Local Community

All six participants described their local communities as welcoming, tight-knit, friendly, and helpful. Some participants believed small towns could be “cliquey,” so they sought communities where they felt welcomed and the people seemed friendly. Other participants believed small towns are inherently welcoming and friendly, making it easier to build relationships. Regardless of the participants' initial thoughts about living in a rural community, they all adjusted to their local communities and felt at home.

Joey spent most of his adolescence in a city in a Southern state. Although Joey spent several years teaching English in rural China, he was still unsure about moving his family to a rural community in the Midwest. However, after living in his rural community for several years, he feels like it is home:

But before we moved here, like the idea of moving to, you know, the [Midwestern state] countryside, I wasn't really sold on that [smiling, chuckling]. It's a little different than [Southern state]. I've been here for four years, and it's my home, like, this is where I want to be the rest of my life.

Joey explained the importance of community, and he feels like he's found that sense of community in his town:

Just having a sense of community, I think, is a big deal. Like, there are some towns that you go to, and it doesn't really feel like a town. It feels like there's just a collection of people that happen to live... share the same, you know, zip code.

And then there are other towns that you go to, and it's like, yeah, these are people who, you know, love being part of this community. And I think that really does make a difference, especially for younger children, because they get to grow up with that sense, and then it stays with them.

Layla also grew up in a larger city. She believed some small towns could

“cliquey,” so she was looking for a community that made her feel welcome:

You know, especially me, I have never been in small towns, but small towns have the chance of being extremely cliquey if you're not from the town. Sometimes there are towns that make it hard that you know you're not from there, you're not welcome here kind of thing. So, I was definitely looking at places that made me feel most definitely welcome.

Layla explained she was not able to spend much time in the town before she accepted her teaching position, so she was sensitive to the way the town and the people she interacted with made her feel:

Communities that, um, were more welcoming, kind of had had more of the welcoming feel to as you drove into town. And even just kind of the feeling of, you know, the few students I saw in the school, or the few teachers I saw in the school, kind of, how did they make me feel? Did they make me feel welcome? Or was it more of a standoffish feel to someone?

A hurricane displaced Jimmy and his family from their home in a large city located in a U.S. Territory. He was apprehensive about moving to a rural town in the Midwest that he had never heard of:

I asked myself every night, I say [Midwestern state]. How did I get here? I don't know [voice inflection, shaking head]. Yeah. So, I didn't even know where [Midwestern state] was on a map before I got here.

However, after settling into his rural town, Jimmy said he and his wife liked living in a tight-knit community, “Well, my wife likes it here. She likes the community up here. Everybody knows each other. They're a very tight, tight community. And I like that.” In addition, Jimmy appreciated everything the school did for his children to help them feel like they belonged when they moved here after the hurricane:

Yeah, they met the school counselor. Yeah., I have two daughters, and it's pretty...it was pretty...at first, they had problems with my smallest one because she didn't understand the letters. What they figured out is that in the school she learned in [U.S. Territory] she learned to write in cursive, and they didn't recognize the print letters. But then they figured that out, and she was...she did fine after that. And they were so great. So, so, so good to them. They put psychologists in place. They were, they were, they were awesome with our daughters. And we were very grateful for them.

At the time of the interview, Jeremy had also settled into the community. He felt like the community had welcomed him, and he felt like the community appreciated the work he had done at the school, which gave him a sense of belonging, “Just everything that I have done, it’s just been, kind of, welcomed and accepted, and appreciated. So just the sense of, kind of, belonging really kind of cinches it for me.”

Molly was from a rural town near where she accepted her initial teaching position. She felt like rural communities are supportive of their schools, teachers, and students:

If was going to start, it was going to be similar to where I grew up, as far as, like, community support for the school, and the teachers, and their students, and kind of prioritizing, like, the student’s learning first.

Molly further explained small towns are more than industry and commerce; they are about the people who live there and the way they come together to support each other:

They are not afraid to help anybody out, like donations for kids that need things that they can't afford or anything like that or even providing supplies for classrooms. So, like, for me, it wasn't really about what the town itself, like what the economy had to offer. It was about the people.

Amie believed people in small communities are more willing to help each other, and it is easier to build relationships in small communities because everyone knows each other:

I liked that it felt [pause]; it was just it's a small community where everyone knows everybody, so you have that foundation for a relationship to build. Like some of my student's parents are like subs, so I can see them and talk to them about their student, or like there's just a better foundation to build from compared

to even [hometown] where there's like 9000 people and like you might not know them growing up there. So, I [pause]; some people hate it, but I love towns where, like, everyone knows everybody. Like that's what I really liked about it is that everyone knows everyone, and they're willing to help each other.

Amie thought about teaching in a larger school district but decided she wanted to stay closer to home and in a more familiar community:

But there was a point where I thought about going to like back east to teach just to see the difference in communities. I also thought I don't know the communities there. I better stick with what I know.

Amie chose to teach in a community near her hometown. She described what it was like when she recognized last names and how having those connections with people through previous associations made her feel even closer to the community:

But, like, I see the last names of students, and I know, oh, I know your cousin, or I was friends with your cousin in high school and stuff like that. So, I really liked that it feels more like a family, then as a community than just a community where people don't necessarily [um] want to help each other.

Sub-Theme Six: Belonging in the School Community

Participants shared a similar need to belong in their respective school communities. This sense of belonging was characterized by a feeling they were wanted, needed, and respected by all school stakeholders. In addition, the participants felt like they belonged when the school's mission and vision aligned with their personality and professional philosophy.

Layla believed it was important to work in a school that fit with her personality and teaching philosophy:

I think just because I feel like that aligns more with my personality as a teacher and within my own teaching philosophy. In the hopes that you know, I support students, and I helped them grow as individuals and helped support them as they become their own people.

Layla was a K-12 music teacher who enjoyed working with elementary students. Therefore, she felt it was important to find a teaching position that allowed her to work with elementary-aged students:

There were some positions that I applied for that were specifically elementary because that was kind of where I had found that I enjoyed my teaching the most was with elementary-age students through music, and of course, my degree and certification were through K-12. But I definitely found, kind of like that, that elementary education niche that I was definitely enjoying.

Layla interviewed for teaching positions in several schools and had multiple job offers; some were from larger school districts. She accepted the position at a small rural school because she felt like they wanted her more than the other schools where she interviewed:

I think part of it, too, was [Midwestern rural school district] just so willing to just jump for it and willing to offer me the position. There hadn't been a ton of turnaround between the time I had interviewed with them as to when they had offered me the position as opposed to, you know, a couple of the bigger districts. They had to wait for their handful of applicants to fully go through the interview process, and then they had to discuss it, and then they offered you the position. I really respected the fact that they were, they were certain that they wanted me to be in their district. And that definitely influenced me and, kind of, as I was moving forward with that.

Jimmy also felt wanted by his school district. He described how he learned about the opportunity to teach at his rural school:

I got an opportunity when one of the school's Paras met me at the grocery store here in [Midwestern rural town 1]. And they told me that the Spanish teacher was not renewing her contract and was leaving to [Western city] or something like that. And they said you should apply, you should apply, you know, okay. And after like a month or two, I, they kept on calling me to come in and apply, and I applied, and I'm here.

Jimmy had a background in education, but he needed to hold proper certification to teach in the Midwestern state where his school was located. He said the school continued to make him feel wanted while he completed his certification requirements:

And this position just fell in my lap. And I have a teaching background, and everything was made for me to get the job (right). I did have to get, like, a human resources course and a Special Ed course, but I did that while I was here.

Joey also had a teaching background through his work teaching English in rural China; however, he was not certified to teach in his Midwestern state. Joey served as a paraeducator in his school before he became a teacher. He believed the school would offer him a teaching position after he finished his teaching certification program, which made him feel wanted in the school community:

I had been a para at the school here for three years. And, um, you know, the school kind of supported me and, you know, helped me, you know, be a para while I got my education, and let me do observations and everything like that. So, I felt, you know, fairly sure that if I did everything that was required of me and got my certification, then there would be a job here for me.

Joey's school encouraged him to complete a para-to-teacher program offered at a post-secondary institution near his town:

They had in [Midwestern college], they had what was called a S.E.E.P. It's the, um, oh gosh, what was it? But yeah, it basically, it's like a program where, you know, if you're working full time as a para, they give you credit for some things and make it a little bit easier to graduate and other things. That was very helpful.

Joey taught students of all ages in China: "When I was in China, I taught pretty much everybody. I had students from ages two to 62, you know?" Through this experience, he discovered his favorite age group was teenagers. Therefore, when he graduated and began searching for a teaching position, he wanted to teach in a high school:

I love teaching all students, but I think my favorite age group to teach is the teens. Especially teens and early twenties because I feel like those are the really, really key years when people make the decisions that shape their life the most. And being able to be a positive influence in that time is, I think, the time that I can make the biggest difference. So that was why I was really interested in high school. But I think just, um, being able to have more thoughtful conversations, being able to kind of explain some deeper meanings, larger ripples of effects that might be beyond the, the, you know, comprehension abilities of younger kids.

Amie, Jeremy, and Molly student taught in the schools where they accepted their initial teaching positions. All three participants believed having experienced the school before they accepted a full-time teaching position helped them feel like they belonged in their school communities. Amie developed a strong relationship with her cooperating teacher and school administrator, which gave her the confidence to apply for the position:

I had been able to kind of make a connection with the principal while I student taught, and the relationship I developed with, like, my cooperating teacher played a big part in it [the decision to apply].

Amie said her school administrator encouraged her to apply for the teaching position and held the position for her as she contemplated whether or not to apply:

And the principal had talked to me about applying and how he really wanted me to apply. So, he told me that he was going to leave the application open until I applied [smile].

Amie was offered the position right after the interview, which made her feel wanted and appreciated:

I knew I was interviewing for a fifth-sixth [inaudible] position. And so that influenced me wanting to do the interview. But the day I interviewed, like, 10 minutes later, I was getting ready to leave, and he came in and offered me the job. I thought he was lying to me when he offered me the position and that they were just messing around [smiling].

Amie believed her student teaching experience in the school benefited her as she entered her first year of teaching, especially related to feeling like she fit in with her colleagues, which fostered a sense of belonging in the school:

So, I feel like my position might be a little different just because I student taught here. So, I knew the ins and outs of the school already. Like for me, sometimes it feels more like I'm a second-year teacher than a first-year, especially since I had that year-long experience. I feel like me subbing as much as I did, gave me a good feel of how, what the other teachers were like, and to see what type of people the school hires.

Jeremy also had a positive student-teaching experience at his school. When his cooperating teacher asked him if he was going to apply, Jeremy felt like it was the perfect opportunity:

And he asked me if I was gonna apply. And so, I really, I slept on it and slept on it, and it just, I felt like [pause] it was just the perfect opportunity almost.

Jeremy's student teaching experience allowed him to build relationships with students, which helped him feel like he belonged in the school:

I built a great rapport with the students, and it was, it was so much fun. Like, it didn't feel like I was a fish out of water. It didn't feel like I was the odd man out, like, I just kind of felt [pause] at home, almost like it was like I wasn't the stranger when I walked into the building [yeah]. I was able to just kind of hit the ground running, in a sense, because I knew everybody.

Molly had a similar experience. She described a positive student-teaching experience that helped her feel like she belonged in her school:

I wanted to feel welcomed and a part of the environment, like, the environment and the staff itself. So, like, they introduced me to everybody to make sure that I wasn't lost, and I was comfortable, and that was a huge thing. And it was very friendly. They, the principal at the time and the superintendent, like, they welcomed me right away at the door. They showed me around. And every admin. has, like, gone out of their way to make sure that I was, like, comfortable, and I'm part of the team.

This positive experience made Molly feel like she might want to teach at the school.

Molly used her time as a student teacher to "vet" the school to make sure it was the right fit for her:

So, when I student taught here, [um] I was just as much as like observing the school and kind of vetting it as much as they were looking at me as a candidate for the position, and the staff environment was huge. When I did, when I did my student teaching, I asked just a lot of the veteran staff that had been there a while, like, is it going to be worth me staying here, and learning and growing here? And then I asked a lot of the students. Like, is it, do you feel like the teachers or the school environment here, like, they want to be here to teach you, or they're willing to help out?

Molly believed her experience growing up in a small town and her student teaching experience benefited her, “I was lucky enough to experience it as a student teacher, and growing up.”

Theme Four: Sense of Purpose

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data was a sense of purpose. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of purpose” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (7) opportunities for impact, and (8) opportunities for advancement. All of the participants described experiences during their first or second year of teaching that impacted their students positively, and their desire to continue making a difference in the lives of their students. Two participants shared their desire to grow and improve in their profession and how their initial teaching position provided them with opportunities for advancement in the future.

Sub-Theme Seven: Opportunities for Impact

Teachers are in a unique position to impact the lives of children. The daily interactions between teachers and students extend beyond the academic content areas and into their social and emotional development. The opportunity for teachers to make a difference in the lives of students was not lost on the participants. Each participant talked about their desire to influence their students positively.

Joey explained the two main reasons he chose to accept a teaching position in a hard-to-staff rural school were need and the desire to feel useful, “Well, the biggest one, weirdly enough, is need. You know, I want to be somewhere where I feel like I'm useful.” He believed there were fewer resources available to students in rural areas and, therefore, he was needed more in rural areas:

There's a lot less resources available. So that was actually one of the things that was attractive to me about it, is feeling like I'd probably be more useful here than if I went to, you know, some highly ranked school over in [Midwestern city] or something like that.

In addition, Joey shared a desire to serve underrepresented students in his community:

We have, in comparison to most schools in [Midwestern state], we have a very, very high minority population. We also have a very, very high-needs population. So those are all areas that I felt like I could be, I could be of more service.

Joey said the most significant impact he could have on his students' lives was to pass his love of learning on to them.

The truth is that I love learning, and I think learning is a wonderful gift. And being able to help other people realize that, and being able to help other people learn, I think, is really rewarding. And, um, I have what I like to call the lightbulb moment of like, you can see like, you know, the switch and a student's mind toggle from like, I don't get this, it's annoying, so I get it. Like, you know, just like being able to help see that moment happen and sometimes being the cause of it is really, really rewarding.

Jeremy first realized he could make a difference in students' lives when he joined a peer tutoring program at his high school.

They had a program at [Midwestern Town 3] where you could peer tutor with the elementary. So, if you're a senior, you can go for a class period. We did block scheduling, so it was about an hour and a half, and so I worked with the fourth-grade class, and I would just kind of go in there and observe. And then I would [pause]; I ended up helping, like, not [pause] not slower students, but students who just kind of behavior-wise, like, they had problems staying on task, so they were behind and stuff. So, I started working with a couple of those students, and immediately they would [pause]; before they wouldn't be doing their homework, and they'd immediately just start doing everything, and like just start performing better and I just, I started liking it more.

Another high school experience that helped Jeremy realize he could make a difference in the lives of students was when he was working with first graders during an activity day the school planned.

There was an event for the Eclipse, and it was an optional school day, but

my dad told me since it was an optional school day, and as my senior year, my dad told me it was optional for the high schoolers, but Elementary was having a whole project day. And so we went, and the whole day I walked around with, I believe it was first graders. And the whole day, I had ten of them trying to hold my hand and walking with me at the same time. And then, the next day, the school counselor told me that she thought that I would be a good teacher, and so that's kind of how I transitioned.

Jeremy explained he had the opportunity to work with students who challenged their regular classroom teachers during his student-teaching experience. His positive experience working with these students helped solidify his decision to apply for the open teaching position.

Another reason why it just kind of felt right was [pause]; some of the students who had just kind of talked to other teachers, they'd say they're problem students. They are disrespectful, always talking back and whatever. But a couple of the students, they would, they really were just really good for me, you know, like, I was able to [pause]; when I student taught, I literally built relationships with every single person. [Inaudible] like students who played sports, students who watched anime, did whatever, like, I kind of do all of that.

Jeremy shared some of the ways he had made a difference in his students' lives during his first year of teaching:

And so, in my group, there was a student who was an eighth grader at the time, but she was failing every class, and she was always saying she wanted to go home school and I just said you don't want to do that. And so, as the quarter was going on, as much as she complained, she was getting her work done. Her grades were going up. We're talking, and she's doing much, like, much, much better in school. And so, like, I was already seeing, like, I'm already making an impact. Like, it just felt wrong to leave and just not, like, lose that opportunity. And so, like, I'm already [pause]; I was already seeing, like, I'm already making an impact. And so just, yes, small stuff like that just kind of contributed.

Layla also had opportunities in high school to work with and help students:

And then, once I hit ninth grade, she [orchestra teacher] had seen me kind of as a leader in my groups and a leader in the school and asked me to come back to kind of be a helper with the group and work with kids one-on-one and help them with their music. And so, she had given me that opportunity in a sense to kind of branch out in my first educational teaching experience and kind of get one-on-one education with students. And that was a huge transformative experience for me

because, you know, it was my first actual glimpse of, you know, this is what teaching music looks like.

Layla believed she made a positive impact in these students' lives:

And this is kind of how it feels, and it was really nice to build connections with the students that I did. And to feel like I was making a difference to that overall group in the kids' overall education with music. Some of them, at this point, even have come back to me and been like, you know, I really appreciated when you would be there to help, and I felt like I learned so much on that one-on-one basis. And that had just kind of been, like, the solidifying thing for me that, you know, music education is cool, and it's something, you know, that I find enjoyment from, and you know if you find a job that you get joy from, then you're not really working.

Molly spoke about an influential teacher she had in high school that helped her understand how teachers can make a difference in their student's lives:

One teacher that I did have, he wanted you to be the best that you could be on the court or like off the court. And I didn't really know I wanted to go into teaching, like, to actually teach, until I was probably about a junior. But, he just, [um], really played an influence, like, like, you could make a difference. Like, it just mattered. Like him being there to a lot of us just really mattered. And I really wanted to, kind of, be that person for the kids that, like, don't feel like they have anybody that cares. So that was a big influence just to kind of be the person that mattered.

Molly also shared that some of her college professors became her education role models because of the high standards they set for students:

Getting into college, you got, like, we got to see, like, our professors and stuff. And they are people that, like, I just want to embody to be like, as a teacher. Their standards are set so high, and they're just amazing. So, it's the role model feel of that was something that I would like to become eventually.

Molly carried these experiences with her while searching for teaching positions, "I really wanted a school that provided for its students first at all costs."

Amie talked about an influential teacher she had and how that teacher made her the person she is today:

Um, so, [teacher's name], my math, the math teacher, since it was a private school, a lot of it was faith-based. And that, I think, kind of aided in the ability to know, like, what felt right and what felt wrong and stuff. So, a lot of the times, I find myself saying stuff to the kids, and I'm like, yep, [teacher's name] would have said that too. So that, with the relationship of my religion in play when I was growing up, really helped in knowing that what she was doing, even though it felt like she was being strict, was aiding us later on. It made us the people that we are today, a lot of my classmates at the time.

Amie also shared she had a teacher whom she did not have a positive experience with and how that experience drove her to be better:

She was our FFA advisor. And I don't, I don't really know how to describe it. The way she made us feel, I told myself I will never make anyone feel like that. She did a lot of like [pause], just she wasn't really kind. That's like the best way to put it is that she made sure that, like [pause], I personally, she made it feel like we just weren't what she wanted us to be. And I didn't like that.

Sub-Theme Eight: Opportunities for Advancement

Layla and Jeremy discussed their desire to grow and advance in their profession. Finding a school district that would support their growth was an important factor they considered before accepting their initial teaching position. Layla believed the culture in her school encourages teachers to try new things and grow:

It definitely felt, as I was coming into the school district, like there's a lot of backing between administration and teachers and a willingness to support the teachers as they grow and try new things and try out different curriculum and different lessons and different ideas and willing to support the teachers as needed and willing to give feedback should we ask for it.

Layla also said she likes her small town right now, but she doesn't think she'll stay at her small rural school forever.

A lot of times, it definitely makes it feel like I do love my positioning and where I am, but it definitely feels like this isn't the place that I would stay for all eternity, you know, especially as I were to grow and to create a family and to just kind of grow outside of myself.

Jeremy said his initial teaching placement was a starting point for his career, and he planned on moving to a larger school district in the future:

So, I was like, you know what, this a great spot to build my curriculum. It's a great spot to, you know, get ready for moving forward. I wanted to [pause]; I wanted to really use this opportunity that I was given to develop my craft, as they say.

Jeremy explained:

I make north of \$50,000 with the \$11,000 stipend and head football coach job. And so, by the time [pause]; hopefully, by the time I complete my Master's when I move to a new school, I won't be really losing much because I'll be, I'll be right back up to where what I was making.

Jeremy described his initial thoughts about some of the opportunities his school offered him during the interview:

When I interviewed, they asked me if I wanted to take over his role as Athletic Director, and I was like, absolutely not [laughing]. But I was like, but, you know, I am gonna get my Master's in administration. I was like, not the first year, but maybe down the road.

Although Jeremy turned down the initial offer to be the school's Athletic Director, a similar opportunity arose for the next school year:

And so, they split it up into two ADs, you know, co-ADs. So it's kind of lightened the workload that [cooperating teacher] did. And so there's an opening for this year, and they asked me if I wanted to do the co-Athletic Director and pick up some other responsibilities. And so now I'm kind of accruing more and more [pause] more responsibilities, but I'm also able to learn more about it. Then, like, for the Athletic Director, I'm not having to do all the contracts and everything. And so, I'll be, I'll be getting paid a little more for that too.

Jeremy was appreciative of the many opportunities his school offered:

Like I'm slowly just starting to be able to absorb everything like a [pause]; like a sponge almost. And so, [pause]; it's, it just has a lot of opportunities, and it was an opportunistic place.

Summary of Themes

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. This study focused on the lived experiences of first-year and second-year teachers related to the motivational factors they considered before accepting initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in the Midwestern state selected for this study. Data collection included six semi-formal interviews. The interviews were transcribed and coded. Four themes and eight sub-themes emerged from the data.

The first theme was a sense of connectedness. Participant descriptions resulted in two sub-themes: (1) rural connections, and (2) personal connections. The concept of connectedness is broad yet essential to this study because the participants described how they experienced a sense of connectedness with the town or school where they worked. Participants described this sense of connectedness as coming from personal relationships or past experiences in rural communities. Personal relationships with family, friends, or cooperating teachers directly impacted all six participants' motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools. Some participants, especially those who grew up in rural communities, created assumptions about living in rural communities based on their past experiences. These assumptions were largely positive and led the participants to believe they understood the norms of all rural communities better than those who had never experienced living in rural communities.

The second theme was sense of support. Participant descriptions within the theme "sense of support" resulted in a third sub-theme: (3) emotional support structures. The

participants' believed teaching is a demanding profession that is stressful at times.

Therefore, participants shared the importance of emotional support structures in their personal and professional lives. The participants included family, friends, and colleagues as the primary structures for emotional support. These supportive relationships led all the participants to search for and accept teaching positions in communities near their family or friends.

The fourth sub-theme that emerged within the theme "sense of support" was: (4) resource support structures. Participants shared the importance of resource support structures in their communities and schools. Some of the community resource support structures the participants included were healthcare, grocery stores, and retail shopping. The participants had no consensus regarding the most important community resource support structures. Four of the six participants lived in communities that required them to travel to larger communities to access essential services like grocery shopping and healthcare. Two participants lived in larger communities and commuted forty miles daily to and from work. However, none of the participants expressed a desire to leave their teaching position because of the commute or said the need to travel to larger communities was a factor they considered before accepting their initial teaching position.

Participants described school-based resource support structures as essential factors during their initial job search and after they accepted their initial teaching position. School-based resource support structures included administrative support, salary, benefits, and extra-duty contracts. School-based resource support structures were more important to the participants than community support structures; however, once again, there was no consensus among the participants regarding which school-based

support structures were the most important. Overall, a sense of administrative and collegial support was most important to the participants. Certain benefits, such as stipends and leave, were less important to all participants during their initial job search and interviews. However, benefits like these and extra duty contracts may have swayed some participants to accept or decline certain teaching positions.

The third theme, sense of belonging, was among the most powerful themes of the study. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of belonging” resulted in two sub-themes: (5) belonging in the local community, and (6) belonging in the school community. Each participant explained how their communities made them feel welcomed and at home. Although there were not many specific examples of how each community made them feel welcome, the participants described a general friendliness in the town, which made them feel comfortable and welcome in the community. A sense of belonging in the school community was even more powerful. Five participants had ties to the school through relationships with school staff, administration, and students. These relationships impacted their decision to apply for and accept their initial teaching positions.

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data was sense of purpose. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of purpose: resulted in two sub-themes: (7) opportunities for impact, and (8) opportunities for advancement. All of the participants shared their desire to make a positive difference in the lives of their students. Participants also explained how previous educational experiences and interactions with teachers in their past shaped their view of how they could have a positive impact on their students. In addition, two participants described their desire to grow and improve in their

profession and how their initial teaching position provided them with opportunities for advancement in the future.

Overall Themes and Relationships to Literature Review

The themes discovered through the research connect to the information found in the literature review. As discussed in the literature review, the existing body of research related to teacher recruitment was mainly conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and was focused on hard-to-staff urban settings and rural southern regions in the United States. Therefore, further exploration was needed to understand post-pandemic motivational factors that influence teachers to accept initial teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in Midwestern states.

This study aimed to answer the central research question: **What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state?** Four sub-questions were also investigated. These questions were:

1. How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
2. How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
3. How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
4. Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Data was collected through six semi-formal interviews. The themes that emerged from the data analysis process connected to information gathered in the literature review. In addition, the themes responded to the central question and sub-questions.

Connection Between Themes and Literature Review

In Chapter Two, research was reviewed to identify teacher retention and recruitment practices in response to the current teacher shortage many school districts are experiencing. In addition, the expectancy-value theory of motivation was explored as a philosophical framework for teacher motivation. The following sections examine the central themes that emerged from the interview data and connect them to the components identified in the literature review.

Theme One: Sense of Connectedness

Participants described personal connections that provided a sense of connectedness in their local community and school community. Five of the six participants in this study completed their student-teacher experience at the school where they accepted their initial teaching position. These participants conveyed a sense of comfort during the application process because they made personal connections with local and school community members during student teaching. The relationships with their cooperating teachers and school administrators were especially powerful, inasmuch as they believed these relationships were the foundation of their understanding of the school's culture and the expectations for teachers in their school districts. The participants' experiences in this study support research conducted by Engel and Curran (2016), which indicated K-12 schools that encouraged higher levels of preservice teacher

engagement had fewer teacher recruitment and hiring issues than schools with lower levels of preservice teacher engagement.

All six participants described experiences they had in rural communities during their childhood or through family who lived in the rural community where they accepted their initial teaching positions. Some participants also graduated from post-secondary institutions located in rural communities. The participants explained how their encounters with rural communities were largely positive, and they believed it helped them understand what it was like to live in rural communities, including how to adapt to the geographic isolation often associated with remote rural localities. Understanding the unique challenges and benefits of living and working in rural communities supports research indicating pre-service teacher preparation programs that highlight the attributes of rural communities improved teacher recruitment efforts in hard-to-staff rural schools (Barley, 2009; Booth et al., 2021; Irving et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020). In addition, research from Goodpaster et al. (2012) and Oyen and Schweinle (2020) suggested being from a rural community was a significant variable that influenced preservice teachers to apply for and accept rural teaching positions.

Positive, prior experiences with rural communities like those described by the participants align with the expectancy-value theory of motivation. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) included ability beliefs and expectations for success as two of the core elements of the expectancy-value theory of motivation. When applied to the participants' lived experiences in this study, a sense of connectedness to the local and school community helped them feel confident in their ability to live in a rural community. It also gave them a glimpse into successful teaching in a rural school, which improved their sense of self-

efficacy and may lead to improved teacher retention (Banghart, 2021; Reitman & Karge, 2019).

Theme Two: Sense of Support

Participants described the teaching profession as rewarding, demanding, and stressful. To help cope with the demands and stress of the profession, participants discussed the importance of having supportive family and friends. As a result, participants cited the importance of finding a job near their family and friends. This finding supports Reininger's (2012) research that found a potential correlation between high school students who value living close to home and the likelihood they become teachers. In addition, all but one of the participants were from the Midwestern state in this study, which supports research from Podgursky et al. (2016) that suggested low interstate mobility rates among teachers.

The participants in this study consistently said distance from family and friends was the number one factor they considered when searching for initial teaching positions. Although none of the participants mentioned smaller class sizes as a benefit to teaching in a rural school, two of the six participants said they were looking for schools and communities similar to the rural communities where they grew up. Two of the other participants said they wanted to begin their teaching career in a small, rural community. These data support research from Tran et al. (2020) and Ulferts (2015) that found family, job security, smaller class sizes, and a desire to live in a rural community were critical factors that attracted teachers to rural schools.

After family and friends, the second most common factor participants said they were looking for when choosing their first teaching position was supportive colleagues

and administrators. All but one of the six participants completed their student teaching experience in the district where they accepted their initial teaching contract. These participants perceived their cooperating teachers, colleagues, and administrators as supportive and collaborative. Layla was the only participant who did not complete her student teaching experience in her school district. However, she said, “Unity, especially within the school district and with that mission,” was essential to her. She also believed it was important to see evidence of “trying to grow as a school and trying to improve their students and improve the overall community and culture of achievement.” All of these factors support Lee’s (2005) research on developing strategic teacher recruitment plans that distinguish the school district from others and highlight what the district has to offer teachers, including a collegial work environment, supportive school and district leadership, professional development opportunities, and evidence of student learning outcomes.

In addition to emotional support, participants named several important resource support structures, including compensation, stipends, benefits, and extra duty assignments. These resources, while important, were not described as the most significant factors the participants considered when determining which teaching position to accept. Compensation mattered to some of the younger teachers. Jeremy and Molly discussed the stress of paying bills for the first time. However, neither Molly nor Jeremy said the base salary was why they accepted or declined contracts extended to them, and Molly was the only participant to say salary was an important factor.

None of the participants mentioned insurance as a meaningful benefit; however, Jeremy was excited to learn about the \$11,000 stipend he received for not taking the

district's insurance benefit. Although it was not the main reason he accepted his teaching position, Jeremy said it helped make up his mind because it could help him achieve future goals like "buying a house, buying a car, and maybe having a family." Jimmy and Joey listed benefits that supported their ability to spend time with their spouses and children. Both participants said they were excited to teach their children, which is a benefit of teaching in small rural schools, because they were the only Spanish and Special Education teachers in their respective schools. Jimmy also described his excitement to share vacation time with his wife, who was also a teacher in the district.

Molly and Jeremy were the only participants who talked about extracurricular contracts. Jeremy wanted to coach football. He said the ability to coach was one of the most important things he was looking for, "I would say, you know, as a football player in college football player, coaching, that was huge, that was a huge aspect of it." Molly, on the other hand, was not interested in taking on any extra duty contracts during her first year:

I didn't want to be way overloaded, especially in my first year of teaching, and if they were okay with me, like, taking a step back or not saying yes to certain things that I maybe wasn't as comfortable with taking on right away."

In fact, Molly said the required extra duty assignments in one district "kind of eliminated" the school from consideration.

These data support research from See et al. (2020) and Ulferts (2015) that found benefits such as signing bonuses and loan forgiveness were not significant factors preservice teachers considered when accepting an initial teaching position. In addition, these data support research from Berry et al. (2011) that suggested factors school administrators believed were significant, including benefits, remote locations, and

paperwork, were less significant than other factors. The significance of base pay to the participants in this study was less clear. Studies from See et al. (2020), Tran and Smith (2019), and Ulferts (2015) determined base salary was the number one factor preservice considered when accepting a teaching position. Only three participants talked about salary during the interview, and only Molly said it was a factor she considered before accepting her first teaching contract. The other participants did not mention salary as a factor they considered.

In a 2007 study of teacher motivation, Watt and Richardson described cost value as the effort, financial, and emotional costs associated with performing a task. Thompson and Palermo (2018) expanded this definition by including the perceived usefulness of future goals and competition with other goals. All six participants in this study described the importance of cost value as it relates to emotional support, especially supportive family, friends, colleagues, and administrators. However, financial cost value did not have the same significance to the participants when compared to other factors.

Theme Three: Sense of Belonging

The findings of a 2005 study by Hammer et al. suggested the most impactful teacher recruitment strategies involved strategic planning in recruiting the best people for the right job and school district. The participants in this study also shared the importance of finding a job that fit what they were looking for in their initial teaching position. These criteria included extracurricular assignments, alignment of personal values with the mission and vision of the school district, and feeling welcomed by a friendly local community. However, all participants described specific job-related factors they were looking for, including their preferred grade levels, specific curriculum content, and

specific extra-duty assignments such as coaching and sponsoring activities. These results supported Lee's (2005) findings that outlined critical components of strategic teacher recruitment plans, including marketing strategies to distinguish the school district from others by highlighting what the district has to offer teachers.

The perception of feeling wanted by the school district was a powerful motivator for the participants in this study to accept their first teaching contract. In addition, the participants described how feeling wanted also created the perception they belonged in the school community. For example, Amie, Joey, Jeremy, and Jimmy were all encouraged to apply for their teaching positions by school community members. Personal invitations to apply for open positions support teacher recruitment and teacher retention. Feeling isolated significantly contributes to new teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jung, 2010; Minarik et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Personal connections with school community members reduce feelings of isolation (Nielsen et al., 2007).

Participants also described an appreciation for efficient hiring practices. All participants described a fast turnaround time between the interview and the job offer, which made them feel desired by the school district. Layla, who was from a large western city, said the time between the interview and the job offer was short:

There hadn't been a ton of turnaround between the time I had interviewed with them as to when they had offered me the position as opposed to, you know, a couple of the bigger districts.

Layla said she "Respected the fact they wanted me to be in their district, and that influenced me as I was moving forward." Amie said she knew "this was my dream job" when she received a job offer just ten minutes after the interview.

DeFeo and Tran (2019) and Engel and Curran (2016) found many rural schools do not have human relations departments that control hiring. Instead, one person, usually the principal or superintendent, is responsible for every aspect of the hiring process. In contrast, urban school districts often have large bureaucratic hiring systems that can slow the hiring process (Levine & Quinn, 2003). Therefore, rural schools may have an advantage over urban schools because they can be more efficient when offering teaching contracts.

Watt and Richardson (2007) described intrinsic value as one of the critical components in the expectancy-value theory of motivation. Intrinsic value emphasizes the enjoyment and satisfaction an individual experiences when performing a task. All six participants in this study described the importance of intrinsic value related to their perception of belonging in their school and local communities. They described feeling satisfied with their decision to accept their initial teaching contracts because the position met the job-related factors they sought, which translated to a sense of professional fulfillment. They were also satisfied with their school and local communities and described them as warm, friendly, tight-knit, and welcoming, which conveyed a sense of belonging.

Theme Four: Sense of Purpose

McClannon (2018) suggested altruistic motivation, such as the desire to positively impact students and feeling like they are making a difference in society, were more powerful motivational factors among nontraditional prospective teachers like Joey and Jimmy than traditional prospective teachers like Molly, Layla, Jeremy, and Amie.

However, all of the participants in this study said the opportunity to impact students' lives was why they chose to enter the teaching profession.

In addition, most participants shared how former high school teachers or college professors guided their decision to become teachers. Positive past educational experiences were especially important to Molly, Amie, Jeremy, and Layla. Amie described how an influential mathematics teacher continues to impact her teaching style today:

She taught math at [Catholic school] and was just amazing. She was very strict, and I thrived on that. She just made it really easy to learn, and her expectations were clear from, like, the first day, and I really liked that. I find myself saying stuff to the kids, and I'm like, yep, [teacher's name] would have said that too.

Molly shared how an influential teacher made a difference in her life, and now she wants to “pay it forward” by supporting her students:

But, he just, [um], really played an influence, like, you could make a difference. Like, it just mattered. Like him being there to a lot of us just really mattered. Having that support system there really just was like, man, I could do that for somebody, and there's a lot of kids out there that probably face things that they think they're alone in, and they're really not.

Molly also explained her college professors' impact on her idea of what a good teacher should look like:

And they are people that, like, I just want to embody to be like as a teacher. Their standards are set so high, and they're just amazing.

These descriptions support the findings in studies by Watt and Richardson (2007) and Lee et al. (2005) that ability beliefs related to positive prior teaching and learning experiences were among the highest-rated factors influencing college students' decision to pursue education as a career.

Jeremy was involved in a peer tutoring program at his high school. He described how the program helped guide him into teaching:

They had a program at [Midwestern school] positively where you could peer tutor with the elementary. I ended up helping, like, not [pause] not slower students, but students who just kind of behavior-wise, like, they had problems staying on task, so they were behind and stuff. So, I started working with a couple of those students and immediately they would [pause]; before they wouldn't be doing their homework, and they'd immediately just start doing everything, and, like, just start performing better, and I just started liking it more.

Layla also participated in a peer teaching program in high school. She described the experience as “transformative” and explained how the experience helped her understand the positive impact she could have on students:

And then I hit ninth grade. She [an influential teacher] had seen me kind of as a leader in my groups and a leader in the school and asked me to come back to the kind of be a helper with the group and work with kids one-on-one and help them with their music. And that was a huge transformative experience for me because, you know, it was my first actual glimpse of, you know, this is what teaching music looks like and to feel like I was making a difference to that overall group in the kids' overall education with music.

The high school experiences described by Jeremy and Layla support the findings of a 2021 study from Mancenido that changing negative conceptions about the teaching profession requires a shift in the discourse about teaching through intentional programs and policies that highlight the positive aspects of teaching. In addition, efforts like this support the long-term potential of grow-your-own teacher programs in high schools to improve teacher recruitment (Hammer et al., 2005; Irving et al., 2020).

Jeremy and Layla were also motivated by their future goals. Jeremy viewed his school district as an “opportunistic place” where he could “build his curriculum” and complete a Master’s degree program to prepare him for his future goal of being a teacher, coach, and administrator in a larger school district. Layla said she was satisfied with her

current position, but she was not sure it was the place she wanted to say “for all eternity.” However, she viewed her school as a positive place to begin her career because she believed the mission and vision of the district aligned with her personality and teaching philosophy. She also felt the district supported teachers to “grow and try new things.” These descriptions support a study by Tran et al. (2020) that found the most impactful teacher recruitment strategies for rural schools included highlighting the advantages of living and working in rural communities and appealing to altruistic and other intrinsic motivators.

Joey took a nontraditional route into the teaching profession. He wanted to teach somewhere he felt “useful” and believed rural communities had “a lot less resources available.” Joey participated in a para-to-teacher program at a post-secondary institution forty miles from his community. He described how his school’s administration supported his decision to pursue a teaching certificate:

We [school administration] want you here, and we understand you're going to get your degree. We wish you luck, and we hope that when you do get your degree, you will want to be here, but not a requirement or anything like that.

Joey said he wanted to stay in the community because he already “knew the school” and had “really good” relationships with the administration, teachers, and students because he had worked with them for several years.

Jimmy was a social worker before becoming a teacher. However, he and his wife ran an after-school program before coming to the United States. Jimmy felt supported by his school while finishing the credits needed to teach in his Midwestern community. Additionally, he shared his excitement about helping students meet the foreign language requirements to support their future goals:

For college credits or for, I don't know, whatever the colleges or universities want for the two years of foreign language, but I feel that I, as you know, there are students that really have learned a lot.

The experiences described by Joey and Jimmy support research from Palermo (2018) that suggested previous work experiences positively influenced nontraditional preservice teachers' motivation to become teachers, especially when the work experience related to teaching. They also support the implementation of grow-your-own teacher programs that identify adults in the community interested in switching careers to teaching (Hammer et al., 2005).

Positive, past educational experiences that foster the desire to make a positive difference in students' lives align with the expectancy-value theory of motivation. Watt and Richardson (2007) described social utility value as the importance society places on a task. When applied to teacher motivation, Thompson and Palermo (2018) defined social utility value as a sense of altruism or duty to improve society. The participants in this study were highly motivated by social utility values. Their aspiration to serve as positive role models and desire to help students achieve their goals stood out as exceptional examples of why they chose to become teachers.

Summary of Themes' Relationships to Literature Review

The participants in this study shared similar beliefs, values, and characteristics as participants in previous studies. One commonality was a sense of connectedness to their school and community through personal connections. Five of the six participants in this study completed their student-teacher experience at the school where they accepted their initial teaching position, which provided a sense of comfort during the application process. Positive relationships with their cooperating teachers and school administrators

provided the foundation for understanding the school's culture and the expectations for teachers in their school districts.

Participants also felt a sense of connectedness to their rural community and school through past rural experiences. All six participants described experiences they had in rural communities during their childhood or through family who lived in the rural community where they accepted their initial teaching positions. The participants explained how their encounters with rural communities were largely positive, and they believed it helped them understand what it was like to live in rural communities, including how to adapt to the geographic isolation often associated with remote rural localities.

A second commonality was a sense of support. Participants described the teaching profession as rewarding, demanding, and stressful. To cope with the demands and stress of the profession, participants discussed the importance of having supportive family and friends for emotional support. As a result, participants cited the importance of finding a job near their family and friends. After family and friends, the second most common factor participants said they were looking for when choosing their first teaching position was supportive colleagues and administrators. They described their cooperating teachers, colleagues, and administrators as supportive and collaborative. In addition to emotional support, participants named several important resource support structures, including compensation, stipends, benefits, and extra duty assignments. These resources, while important, were not described as the most significant factors the participants considered when determining which teaching position to accept.

A sense of belonging was the third commonality among the participants. The participants in this study shared the importance of finding a job that fit what they were looking for in their initial teaching position, including job-related factors such as preferred grade levels, curriculum content, and specific extra-duty assignments. There was a common perception among the participants that feeling wanted by the school district was a powerful motivator to accept their first teaching contract. A short turnaround time between the interview and the contract offer characterizes efficient hiring practices.

The final commonality was a sense of purpose. The participants shared positive past educational and work experiences that influenced their decision to become teachers. These experiences instilled a sense of altruism that remained with them through their first and second years of teaching. Shared altruistic values were conveyed by a desire to pass on their love of learning to students, provide support to students, and positively impact students' lives. Some participants also shared their future goals and believed their initial teaching position provided opportunities for professional growth and advancement.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the study's purpose and research questions, the approach to the study, and data analysis procedures. Implications of the findings are discussed and organized around four central themes and eight supporting sub-themes, and the research questions are reviewed in relationship to the findings of the study. Finally, the study's limitations, recommendations for targeted audiences, and suggestions for future research are presented at the end of the chapter.

Summary

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. This study focused on the lived experiences of six first-year and second-year teachers and the factors they considered before accepting their initial teaching contracts.

Phenomenology is a research approach that describes lived experiences to uncover meaning in everyday phenomena typically overlooked or assumed (Vagel, 2018). Phenomenology is distinguished from other forms of social inquiry because it does not necessarily aim to explain phenomena, but rather to understand how individuals experience phenomena (Van Manen, 2014). Therefore, a phenomenology approach was selected to understand lived experiences of the first-year and second-year teachers in this study related to the motivational factors they considered before accepting teaching positions in FAR (Frontier and Remote) Level IV communities (Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, 2019).

This study used criterion-based and convenience sampling procedures to purposefully select participants whose lived experiences provided a better understanding of the central research question of this study. Emails were sent to twenty-six principals in twelve school districts in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. The purpose of the principal emails was to identify teachers who met the criteria for this study. Twelve of the twenty-six principals responded with a return rate of forty-six percent. Next, a participation interest email was sent to thirty-eight teachers who met the criteria for this study. Seven teachers responded to the email with a return rate of eighteen percent. Six of the seven respondents agreed to participate in the study.

Data were collected through six individual interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol. Participants had the option to conduct interviews in person or remotely using the Zoom video conferencing application. All of the participants chose to conduct interviews remotely. Audio recordings of each interview were made using two digital recording devices and the application Otter.ai for transcription purposes. Observational notes were recorded during each interview, and reflective notes and voice memos recorded initial takeaways after each interview.

Transcript analysis for each interview included in vivo coding and axial coding. In vivo coding captured the participant's voice, and axial coding provided structure to organize in vivo codes to discover underlying patterns and relationships within the data. Axial codes were analyzed, resulting in the emergence of four themes and eight sub-themes.

This study aimed to answer the central research question: **What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state?** Four sub-questions were also investigated:

1. How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
2. How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
3. How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?
4. Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Four themes emerged from the data: (1) sense of connectedness, (2) sense of support, (3) sense of belonging, and (4) sense of purpose. Each theme had two supporting sub-themes resulting in a total of eight sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes are displayed in Table 8. The themes, sub-themes, and implications are discussed in the next section.

Table 8

Themes and Sub-Themes

| Theme One | Theme Two | Theme Three | Theme Four |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Sense of Connectedness | Sense of Support | Sense of Belonging | Sense of Purpose |
| (1) Rural Connection | (3) Emotional Structures | (5) Belonging in the School Community | (7) Opportunities for Impact |
| (2) Personal Connections | (4) Resource Structures | (6) Belonging in the Local Community | (8) Opportunities for Advancement |

Discussion

Theme One: Sense of Connectedness

Participants described a sense of connectedness to the rural communities where they lived and worked. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of connectedness” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (1) rural connections, and (2) personal connections. These connections were related to family who lived in their community, personal history with the geographic area, or past experiences in other rural communities. During interviews, the participants explained how these connections helped them feel grounded in their town or school district. Other participants described relationships with trusted individuals who provided guidance and encouragement when deciding which teaching position to accept.

Sub-Theme One: Rural Connections

The first sub-theme emerged from descriptions of participants' experiences in rural communities. All six participants grew up in a rural community; or had family who lived in the community where they accepted their initial teaching contract. In addition, five of the participants attended post-secondary institutions located near rural communities. These experiences and family connections provided participants with an understanding of what it was like to live in a rural community, especially related to their ability to adapt to the geographic isolation and perceived lack of entertainment and commerce associated with rural communities (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Participants also described the benefits associated with living in a small town. These benefits included the perception that small towns are friendly,

welcoming, and tight-knit. As a result, the participants felt connected to the culture of their towns (Barley, 2009; Booth et al., 2021; Irving et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020).

Sub Theme Two: Personal Connections

Participants also described personal connections other than family that provided a sense of connectedness in their local and school communities. Five of the six participants in this study completed their student-teaching experience at the school where they accepted their initial teaching contract. These participants conveyed a sense of comfort during the application process because they made personal connections with local and school community members during student teaching. Relationships with cooperating teachers and school administrators were especially powerful. The participants believed these relationships provided a foundation for their understanding of the school's culture and the expectations for teachers in their school districts, which led to an elevated sense of self-efficacy (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jung, 2010; Minarik et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

A 2019 study from McHenry-Sorber and Campbell found school district leaders believed teacher shortages were related to state contexts, salaries, and other policies beyond their control. However, increasing preservice teacher engagement in hard-to-staff rural schools is something districts can control, and research from Engel and Curran (2016) suggested K-12 schools that encouraged higher levels of preservice teacher engagement had fewer teacher recruitment and hiring issues than schools with lower levels of preservice teacher engagement.

Implications

There are important implications for school administrators recruiting teachers in hard-to-staff rural school districts. First, school administrators must build positive relationships with post-secondary colleges of education to bring student teachers into their schools. These efforts are significant for content areas like mathematics, science, special education, and foreign language, which are most affected by the teaching shortage (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). In addition, school administrators must actively build relationships with preservice teachers completing their student-teaching experience by supporting student teachers in the classroom and encouraging cooperating teachers to do the same. A study by Rich et al. (2020) suggested targeted support from a cohesive support network of school administrators, university professors, and mentor teachers positively impacted preservice teacher efficacy and classroom performance. The relationships developed through these support networks create the conditions for effective and timely communication between schools and post-secondary institutions about school staffing needs and preservice teacher performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003).

There are also implications for post-secondary education departments. Post-secondary institutions can be viewed as silos within a community with culture and feel much different than the local community. Therefore, post-secondary education departments that work with rural schools to build pre-service teacher preparation programs highlighting the attributes and challenges of living and working in rural communities may improve teacher recruitment in hard-to-staff rural schools (Barley, 2009; Booth et al., 2021; Irving et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020). In addition, post-secondary education departments should consider supporting grow-your-own teacher

programs to combat the national trend of declining enrollment numbers in teacher preparation programs (Berry & Shields, 2017).

Theme Two: Sense of Support

During interviews, participants perceived the teaching profession as rewarding, demanding, and stressful. Therefore, the second theme that emerged from the data was a sense of support. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of support” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (3) emotional support structures, and (4) resource support structures. Participants expressed the importance of support structures in their personal and professional lives. Participants listed family, friends, and colleagues as their primary structures for emotional support. Participants also listed administrative support, extra duties, salary, and benefits such as retirement, vacation, and stipends as important resource support structures.

Sub-Theme Three: Emotional Support Structures

Participants characterized emotional support structures as trusted people who provided emotional support during challenging times or stressful situations. Participants said family and friends were their most important emotional support structures. As a result, participants cited the importance of finding a job near their family and friends. This finding supports Reininger’s (2012) research that teachers are more likely to live within 20 miles of their home town than other college graduates, and a potential correlation between high school students who value living close to home and the likelihood they become teachers. In addition, all but one of the participants were from the Midwestern state in this study, which supports research from Podgursky et al. (2016) that found low interstate mobility rates among teachers.

After family and friends, the second most common factor participants sought when choosing their first teaching position was supportive colleagues and administrators. All but one of the participants completed their student teaching experience in the district where they accepted their initial teaching contract. These participants perceived their cooperating teachers, colleagues, and administrators as supportive and collaborative. In addition, participants sought a sense of unity and support within the school related to a culture of teacher growth and student achievement. All of these factors support Lee's (2005) research on developing strategic teacher recruitment plans that distinguish the school district from others and highlight what the district has to offer teachers, including a collegial work environment, supportive school and district leadership, professional development opportunities, and evidence of student learning outcomes.

Sub Theme Four: Resource Support Structures

Data analysis revealed several important resource support structures, including compensation, stipends, benefits, and extra duty assignments. However, the participants did not describe these resources as the most significant factors they considered when determining which teaching position to accept. These data support research from See et al. (2020) and Ulferts (2015) that suggested benefits such as signing bonuses and loan forgiveness were not significant factors preservice teachers considered when accepting an initial teaching contract. The significance of compensation to the participants in this study was less clear. Studies from See et al. (2020), Tran and Smith (2019), and Ulferts (2015) found base salary was the number one factor preservice considered when accepting a teaching position. However, only three participants in this study mentioned

compensation during the interviews, and only one said it was a factor she considered before accepting her first teaching contract.

Implications

The findings in this study revealed an implication for rural school administrators developing strategic teacher recruitment plans. Teacher recruitment efforts in hard-to-staff rural schools should focus on the district's geographic area. Reininger (2012) posited teachers are more likely to live and work within twenty miles of their hometown than other college graduates. Reininger's study also found a potential correlation between high school students who valued living close to home and the likelihood they become teachers. Therefore, high schools may consider creating databases to track graduates who chose to study education in college and find value in sharing these databases with other area school districts to assist in targeted and strategic teacher recruitment efforts.

There are also implications for policymakers who have focused on relaxed certification requirements, alternative pathways to certification, and increased certification reciprocity between states to reduce the impact of teacher shortages (Aragon, 2018). Instead, policymakers may consider funding programs to assist state Departments of Education to support efforts by high schools to build databases that effectively track graduates as they matriculate through post-secondary teacher preparation programs. In addition, policymakers must find ways to fully fund public education to raise teacher pay, improve benefits, and develop stronger learning communities focused on teacher professional development impacting student achievement (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

Theme Three: Sense of Belonging

The third theme, sense of belonging, was among the most significant themes of the study. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of belonging” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (5) belonging in the local community, and (6) belonging in the school community. All six participants described their local communities as welcoming, tight-knit, friendly, and helpful. Layla and Joey believed small towns could be “cliquey,” so they sought communities where they felt welcomed and the people seemed friendly. The other participants believed small towns are inherently welcoming and friendly, which made it easier to build relationships. Although the participants did not cite specific examples of how each community made them feel welcome, there was consensus that their friendly, welcoming community provided them with the sense of belonging they sought in a community.

The participants also described a sense of belonging in the school community. Five participants completed their student-teaching experience in the school where they accepted their first teaching contract. These student-teaching experiences enabled the participants to develop relationships with school staff, administration, and students. Consequently, four of the participants were encouraged to apply for a teaching position in the district where they student taught, and the fifth participant said she used her student-teaching opportunity to “vet” the school as much as the school used her student-teaching experience to vet her.

Sub-Theme Five: Belonging in the Local Community

A sense of belonging in the local community was essential to the participants. Participants who did not grow up in rural communities explained they did not necessarily

envision themselves living and working in a rural, Midwestern community. However, they perceived small towns as friendly and believed small towns provided a better sense of community than urban population centers, which was important to them. These participants also shared how small gestures like strangers waving hello to each other made their communities feel like everyone knew each other.

The participants who grew up in rural communities sought communities that reminded them of “home.” Molly and Amie described the comfort they felt living and working in a place that felt familiar. Amie also described small towns as places where everyone knew each other; however, she noted this could be a “benefit or a curse” because of preconceived notions about certain families within the community.

Nevertheless, all participants perceived the benefits of living in small, rural communities outweighed the disadvantages, and they all felt satisfied with their local communities.

The leading cause of attrition among inexperienced teachers is a lack of self-efficacy (Banghart, 2021; Reitman & Karge, 2019). Low levels of teacher self-efficacy correlate to multiple factors, including feelings of isolation and teaching in localities and demographics that are unfamiliar (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jung, 2010; Minarik et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Therefore, strategic recruitment efforts in hard-to-staff rural schools must include publicizing the benefits of living and working in the community (Engel & Curran, 2016; Stoko et al., 2007).

Sub-Theme Six: Belonging in the School Community

The participants also described a sense of belonging in their school communities. The participants in this study shared the importance of finding a job that fit what they were looking for in their initial teaching position. These criteria included aligning their

values with the mission and vision of the school district and the belief a friendly and supportive school community welcomed them. These findings support research from Hammer et al. (2005) that the most impactful teacher recruitment strategies involved strategic planning in recruiting the best people for the right job and school district.

In addition, participants described specific job-related factors they were looking for, including their preferred grade levels, specific curriculum content, and specific extra-duty assignments such as coaching and sponsoring activities. These results supported Lee's (2005) findings that outlined critical components of strategic teacher recruitment plans, including marketing strategies to distinguish the school district from others by highlighting what the district has to offer teachers.

Most significantly, the participants perceived their school district wanted them, which was a powerful motivator to accept their first teaching contract. Several participants received personal invitations from school staff to apply for open positions. Another participant explained how his school's administration encouraged and supported his decision to participate in a para-to-teacher program, making him feel appreciated and needed. Personal connections with school community members creates self-efficacy in new teachers by reducing feelings of isolation (Nielsen et al., 2007). The perception of being wanted was enhanced by an appreciation for efficient hiring practices, which was characterized by a fast turnaround between the interview and the job offer. DeFeo and Tran (2019) and Engel and Curran (2016) found many rural schools do not have human relations departments that control hiring. Instead, one person, usually the principal or superintendent, is responsible for every aspect of the hiring process. In contrast, urban school districts often have large bureaucratic hiring systems that can slow the hiring

process (Levine & Quinn, 2003). Therefore, rural schools may have an advantage over urban schools because they can be more efficient when offering teaching contracts.

Implications

There are several implications within the “sense of belonging” theme for rural school administrators. First, strategic teacher recruitment plans that do not include the school district's mission, vision, and values miss an opportunity to appeal to intrinsic motivational factors related to an applicant’s personal and professional values (Lee et al., 2015; Thomson & McClannon, 2018; What & Richardson, 2007). Second, job advertisements lacking descriptions of the opportunities school districts offer teachers, including small class sizes, extracurricular opportunities, innovative curricula, and professional development, are not targeted or strategic (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Engel & Curran, 2016; Kier & Chen, 2017; Lee, 2005; Stoko et al., 2007; Tran et al., 2020). Third, leveraging personal connections with teachers, other school administrators, post-secondary institutions, and community members may enhance the ability to identify potential applicants and create an opportunity to extend personal invitations to apply for open teaching positions. Last, employing efficient hiring practices characterized by a short turnaround time between the interview and job offer may give hard-to-staff rural schools an advantage over larger school districts because it creates the perception the applicant is wanted and needed by the school (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Engel & Curran, 2016; Levine & Quinn, 2003).

Schools are often the heart of small, rural communities. The participants in this study described the support they felt from community members in their communities. Strategic teacher recruitment plans highlight the benefits of working and living in a small

community (Engel & Curran, 2016; Stoko et al., 2007). Therefore, one implication for community organizations and chambers of commerce is highlighting how the community supports the local schools. Job advertisements that include links to online resources about the town and community organizations not only target potential teacher candidates who desire to work and live in a rural community, but may also entice teachers who never considered the benefits of living in a rural community to apply (McCullough & Johnson, 2007).

Theme Four: Sense of Purpose

During interviews, participants described a sense of purpose in their professional lives as a desire to make a difference in the lives of their students. Participants also described aspirations to grow and improve in their profession and believed their initial teaching position could provide them with career advancement opportunities. Participant descriptions within the theme “sense of purpose” resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (7) opportunities for impact, and (8) opportunities for advancement.

Sub-Theme Seven: Opportunities for Impact

The participants in this study recognized and discussed the opportunity teachers have to make a difference in the lives of students. Each participant shared how former teachers or college professors guided their decision to become teachers and how positive experiences with influential teachers during their youth fostered a desire to “pay it forward” to the students they served. Positively impacting students and making a difference in society were common themes among all of the participants in this study, regardless of whether they took a traditional or nontraditional route into the teaching profession. These data refute a study by McClannon (2018) that found altruistic

motivation, such as the desire to positively impact students and feeling like they are making a difference in society, were more powerful motivational factors among nontraditional prospective teachers than traditional prospective teachers. In addition, the participants' descriptions of positive past educational experiences support the findings in studies by Watt and Richardson (2007) and Lee et al. (2005) that ability beliefs related to positive prior teaching and learning experiences were among the highest-rated factors influencing college student's decision to pursue education as a career.

Four of the participants shared positive previous work experiences related to education. Jeremy and Layla had positive teen mentor experiences in high school. Jimmy successfully ran an afterschool program with his wife before becoming a teacher. Joey taught English in China and worked as a para-educator before completing a para-to-teacher program to earn a special education teacher certification. The high school experiences described by Jeremy and Layla support the findings of a 2021 study from Mancenido (2021) that changing negative conceptions about the teaching profession requires a shift in the discourse about teaching through intentional programs and policies that highlight the positive aspects of teaching. Past work experiences like those described by Jimmy and Joey support research from Palermo (2018) that found previous work experiences positively influenced nontraditional preservice teachers' motivation to become teachers, especially when the work experience related to teaching. In addition, experiences like those described by the participants support the long-term potential of grow-your-own teacher programs in high schools to improve teacher recruitment (Hammer et al., 2005; Irving et al., 2020).

Sub-Theme Eight: Opportunities for Advancement

Two participants believed their initial teaching placement provided opportunities for career advancement and the achievement of their future goals. Jeremy viewed his school district as an “opportunistic place” where he could “build his curriculum” and complete a Master’s degree program to prepare him for his future goal of moving to a larger school district. He also planned to take on some Athletic Director duties during his second year in the district, which provided him a glimpse into what it was like to be a school administrator, which was another of his future goals.

Layla explained she was satisfied with her current position, but she was not sure it was the place she wanted to say “for all eternity.” However, she viewed her school as a positive place to begin her career because she believed the mission and vision of the district aligned with her personality and teaching philosophy. She also felt the district supported teachers to “grow and try new things.” These descriptions support a study by Tran et al. (2020) that found the most impactful teacher recruitment strategies for rural schools included highlighting the advantages of living and working in rural communities and appealing to altruistic and other intrinsic motivators.

Implications

There are implications for school administrators within the theme “sense of purpose.” During interviews, participants expressed the importance of motivational factors to become teachers related to intrinsic values: the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment an individual experiences when performing a task; social utility values; a sense of altruism or duty to improve society; and cost values, which include the perceived usefulness for future goals and competition with other goals (Thompson & Palermo,

2018; Watt & Richardson, 2007). The participants in this study believed teaching positions that provided opportunities to fulfill these values were more significant than compensation and other job-related benefits. Therefore, failure to design strategic teacher recruitment plans that consider motivational factors related to intrinsic values, social utility values, and cost value will be less effective in attracting new teachers.

Another implication for school administrators is the value of grow-your-own programs. Christiansen et al. (2019) found the two most significant predictive factors of high school students entering the teaching profession were self-efficacy and encouragement by family and others to consider teaching as a career. Grow-your-own teacher programs have the potential to create positive associations about teaching and learning to offset negative conceptions among high school students about the teaching profession (Mancenido, 2021). In addition, supporting grow-your-own programs that identify adults in the community, including paraeducators and other school support staff, who are interested in switching careers to teaching may open a new teacher applicant pool of individuals already established in the community. However, grow-your-own programs for nontraditional college students require cooperation from post-secondary education departments, making it necessary for school administrators to develop and maintain positive and collaborative relationships with post-secondary institutions whenever possible.

There are also implications for veteran teachers in school districts. The impact and influence teachers have on students cannot be overstated. Therefore, establishing positive learning environments where teachers and students develop meaningful relationships is critical to improving the perception of the teaching profession. In

addition, teachers can play an essential role in identifying and encouraging students who may consider teaching as a profession (Christiansen et al., 2019). High levels of teacher engagement in the development and implementation of grow-your-own teacher programs improve teacher buy-in and sustainability of these programs (Hammer et al., 2005; Kay, 2021; Mancenido, 2021)

Research Questions

Chapter Five provided an overview of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis process. The previous section of this chapter outlined the potential implications of those findings. This section refers back to the research questions posed in Chapter One and summarizes answers to each question based on the study's findings.

The central research question posed in Chapter One was, “**What motivational factors influence teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state?**” Four sub-questions were investigated to explore the central question in greater depth.

The first sub-question explored how past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts. Each participant shared formative past educational experiences that influenced their motivation to become teachers. The participants who grew up in rural communities only applied to schools in rural communities because of their positive associations with rural education, rural communities, and a desire to live and teach in a community that felt familiar. The participants who did not grow up in rural communities were more likely to apply for teaching positions in larger communities. However, family connections and the friendly

and welcoming environment in the school and local community influenced their decision to accept their initial teaching contract.

Five participants completed their student-teaching experience in the school district where they accepted their first teaching contract. They shared how relationships with their cooperating teachers, school administrators, colleagues, and students influenced their decision to apply for and accept their initial teaching contract. The participants described several perceived benefits to accepting their initial teaching position in the school where they completed student teaching, including a belief they understood the culture and expectations of the school, familiarity with the local community, and an understanding of what it was like to live in a remote community with limited access to commerce and entertainment.

The second sub-question considered how relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts. All of the participants described supportive relationships with their family and friends. Therefore, proximity to family and friends was the most important factor participants considered when accepting their first teaching position. However, none of the participants said their family and friends encouraged them to accept their initial teaching position. Instead, the participants described feeling supported in their decision to accept their first teaching position because their family and friends wanted them to be happy and fulfilled.

The participants described teaching as a rewarding, demanding, and stressful profession. All the participants described family as a critical emotional support structure. The participants who took a traditional route into teaching described their parents and siblings as the primary people they relied on for emotional support. However, they also

discussed how having friends nearby was a benefit. The two participants who took a nontraditional path into teaching relied more on their spouses for emotional support and did not mention friends during the interview. These participants moved from farther away to be near their families because they believed it was important for their children to develop relationships with their grandparents.

The third sub-question probed the impact of geographic isolation from population centers had on the motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts. The participants traveled to larger population centers two or three times monthly to buy groceries, eat at restaurants, shop, and access health care. The distance they traveled to access these services was between twenty and one hundred miles. All participants accepted traveling to larger population centers to access goods and services was part of life in small, rural communities. However, none said geographic isolation from population centers was a significant factor they considered before accepting their initial teaching contract. In fact, all the participants agreed the benefits of living and working in a small community outweighed the disadvantages.

The fourth and final sub-question investigated school-based factors that influenced motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts. The participants in this study shared the importance of finding a job that fit what they were looking for in their initial teaching position. These criteria included aligning their values with the mission and vision of the school district and the belief a friendly and supportive school community welcomed them. In addition, participants described specific job-related factors they were looking for, including their preferred grade levels, specific curriculum content, and specific extra-duty assignments such as coaching and sponsoring activities.

Participants cited school-based factors like compensation and benefits as important; however, none said compensation or benefits influenced their decision to accept their initial teaching contract.

Two participants believed their initial teaching placement provided opportunities for career advancement and the achievement of their future goals. One participant viewed his school district as an “opportunistic place” where he could “build his curriculum” and complete a Master’s degree program to prepare him for his future goal of moving to a larger school district. The other participant said she felt content with her current position and believed her school's growth and achievement culture could help her achieve her future goals. However, she was unsure she wanted to stay in her school for “all eternity” because she believed larger school districts had opportunities not available in her rural school.

Most significantly, the participants believed their school district wanted them, which was a powerful motivator to accept their first teaching contract. Several participants received personal invitations from school staff or administration to apply for their positions. Another participant explained how his school’s administration encouraged and supported his decision to participate in a para-to-teacher program, making him feel appreciated and needed. The perception of being wanted was enhanced by efficient hiring practices, characterized by a fast turnaround between the interview and the job offer.

Potential Limitations of the Study

All research has limitations. There may be limitations to this study’s findings based on the selected methodology of the study, the sampling methods selected, the

sample size, the scope of the study, and researcher bias. The following limitations may have impacted the findings of the study.

1. Qualitative research is subjective and represents multiple realities. Data are subjected to multiple interpretations and may be interpreted differently by other researchers.
2. The use of convenience sampling to narrow participant selection to a geographic region located in the western third of one Midwestern state may be a limitation of this study. Limitations associated with convenience sampling include potential threats to the data, such as bias and lack of generalizability.
3. The sample size for this study was small ($n=6$). Ideally, phenomenological studies include a sample size of nine to fifteen participants. The low participation rate may have impacted the study's findings. A larger sample size may have produced different results.
4. The scope of this study was narrow and focused on FAR (Frontier and Remote) communities in the western third of the Midwestern state selected for this study. Therefore, a lack of generalizability may be a limitation of this study.
5. Although the distance between school districts ranged between twenty and 260 miles, the relative proximity between the districts increased the probability the researcher and participants could know each other. While there were no personal relationships between the participants and the researcher, participants may have known the researcher's school and his position as a school administrator. This knowledge may have impacted the participants' comfort level during interviews, which could have created bias. Likewise, the researcher's knowledge of the

participants' school districts and associations with those school districts could have also created bias.

Recommendations for Targeted Audiences

The findings of this study support the need for targeted and strategic teacher recruitment plans in hard-to-staff rural communities to recruit and hire the best people for the right job (Hammer et al., 2005). Based on the results of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations to the targeted audiences of this study.

Rural School Administrators

1. Five of the six participants in this study completed their student teaching experiences in the district where they accepted their first teaching contract, indicating student-teachers may be more likely to accept teaching positions in schools where they student taught. Therefore, rural school administrators must build positive relationships with post-secondary colleges of education to bring student teachers into their schools.
2. The participants in this study who completed their student-teaching experience in the school district where they accepted their initial teaching contract felt like they had positive and supportive relationships with their cooperating teachers and school administrators. The participants said these relationships motivated their decision to accept their initial teaching position. Therefore, rural school administrators must build relationships with preservice teachers completing their student-teaching experience by supporting student teachers in the classroom and encouraging cooperating teachers to do the same.

3. School staff or administrators encouraged five of the six participants in this study to apply for their teaching positions. Therefore, identification of potential applicants could be enhanced by leveraging personal connections with teachers, other school administrators, post-secondary institutions, and community members. Leveraging personal connections may create an opportunity to extend personal invitations to apply for open teaching positions.
4. Teacher recruitment efforts in hard-to-staff rural schools should focus on the district's geographic area. The participants in this study named proximity to family and friends as the most significant motivator to accept their initial teaching contract. Therefore, strategic teacher recruitment plans should target teacher applicants from the school district's geographic area.
5. Hard-to-staff rural high schools should create a database of former students who chose to study education in college and share these databases with other hard-to-staff rural schools in the area. Creating and sharing these databases with other schools may help identify potential teaching applicants from the geographic area and allow school administrators to target these applicants.
6. The participants in this study described intrinsic motivational factors related to a connection between personal and professional values and the school district's mission, vision, and values. Therefore, rural school administrators should include the school district's mission, vision, and values in their strategic teacher recruitment plan. Schools that do not include mission, vision, and values may miss an opportunity to appeal to the applicant's intrinsic motivational values.

7. The participants in this study described specific job-related criteria and opportunities for advancement and professional growth as essential factors in their decision to accept their initial teaching contract. Therefore, strategic teaching recruitment plans must include details about what the school district has to offer applicants, including extracurricular opportunities, innovative curricula, and professional development.
8. The participants in this study believed their school district wanted them because of the short turnaround time between the interview and the job offer. Therefore, employing efficient hiring practices may provide small school districts with an advantage over larger school districts because they often do not have a human relations department that controls hiring.
9. Two of the participants in this study shared positive experiences related to grow-your-own teacher programs in high school that influenced their decision to become teachers. One of the participants in this study worked as a paraeducator before enrolling in a para-to-teacher program. The participant said his school administrator supported the program. Strategic teacher recruitment plans in hard-to-staff rural schools must look beyond immediate needs and plan for the future. Therefore, grow-your-own programs that identify students and adults in the community interested in becoming teachers may open a new teacher applicant pool of individuals already established in the community.

Post-Secondary Education Departments

1. Five of the participants in this study completed their student-teaching experience in the school district where they accepted their initial teaching contract. These

participants said the experience helped them better understand the advantages and disadvantages of living and working in a rural community. Therefore, working with rural schools to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to observe rural schools before student teaching may encourage preservice teachers not from rural communities to seek student teaching and job opportunities in rural communities.

2. Work with rural schools to build preservice teacher preparation programs highlighting the attributes and challenges of living and working in rural communities.
3. Collaborate with rural schools to support grow-your-own teacher programs to combat the national trend of declining enrollment numbers in teacher preparation programs.

Community Organizations

1. The participants in this study described the support they felt from community members in their communities. Community organizations can support teacher recruitment by creating online resources highlighting what the community offers its citizens and how the community supports the local schools.

Veteran Teachers

1. The participants in this study described positive educational experiences that included meaningful relationships with former teachers that motivated them to become teachers. Teachers have a unique opportunity to influence their students and to create positive associations with teaching and learning by establishing positive learning environments where teachers and students develop meaningful relationships.

2. High levels of teacher engagement in the development and implementation of grow-your-own teacher programs improve teacher buy-in and the sustainability of these programs (Hammer et al., 2005; Kay, 2021; Mancenido, 2021). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to engage in the development and implementation of grow-your-teacher programs.

Policymakers

1. Support efforts to track students studying education in college by funding programs to assist state Departments of Education to effectively track college students as they matriculate through post-secondary teacher preparation programs.
2. Fully fund public education to raise teacher pay, improve benefits, and develop stronger learning communities focused on teacher professional development impacting student achievement (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study revealed several questions that could be addressed in future research. Employing different research methods, a larger sample of participants, and a broader geographic scope may provide additional insights not obtained in this study. The following questions emerged from the data analysis process.

1. What teacher recruitment practices do hard-to-staff rural schools currently employ?
2. What financial, human resource, and time costs are associated with grow-your-own teacher programs?
3. Do the financial, human resource, and time costs limit developing and implementing grow-your-own programs in hard-to-staff rural schools?

4. How does a community's demography (i.e., socioeconomic, ethnic, and age structure) impact teacher recruitment in hard-to-staff rural schools?
5. How do the motivational factors influencing veteran teachers to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools differ from those influencing first-year and second-year teachers?

Summary

Chapter Six summarized the study's purpose, research questions, approach, and data analysis procedures. Implications of the findings were discussed and organized around four central themes and eight supporting sub-themes, and the research questions were reviewed in relationship to the findings of the study. The study's limitations, recommendations for targeted audiences, and suggestions for future research were also presented in the chapter.

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state. During the 2022-23 school year, six first-year and second-year teachers were interviewed between October and April. Interview transcripts were analyzed, resulting in the emergence of four themes: (1) sense of connectedness, (2) sense of support, (3) sense of belonging, and (4) sense of purpose.

The participants in this study communicated the importance of having personal connections with and experiences in rural communities before they accepted their initial teaching contract. Participants described the teaching profession as rewarding, demanding, and stressful and emphasized the importance of accepting teaching positions near their family and friends who provided them with emotional support. In addition, the

participants described community and school resources that supported them during their first and second years in the classroom. Participants highlighted the importance of choosing friendly and welcoming schools and local communities where they felt needed. Finally, the participants in this study expressed a need to impact students' lives and a desire to grow and improve to advance in the profession.

The findings of this study may provide valuable insights into teacher recruitment practices in hard-to-staff rural schools. The information may prove helpful to targeted audiences, including school administrators in hard-to-staff rural schools, post-secondary education departments, community organizations, veteran teachers, and policymakers. Perceptions of teachers who chose to accept contracts in hard-to-staff rural schools may assist in developing strategic teacher recruitment plans to attract quality applicants to fill open teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural schools.

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APPENDIX A: EMAIL SCRIPT TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Subject: Dissertation study involving first-year and second-year teachers

Dear (Name of School Principal),

Hello, my name is Nick Dressel. I am the principal at [REDACTED] and a student in the Educational Doctoral program at Doane University. I am preparing to conduct research for my dissertation. The purpose of the study is to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts.

This research aims to positively impact teacher recruitment in rural Nebraska schools. In addition, this work will contribute to the body of literature on this topic. Teachers and school administrators may gain information about or insight into trends that may impact teacher recruitment and find hope in the realization the principal investigator aims to better understand factors that motivate preservice teachers to accept initial teaching positions in rural schools.

I am requesting your assistance to identify first-year and second-year teachers in their first teaching assignment who may be interested in participating in this study. I would appreciate it if you would send the names and email addresses of first-year and second-year teachers in your school by (specify date two weeks after the email was sent) so I can invite them to participate in this study.

Any information obtained during this study that could identify the participant will be kept strictly confidential. Participant and school district names will not be reported in the final study or in any subsequent publications/presentations. Pseudonyms selected by the principal investigator will be used in place of real names and school districts.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this project. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Nick Dressel
nick.dressel@doane.edu
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL SCRIPT TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear (Participant's name)

Hello, my name is Nick Dressel. I am a student in the Doane University Educational Doctoral program and preparing to conduct research for my dissertation. The purpose of the study is to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts.

This research aims to positively impact teacher recruitment in rural [REDACTED] schools. In addition, this work will contribute to the body of literature on this topic. Teachers and school administrators may gain information about or insight into trends that may impact teacher recruitment and find hope in the realization the principal investigator aims to better understand factors that motivate preservice teachers to accept initial teaching positions in rural schools.

I will be conducting interviews with first-year and second-year teachers during the first semester of the 2022-23 school year. Interviews will be between 30-60 minutes in length and take place at a time and location (including Zoom) that work best for the research participants.

Any information obtained during this study that could identify the participant will be kept strictly confidential. Participant and school district names will not be reported in the final study or in any subsequent publications/presentations. Pseudonyms selected by the principal investigator will be used in place of real names and school districts.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please read and respond to the [informed consent form](#) (Linked to the Google Form - Appendix C) by (specify date one week after the email was sent). If you have questions, please contact me at nick.dressel@doane.edu or by phone at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your consideration. I am excited to have the opportunity to learn more about your journey into rural education.

Sincerely,

Nick Dressel
nick.dressel@doane.edu
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX C: ELECTRONIC INFORMED CONSENT OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Electronic Informed Consent of Voluntary Participation

Title of the Study:

Understanding motivation to improve teacher recruitment: A phenomenological study of first-year and second-year teachers in one Midwestern state

Principal Investigator:

Nichlas Dressel, Ed. S., Doane University

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state.

Anticipated Interview Format and Time Commitment:

For this study, each participant will participate in an interview conducted by Nichlas Dressel. This interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes and will take place at various sites to meet participants' needs. The principal investigator will use the [otter.ai](#) application and audio recording devices to make an audio recording of the interview for the purpose of future transcription. After the initial interview session, the principal investigator will contact the participant for review of the written interview transcript. In addition, the principal investigator may contact participants to conduct follow-up interviews to gather more information or clarification. As with the initial interview, any and all follow-up interactions with the researcher will be optional.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Any information obtained during this study that could identify the participant will be kept strictly confidential. The principal investigator will keep any recordings and transcripts of the interviews for a period of five years following the interview. Signed documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet. All digital data will be stored on the Doane University email server in Google Drive and backed up on an external hard drive. The information obtained through this study will be published in the principal investigator's dissertation, may be published in educational journals, and could be presented to the public. Participant names will not be reported in the final study or in any subsequent publications/presentations. Pseudonyms selected by the principal investigator will be used in place of real names and school districts.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no anticipated discomforts or risks for those contributing to this study.

Benefits:

This research is intended to positively impact teacher recruitment in rural schools. In addition, this work will contribute to the body of literature on this topic. Participants may gain information about or insight into trends that may impact teacher recruitment and find hope in the realization the principal investigator aims to better understand factors that motivate teachers to accept initial teaching positions in rural schools.

Institutional Review Board:

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects at Doane University (**F22 003 DC IRB HS**). Doane University is committed to ensuring research involving human subjects is conducted with the highest possible ethical standards. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered during, or before agreeing to participate in this study. You may contact Nick Dressel, Doane University doctoral student/principal investigator at (phone number hidden) or by emailing nick.dressel@doane.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the principal investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the Doane University Institutional Review Board by emailing irb@doane.edu.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study and you are free to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the principal investigator, Doane University, or the Chadron Public School District.

Electronic Consent

Your signature grants voluntary consent to participate in this study and indicates you understand your rights and the researcher's responsibilities. The principal investigator will give you a copy of this consent form for your records.

Clicking the button next to "I agree/consent to give my voluntary informed consent to participate in this study" indicates that you are at least 19 years of age; you have read this consent document or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Name and Contact of Principal Investigator:

Nichlas Dressel, Ed.S., Doctoral Student at Doane University
(phone number hidden) nick.dressel@doane.edu

**APPENDIX D: REVISED INTRODUCTORY EMAIL SCRIPT TO POTENTIAL
PARTICIPANTS**

Subject: \$25.00 Gift Card Opportunity

Dear (Participant's Name)

Hello, my name is Nick Dressel. I am the principal at [REDACTED], and a Doane University Educational Doctoral program student. My doctoral research is focused on teacher recruitment in rural [REDACTED] schools. The research will help school administrators gain insight into motivating factors teachers consider before accepting initial teaching positions in rural schools. Thus, I need to interview first-year and second-year teachers to gain their insight into why they accepted their positions. Although I have conducted a few interviews with first-year and second-year teachers, I have struggled to reach the desired number of interviews for this study. Given the short time left in the school year, I am asking that you please consider helping me complete the study by participating in a 30-minute interview over Zoom. I know a teacher's life is busy, but by volunteering for a short 30-minute interview you can help make a difference in recruiting teachers in rural Nebraska schools. We can be flexible in scheduling the interview to meet your time requirements of your busy schedule. As a thank you for your time, I am offering a \$25.00 Amazon gift card. I would really appreciate it if you could work this into your busy life. You will be helping the profession as well as helping me complete my doctoral study.

Any information obtained during this study that could identify the participant will be kept strictly confidential. Participant and school district names will not be reported in the final study or any subsequent publications/presentations.

If you are willing to help me complete this study, please read and respond to the [informed consent form](#) (Linked to the Google Form - Appendix C). If you have questions, please contact me at nick.dressel@doane.edu or [REDACTED].

Thank you for your consideration. I am excited to have the opportunity to learn more about your journey into rural education.

Sincerely,

Nick Dressel
nick.dressel@doane.edu
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW NOTES TEMPLATE

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of physical characteristics of the participant and the physical environment:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

| Interview Question | Descriptive Notes | Reflective Notes |
|--|-------------------|------------------|
| <p><i>Icebreaker Questions:</i></p> <p>i. Please tell me about where you grew up, anything you feel comfortable sharing.</p> <p>ii. Where did you attend college and what was the community like?</p> <p>iii. What type of teacher preparation program did you complete?</p> | | |
| <p>Research sub-question 1: How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?</p> <hr/> <p>Interview Questions:</p> <p>1. Describe a past educational experience or influential educator that impacted your decision to become a teacher in a rural school.</p> <p>Probing interview questions:</p> <p>1a. Describe how that experience/person made you feel?</p> <p>1b. What other past experiences or people influenced your decision to become a teacher?</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Research sub-question 2: How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?</p> <hr/> <p>Interview Questions: 2. In what ways did your family or friends support your decision to apply for your current teaching position?</p> <p>Probing interview questions: 2a. Why or why not is support from family and friends important to you in relation to your profession?</p> <p>2b. How did geographic proximity to family and friends impact your decision to accept your first teaching position?</p> | | |
| <p>Research sub-question 3: How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?</p> <hr/> <p>Interview Questions: 3. What community characteristics were you looking for when you were applying for your first teaching job?</p> <p>Probing interview questions: 3a. What are some examples of services and community resources you considered important?</p> <p>3b. How often do you travel to larger population centers to access goods and services?</p> <p>3c. How does the need to travel to larger population centers impact your feelings about living and working in a rural community?</p> | | |
| <p>Research sub-question 4: Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?</p> <hr/> <p>Interview Questions: 4. What school-based factors did you consider before accepting your current teaching position?</p> <p>Probing interview questions: 4a. Why were these school-based factors important to you?</p> <p>4b. How did you learn about these school-based factors?</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| 4c. What other factors did you consider before you accepted your current teaching position? | | |
| <i>Wrap-Up</i> – Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what motivated you to accept your first teaching position in a rural school district? | | |

APPENDIX F: REFLECTION JOURNAL SAMPLE

September 12, 2022

I sent the principal emails yesterday. I planned on sending them at the end of August but decided to wait, given how busy the beginning of the school year is for principals. I'm encouraged by the decision because I have already received responses from three principals! Receiving these responses excited me, and I kept checking my inbox, hoping there would be more throughout the night. I need to remember to be patient, stay true to the timeframe I set for responses, and control the things I can control, like improving chapter two.

September 13th, 2022

I received a couple of emails from principals in one school district asking if I wanted emails for teachers who have been hired on a provisional license. I did not clarify this detail in the email that was sent, nor did I think about the possibility that schools would have full-time teachers working on provisional licenses. From the sound of the emails, this may limit the number of participants in this particular district. It is too late to change the qualifications of the participants, so I will stay the course with the intended participant group. On the bright side, many of the principals expressed interest in my topic, and a few asked if they would be able to see the results. This is a good sign that the topic is relevant to current practitioners. Only time will tell, but I hope the results are valuable to the profession.

September 26, 2022

The emails from school principals have stopped coming in. I have nine potential participants, and I'm tempted to send out the participant emails with the hope that all nine will participate.

APPENDIX G: UNITED STATES ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE (2019) EXCEL FILE

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R |
|-----|-------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| ZIP | state | name | far1 | far2 | far3 | far4 | gridpop | sqmi | density | fr1pop | fr2pop | fr3pop | fr4pop | fr1pct | fr2pct | fr3pct | fr4pct |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2,251 | 379 | 5.9 | 2250.658 | 2250.658 | 2250.658 | 2250.658 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3,144 | 346 | 9.1 | 3139.716 | 3008.541 | 3008.541 | 3008.541 | 99.87859 | 95.70576 | 95.70576 | 95.70576 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 309 | 73 | 4.3 | 309.0205 | 309.0205 | 309.0205 | 309.0205 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,484 | 133 | 11.2 | 1484.254 | 1401.112 | 1401.112 | 1401.112 | 100 | 94.39844 | 94.39844 | 94.39844 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 149 | 215 | 0.7 | 148.5547 | 148.5547 | 148.5547 | 148.5547 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 103 | 172 | 0.6 | 103.2393 | 53.727 | 53.727 | 53.42916 | 100 | 52.04121 | 52.04121 | 51.75272 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 426 | 207 | 2.1 | 426.0565 | 426.0565 | 426.0565 | 425.7267 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99.92259 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,309 | 144 | 9.1 | 1309.431 | 1309.431 | 1300.231 | 1300.231 | 100 | 100 | 99.29741 | 99.29741 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 457 | 72 | 6.4 | 436.9392 | 436.9392 | 436.9392 | 436.9392 | 95.62049 | 95.62049 | 95.62049 | 95.62049 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 454 | 716 | 0.6 | 453.6238 | 453.6238 | 453.6238 | 453.6238 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 174 | 397 | 0.4 | 174.4448 | 174.4448 | 174.4448 | 174.4448 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2,042 | 358 | 5.7 | 2042.467 | 2042.467 | 2042.467 | 2015.117 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 98.66093 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 195 | 106 | 1.8 | 194.6131 | 194.6131 | 194.6131 | 194.6131 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 413 | 73 | 5.7 | 412.5676 | 412.5676 | 412.5676 | 412.5676 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,294 | 803 | 1.6 | 1293.692 | 1293.692 | 1293.692 | 1293.692 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 763 | 122 | 6.3 | 762.7627 | 762.7627 | 762.7627 | 762.7627 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 126 | 33 | 3.8 | 125.949 | 125.949 | 125.949 | 125.949 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,420 | 376 | 3.8 | 1420.23 | 1420.23 | 1420.23 | 1420.23 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 632 | 183 | 3.4 | 632.4191 | 632.4191 | 632.4191 | 631.7677 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99.897 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 172 | 419 | 0.4 | 171.8193 | 171.8193 | 171.8193 | 171.8193 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,767 | 213 | 8.3 | 1766.859 | 1754.671 | 1607.43 | 1607.43 | 100 | 99.31022 | 90.97674 | 90.97674 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 450 | 108 | 4.2 | 446.9291 | 386.2496 | 386.2496 | 386.2496 | 99.21063 | 85.74082 | 85.74082 | 85.74082 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 180 | 287 | 0.6 | 180.2111 | 180.2111 | 180.2111 | 180.2111 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 214 | 86 | 2.5 | 214.1874 | 214.1874 | 214.1874 | 214.1874 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 352 | 309 | 1.1 | 352.3504 | 193.9488 | 193.9488 | 193.9488 | 100 | 55.0443 | 55.0443 | 55.0443 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 265 | 30 | 8.8 | 265.2334 | 265.2334 | 265.2334 | 265.2334 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 344 | 131 | 2.6 | 301.3037 | 301.3037 | 266.998 | 266.998 | 87.67254 | 87.67254 | 77.69035 | 77.69035 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2,072 | 578 | 3.6 | 2072.348 | 2072.348 | 2072.348 | 2072.348 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 483 | 64 | 7.6 | 483.4838 | 483.4838 | 483.4838 | 483.4838 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 245 | 44 | 5.6 | 244.7907 | 244.7907 | 244.7907 | 244.7907 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,031 | 346 | 3.0 | 1031.209 | 1006.275 | 1006.216 | 1006.137 | 100 | 97.58206 | 97.57637 | 97.56869 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,294 | 105 | 12.3 | 1294.461 | 1294.461 | 1294.461 | 1294.461 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 215 | 46 | 4.7 | 214.7779 | 214.7779 | 214.7779 | 214.7779 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 574 | 94 | 6.1 | 550.8496 | 550.8496 | 550.8496 | 550.8496 | 96.04229 | 96.04229 | 96.04229 | 96.04229 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 176 | 41 | 4.3 | 176.0936 | 176.0936 | 176.0936 | 176.0936 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 666 | 402 | 1.7 | 665.8695 | 665.8695 | 665.8695 | 664.2407 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99.75538 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 505 | 304 | 1.7 | 505.0298 | 505.0298 | 505.0298 | 505.0298 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,382 | 321 | 4.3 | 1382.049 | 1382.049 | 1382.049 | 1382.018 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99.99781 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 340 | 59 | 5.8 | 340.1702 | 340.1702 | 340.1702 | 340.1702 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 342 | 690 | 0.5 | 341.5156 | 341.5156 | 341.5156 | 341.5156 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 264 | 129 | 2.0 | 264.0335 | 264.0335 | 264.0335 | 264.0335 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1,446 | 478 | 3.0 | 1446.089 | 1446.089 | 1446.089 | 1446.089 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 179 | 157 | 1.1 | 178.5733 | 178.5733 | 178.5733 | 97.89702 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 54.82175 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 565 | 163 | 3.5 | 564.8673 | 564.8673 | 564.8673 | 564.8673 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 232 | 73 | 3.2 | 232.4641 | 232.4641 | 232.4641 | 231.8234 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 99.7244 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 372 | 27 | 13.9 | 371.6247 | 371.6247 | 371.6247 | 371.6247 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 302 | 36 | 8.4 | 299.694 | 299.694 | 299.694 | 293.519 | 99.32841 | 99.32841 | 99.32841 | 97.28183 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 882 | 40 | 22.1 | 881.723 | 881.723 | 881.723 | 881.723 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 131 | 154 | 0.8 | 131.1119 | 70.93488 | 70.93488 | 70.93488 | 100 | 54.10257 | 54.10257 | 54.10257 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 251 | 36 | 7.0 | 250.8853 | 250.8853 | 250.8853 | 250.8853 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 164 | 146 | 1.1 | 164.0551 | 164.0551 | 164.0551 | 164.0551 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

APPENDIX H: PILOT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: Student Teacher at [REDACTED] (*Elementary School*)

Recording/storing information about the interview: A cellular phone voice recorder and a digital recording device will capture an audio recording. Otter.ai will convert the recording into a transcription of the interview. A separate note-taking form will assist in recording observational notes during the interview.

Introduction

Hi, my name is Nick Dressel. I am a student in the Doane University Educational Doctoral program. This semester I am taking a research methods class, and one of the requirements is to conduct an interview. The purpose of the interview is to practice my interviewing skills and test the interview questions to ensure they effectively address the purpose of my study, which is to describe factors that influence preservice teachers' decision to accept teaching positions in rural schools.

I will ask you some questions about your student teaching experience, your thoughts about rural schools, and the challenges you think teachers face. I will also ask you to describe some factors that may influence your decision to accept your first teaching position. Follow-up questions may be asked to better understand your responses or gather more information. Are you still comfortable talking to me about that?

I will take some notes during the interview, but mostly I want to listen and understand your experiences and point of view. Are you still comfortable if I record the interview?

Before we begin, I want to assure you:

- I will not use the information gathered during the pilot interview for my dissertation.
- I will not share any information gathered during the interview beyond my Advanced Qualitative Methods class.
- I will not share any information that will identify you. I will use a pseudonym when I refer to you. Would you like to choose a pseudonym for yourself?

Do you have any questions before we start?

Questions:

1. *Icebreaker* - Please tell me a little about where you grew up, anything you feel comfortable sharing.
 1. Where did you attend high school?
 2. What hobbies do you enjoy?
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
3. In what subject will you be certified to teach?
4. How has student teaching been going?
 - a. What are some successes you have encountered?
 - b. What are some challenges you have encountered?
5. What do you consider the most significant challenges facing teachers today?
6. What comes to mind when you think about rural schools?
 - a. Which of those notions about rural schools excite you most and why?
 - b. Which of those notions about rural schools causes you concern?
7. What things would you take into consideration before accepting a teaching position at a rural school?
8. What else should I know about what you are looking for in your first position as a certified teacher?

General Probes

Tell me more / Can you tell me more about that?

How do you feel about that?

What I am hearing you say is _____

Am I missing anything / is there anything else I should know?

Conclusion

Those are all of the questions I have. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and insights. Again, I want to assure you the information you have provided will not be used beyond the purpose of my class and to improve the interview protocols and questions for my future research. Thank you for the interview!

APPENDIX I: FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Recording/storing information about the interview: A cellular phone voice recorder and a digital recording device will capture an audio recording. The online application otter.ai will convert the audio recording into a transcription of the interview. A separate note-taking form will assist in recording observational notes during the interview.

Introduction

Hi, my name is Nick Dressel. I am a student in the Doane University Educational Doctoral program. I am interviewing teachers for a dissertation study I am conducting. The purpose of the study is to understand the essence of teacher motivation to accept teaching positions in hard-to-staff rural school districts in one Midwestern state.

I will ask you some questions about your teaching experience and your thoughts about rural schools. I will also ask you to describe some factors that influenced your decision to accept your first teaching position. Follow-up questions may be asked to better understand your responses or gather more information. Are you comfortable talking to me about that?

I will take some notes during the interview, but mostly I want to listen and understand your experiences and point of view.

Before we begin, I want to assure you:

- The information gathered during the interview will be used in my dissertation.
- I will provide you with a copy of the interview transcript for you to review and approve.
- I will not share any information that will identify you. I will use a pseudonym when I refer to you.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Questions

Icebreaker Questions

- i. Please tell me about where you grew up, anything you feel comfortable sharing.
- ii. Where did you attend college and what was the community like?
- iii. What type of teacher preparation program did you complete?

Research sub-question 1: How do past educational experiences influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

1. Describe a past educational experience or influential educator that impacted your decision to become a teacher.

Probing interview questions:

- 1a. Describe how that experience/person made you feel?
- 1b. What other past experiences or people influenced your decision to become a teacher?

Research sub-question 2: How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

2. In what ways did your family or friends support your decision to apply for your current teaching position?

Probing interview questions:

- 2a. Why or why not is support from family and friends important to you in relation to your profession?
- 2b. How did geographic proximity to family and friends impact your decision to accept your first teaching position?

Research sub-question 3: How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

3. What community characteristics were you looking for when you were applying for your first teaching job?

Probing interview questions:

- 3a. What are some examples of services and community resources you considered important?
- 3b. How often do you travel to larger population centers to access goods and services?
- 3c. How does the need to travel to larger population centers impact your feelings about living and working in a rural community?

Research sub-question 4: Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?

Interview Questions:

4. What school-based factors did you consider before accepting your current teaching position?

Probing interview questions:

- 4a. Why were these school-based factors important to you?
- 4b. How did you learn about these school-based factors?
- 4c. What other factors did you consider before you accepted your current teaching position?

Wrap-Up: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what motivated you to accept your first teaching position in a rural school district?

Conclusion

Those are all of the questions I have. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and insights. Please keep an eye out for an email containing a copy of the interview transcript and interview verification form.

**APPENDIX J: EMAIL SCRIPT TO PARTICIPANTS WITH
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Dear (Participant's Name),

I am excited about our upcoming interview on (enter interview date) at (enter interview location). The interview questions I will ask you are listed below. The questions are being provided in advance of the interview so you have time to think about the questions and how you would like to respond. If you have any questions, please contact me at nick.dressel@doane.edu or [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Nick Dressel
nick.dressel@doane.edu
[REDACTED]

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about where you grew up, anything you feel comfortable sharing.
2. Where did you attend college and what was the community like?
3. What type of teacher preparation program did you complete?
4. Describe a past educational experience or influential educator that impacted your decision to become a teacher.
 - a. Describe how that experience or person made you feel.
 - b. What other past experiences or people influenced your decision to become a teacher?
5. In what ways did your family or friends support your decision to apply for your current teaching position?
 - a. Why or why not is support from family and friends important to you in relation to your profession?

- b. How did geographic proximity to family and friends impact your decision to accept your first teaching position?
6. What community characteristics were you looking for when you were applying for your first teaching job?
 - a. What are some examples of services and community resources you considered important?
 - b. How often do you travel to larger population centers to access goods and services?
 - c. How does the need to travel to larger population centers impact your feelings about living and working in a rural community?
7. What school-based factors did you consider before accepting your current teaching position?
 - a. Why were these school-based factors important to you?
 - b. How did you learn about these school-based factors?
 - c. What other factors did you consider before you accepted your current teaching position?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what motivated you to accept your first teaching position in a rural school district?

APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT VERIFICATION

EMAIL SCRIPT

Dear (Participant's Name),

Please review the attached transcript from our interview on (DATE) where we discussed teacher motivation to accept initial teaching positions in rural schools. The transcript includes all of the dialogue from the interview, but please focus on the content of the interview rather than the conventional aspects like grammar and syntax. Feel free to note any errors or corrections in the interview to make the information as accurate as possible.

After reviewing the transcript, please open the link to the [interview verification form](#) and indicate your level of approval. You may contact me with any questions or concerns at nick.dressel@doane.edu or [REDACTED]. Thank you again for your participation!


Sincerely,

Nick Dressel
nick.dressel@doane.edu
[REDACTED]

Interview Verification Form

Project Title: Understanding motivation to improve teacher recruitment: A phenomenological study of first-year and second-year teachers in one Midwestern state

After reviewing the transcript, please indicate your level of approval. Thank you again for your participation!

nick.dressel@doane.edu [Switch account](#) 

Your email will be recorded when you submit this form

*** Required**

Please indicate your level of approval of the interview transcript at one of the following levels: *

- I approve of the interview transcript without reviewing it.
- I approve of the interview transcript without changes.
- I approve of the interview transcript with noted changes.
- I do not approve the interview transcript.

[Submit](#) [Clear form](#)

APPENDIX L: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

TO: Nichlas Dressel, Julie Kozisek (faculty sponsor)

FROM: Timothy Frey, IRB Chair

RE: APPROVAL of Project entitled "Understanding motivation to improve teacher recruitment: A phenomenological study of first and second-year teachers in one Midwestern state"

DATE: July 29, 2022

Your project, *Understanding motivation to improve teacher recruitment: A phenomenological study of first and second-year teachers in one Midwestern state*, has been approved via the expedited review process.

The approval code for this project is **F22 003 DC IRB HS**. Please use this code to indicate to participants that the project has been approved by the Doane University institutional review board. Any changes to the procedures, protocol, or instruments will require additional review.

Please add the approval number and contact information for Doane IRB to your consent form. You may list the Doane IRB email contact: irb@doane.edu

This approval is based upon the assurance that you will:

- Protect the rights and welfare of research participants;
- To the extent allowed by the protocol, select subjects equitably among the potential populations of participants
- Adhere to all Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects, as written in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46);
- Maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the research study including, but not limited to, video and audio tapes and other forms of image capture, instruments, copies of written consent agreements, and any other supportive documents in accordance with Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects.

Report to the Doane University IRB immediately if any of the following occur:

- o Unanticipated problems
- o Unanticipated deviations from previously approved protocols
- o Any proposed changes from the previously approved research.

If you have any questions regarding the protection of human participants, or the IRB process for human subjects research, please do not hesitate to contact the Timothy Frey, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at (402) 826-8648 or irb@doane.edu.

Tim Frey
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Doane University

APPENDIX M: SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANT**THANK-YOU CARDS**

Dear (Participant's Name),

Thank you for your time and thoughtful participation in our recent interview. I enjoyed our conversation and the opportunity to learn more about why you chose to teach and serve students in (name of rural community). I hope you have a fantastic school year, and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Nick Dressel

APPENDIX N: SAMPLE IN VIVO CODING

FROM TRANSCRIPT

Interview Date: October 26, 2022
 Interview Time: 5:00 PM
 Interview Location: Zoom
 Interviewer: Nick Dressel
 Interviewee: A.I. (Layla)
 Recorded and Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Nick Dressel 0:02</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we start?</p> <p>Layla 0:05</p> <p>I don't believe so.</p> <p>Nick Dressel 0:07</p> <p>Okay, so please tell me a little bit about where you grew up anything you feel comfortable sharing?</p> <p>Layla 0:14</p> <p>Absolutely. So, um, I spent a majority of my life and time in [Western city], [Western state], so like a larger city, population near about 60,000 about the time that I was living there. So quite large. Most of my schools were larger too. The elementary school I went to had like 300 kids in it, my junior high had close to 800, and my high school had like 1500. My graduating class was 200-something, so large, large schools that I kind of grew up around. I had family that lived in smaller rural areas. So, like, grandparents and stuff that I would visit that lived in</p> | <p>Family in smaller rural areas</p> |
|---|---|

smaller areas. So, I had a kind of experience of small-town living through visiting and through my extended family, but a majority of my life was spent kind of in that larger metropolis of a city. And there wasn't, like, a ton of small-town-like educational experience for me, so I had only known like the large school experience.

Nick Dressel 1:28

Okay. Where did you attend college?

Layla 1:32

My college was [Western college town], [Western city]. I went to the [Western university]. So smaller than [Western city], but still quite large in its own sense. The university, when I enrolled, had like 12,000 people enrolled. So pretty big, you know, even bigger than what I was used to back home. School-wise, like, classes of 300 people and stuff like that, you know, stuff I hadn't ever experienced before. So, just kind of getting bigger, but um, yeah, pretty much a bigger experience than had seen before college-wise.

Nick Dressel 2:09

Okay, and what type of teacher preparation program did you complete?

Layla 2:15

Experience small-town living

So it was a full K-12 music education, teacher prep. We were separate from the College of Education. The university does music education through the Department of Music as opposed to through the College of Education. We took some concurrent classes between both education and the music education side of things. We would take classes with the education students, but the majority of our schooling was in the actual Department of Music, doing the full gamut K-12. So, I would do my elementary practicum; I did secondary band, I learned all the band instruments; secondary choir, I learned how to conduct a choir; secondary strings, how to play all of those. So I got the full gamut in my four years

Nick Dressel 3:05

Music teachers absolutely amaze me. True story. They do. I don't know...I don't know how you guys do it. But you guys weave amazing magic, and concerts are always wonderful. Congratulations. (Thank you) (laughing). So where did, so did you do, Where did you do your student teaching?

Layla 3:25

My student teaching was in [Western town], [Western state]. So pretty similar size-wise to [Western city], like

Traditional teacher prep program

40,000 people, I think is the population, some bigger schools. And I had done the whole K-12 experience, my student teaching too, because that was what my teacher prep was through, was the K-12 experience. So I did eight weeks at the elementary school and eight weeks in secondary

Nick Dressel 3:49

I...my cousin actually lives in [Western town]. She's a physical therapist there, and she's been there since she graduated. But, wherever she went to school, somewhere in [Midwestern state] for her PT. She likes it, so that's good. Good for her.

Layla 4:04

Yeah, yeah, I've heard, like my mentor teachers, a couple of them had said, you know, I didn't expect to end up in [Western town]. I just took a job there, and then, like, I ended up here, like 30 years later, I'm still here, you know (laughing)?

Nick Dressel 4:15

Yeah, for sure. Cool. So, if you would just describe a past educational experience or an influential educator that impacted your decision to become a teacher.

Layla 4:31

Yeah, so um, there are a handful of teachers, like, throughout my experience that had, like, influenced me to kind of go down that road, but I think the biggest one that influenced me was my orchestra teacher. She had actually been my strings teacher for the entirety of my doing strings. We start in [Western school district] in fourth grade. And so I had, had her as an, as a teacher from fourth grade till I graduated from high school. So eight years timeframe. And she does, like, an extra group off to the side as an extracurricular thing that students can apply for, and kind of audition for the [Western school district] symphony. And I had been a member of that group from about fifth grade till ninth grade is when that cuts off. And then, once I hit ninth grade, she had seen me kind of as a leader in my groups and a leader in the school and asked me to come back to the kind of be a helper with the group and work with kids one on one, and help them with their music. And so she had given me that opportunity in a sense to kind of branch out in my first educational teaching experiences and kind of get one-on-one education with students. And that was a huge transformative experience for me because, you know, it was my first actual glimpse of, you know, this is what

Influential teacher - strong relationship

Worked one-on-one with kids (group leader)

Provided first glimpse of what teaching music looks like

teaching music looks like. And this is kind of how it feels, and it was really nice to build the connections with the students that I did. And to feel like I was making a difference to that overall group in the kids' overall education with music. Some of them, at this point, even have come back to me and been like, you know, I really appreciated when you would be there to help, and I felt like I learned so much on that one-on-one basis. And that had just kind of been, like, the solidifying thing for me that, you know, music education is cool, and it's something, you know, that I find enjoyment from, and you know, if you find a job that you find joy from then you're not really working.

Nick Dressel 6:33

Yeah, that's awesome. So I mean, they have one teacher from, like, fourth grade all the way through [inaudible]. That's, that's a pretty unique experience. You know, I mean, maybe not for [Western city]. You know what I mean? But I don't think that you'd probably find a lot of people (right) who have had that kind of experience. Can you kind of talk, just, I mean, given that she knew you for so long, I mean, I mean, you've been around kids, um, you know, you know how much they changed from fourth to

Make a difference

12th grade. Can you just talk a little bit about how that teacher made you feel, you know, I mean, beyond just, just learning to kind of love music and then eventually into music education? How did she make you feel?

Layla 7:15

Um, I think the best way to describe how she made me feel she just made me feel (slight pause) safe. I think it's the best term to put it. You know, I think some of the best teachers out there make their students feel safe, like they could be willing to take the risks, and make the mistakes, and to try new things. She had made me feel so safe, you know, that leading a section in my orchestra or leading a couple of kids or taking them on a one-on-one, you know, she made me feel so safe, that you know, even if I did the thing and messed it up royally (smiling), you know, that it wouldn't come back on me that it would just be a learning experience and something that I could push forward with.

Nick Dressel 8:01

Awesome, thank you for that. Are there any other, you know, past experiences or teachers that you want to talk about?

Layla 8:14

Teacher made her feel safe

Safe to take risks and make mistakes

Um, actually, my, my grandfather had been a music educator in central [Midwestern state] for about 20 years, and I had seen, kind of, at the point that I had come around, he had already retired and was already into retirement pretty, pretty securely at that point. But, I had heard all these stories about how he inspired his students, and he would have, like, past students come up to him; we'd be camping, or we would be out somewhere, and someone would magically appear in the small world that we have and say, you know, I don't know if you remember me, but you taught me to play the clarinet, and I just loved your class so much, and I found a joy and a love for music that I never thought I would have, and I've taken that with me as I move forward. And I saw countless people coming forward and telling him, you know, the impact he had on their lives, and his recurring thing had always been, you know, well, I didn't feel like I did all that much. And it was really inspirational to see, kind of, with my grandpa, how he made all those impacts and how impactful the career of music education, or just education in general, how impactful that is on so many lives. It's not just two or three people you meet over the course of your time. It's hundreds of students that you meet over the course that,

Grandfather was a music educator

Stories about how he inspired his students

Positive impact on students' lives

Impactful a career in education can be

you know, you could be the one turning point that changes their whole future.

Nick Dressel 9:41

Yeah, it's amazing. Thank you for sharing that. In what ways did your family or friends support your decision to apply for your current teaching position?

Layla 9:55

Yeah, so I think the biggest thing for me in my life is family. My mom is my best friend. I'm really close with my siblings. I have a brother who has a kid, so I have a nephew that, you know, is slowly growing up and just turned four. And my family is super supportive of me, and wanting to pursue this job. And I think because I was so, so close with them, they really just wanted me to choose something that made me happy. They didn't care where. But it was always nice to have them as, like, a sounding board because as I was going through the application process, and finding different jobs, whether it had been in [Midwestern state] or [Western state] or even [Western state], in that application process, I was able to, you know, kind of bounce ideas off of them, like, oh, I'm looking here and the job looks like this. And they were really good at giving me just feedback, like, well, that sounds like you

The biggest thing in life is family

**Close family connections
Supportive family**

They wanted me to be happy

Sounding board during the application process

Supportive feedback during application process

and your personality and what you enjoy. Or that sounds like that might be a little too much for you to handle, or that seems a little too out of left field, or that sounds just perfect. And they were able to kind of give me those, those supports as I needed. And a lot of my friends at the time were going through the teacher prep program, and they were like a year behind me. So a lot of them didn't have as much of the experience of knowing exactly, like, what the first year of teaching is like and what our first year being out there in the field is like, but they didn't know, you know, how I was and how I taught. Some of them I did some one-on-one teachings with, and some of them I had been co-teaching with or a program at the University. So they kind of knew me more intimately as an educator too. And they were really similar, kind of, helping me get feedback and helping me through that because we all kind of know, especially in the (inaudible) of music, that unless you get into the big city, there's a low probability of all of us ending up in the same place. So how can we help each other find a place that would at least make us happy?

Nick Dressel 12:07

Friends in teacher prep program

Supportive feedback

Helped each other find a place that would make them happy

Right. And that kind of leads into the next question, just kind of talking about support, and why or why not is support from family and friends important to you in relation to the profession?

Layla 12:22

Um, for me, I think education, specifically, is such a draining job. We get to see students at all levels of their lives and all backgrounds, and you know, some days you have days where it's easy to teach the kids because they listen, and they follow the instructions, and your lesson plan goes perfect, and everyone answers the questions that you have thought of, you know, perfectly. And then there's days where, you know, that's not the case. You have three kids doing who knows what on the side of your classroom, and you have to manage behaviors, and nobody's really getting the lesson that you put down because even with your best planning, it just doesn't go with their learning style that time. And there's all those different factors of how that day is gonna go. And I feel like family and friends are the ones that like help you get through that. You know, they're the ones that support you or listen to you, or you know, offer to bake you that cake if you need the extra carbs (laughing) to help you feel good about your

Education is a draining job

Behavior management, lesson planning, learning styles

Family and friends help get through hard time - listen and support

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>life or, um, or just kind of, kind of, that extra support as you kind of get through those rough days because as much as education is amazing there are those, those days where it's not so, not so easy.</p> | <p>Extra support from family and friends on hard days</p> |
| <p>Nick Dressel 13:43</p> <p>Right. Absolutely. How did geographic proximity to family and friends impact your decision to accept your current position?</p> | |
| <p>Layla 13:53</p> <p>It was, it was a large factor. Um, I had looked at a ton of positions just in the general vicinity of my family, and that was a lot of the ones that I was even just applying to. As I kind of stated before, family is really, really important to me, so being close to them was a huge factor in what I was even just looking for in the first place. I didn't want to go, you know, 10 hours away or, and make it hard for me to see my family or to see my friends, you know. I'm only about an hour, just over an hour away from my family, which was a huge plus when I was looking at this district. Um, there were some further away that I considered, but a large plus, and a large weight into what I was considering, was that proximity to my family.</p> | <p>Searched for jobs in the general vicinity of family</p> <p>Being close to family was important</p> <p>A large weight was proximity to family when choosing job</p> |
| <p>Nick Dressel 14:46</p> | |

Okay, good. Well, just out of curiosity, and did you have, like, an idea about, like, I'm willing to go X number of miles or X number of hours away, or was it just kind of just how it felt?

Layla 15:03

Um, I had, I had stayed pretty within, like, I would say, about a four-hour drive window, which, you know, here out in the Midwest isn't very much when you go 75 miles an hour on the interstate. Um, but about I would say that a four-hour window was within the range where I was looking.

Nick Dressel 15:23

Thanks. What community characteristics were you looking for when you were first applying for jobs?

Layla 15:33

Um, I was looking for places that were not necessarily like extremely sleepy, like nothing to do in the town.

Communities that had groups that I could get engaged with, um, communities that, um, were more welcoming, kind of had had more of the welcoming feel to as you drove into town. And even just kind of the feeling of, you know, the few students I saw in the school, or the few teachers I saw in the school kind of, how did they make

Community groups

Welcoming feeling in the town

Welcoming feeling in the school

me feel? Did they make me feel welcome? Or was it more of a standoffish feel to someone? You know, especially me, I have never been in small towns, but small towns have the chance of being extremely cliquy if you're not from the town. Sometimes there are towns that make it hard that you know you're not from there, you're not welcome here kind of thing. So I was definitely looking at places that made me feel most definitely welcome.

Nick Dressel 16:37

Okay, what are some examples of, like, put in you mentioned community groups, but some examples of like community services, you know, that were available or community resources that you considered important?

Layla 16:55

Um (long pause)...I'm not sure, um, there weren't really a ton, though. It was like I absolutely need that, you know, to be, to feel welcome or to feel like that's the place to go that wasn't really, I don't think, a huge considering factor for me. Services wise.

Nick Dressel 17:24

Yep. Great. Thank you. How often do you travel to larger population centers to access goods and services?

Layla 17:33

Small towns can be cliquy

A place that made me feel welcome

Services in the town were not a huge factor

all eternity, you know, especially as I were to grow and to create a family and to just kind of grow outside of myself.

Kind of the smaller town, while it's nice, sometimes it does make it harder for, say, planning when to go get your groceries, planning when to go get gas or (inaudible) planning to go, handle just like the basic necessities of life.

Nick Dressel 19:12

Yeah, for sure. Okay. Um, what school-based factors Did you consider before accepting your current position?

Layla 19:23

I was looking for unity, especially within the school district and within that mission. I wanted to feel like the school district itself was working towards a goal of some kind and growth and not just, you know, we are we exist, and this is our school district and some, you know, create a plan of, oh, this is what we would like to do, but it doesn't feel like there's any pursuit and actually accomplishing those goals. And specifically with the position I had taken, you know, it felt like they were trying to grow as a school, and trying to improve their students, and improve, kind of, the overall community, and culture of achievement, specifically within this

Larger town might be better to grow and have a family

School and district unity

Goal oriented

Plan to accomplish those goals

A culture of achievement

school. So, I think that was a huge part of it. Um, I think just hard work in general. Feeling like, you know, even the students would be willing to, you know, put in the effort because music obviously is not the easiest thing if they're not willing to be a little persistent with, oh, this instrument is hard for now, or, oh, it's hard to sing this one song, but in the end, we'll get that growth. You know, I think I was just looking for, like, perseverance, I think, within the school culture and within the students. And that was a huge thing communicated to me within the administration and within the few students I did get to speak with because, as I was taking a tour of the school, they were just a hard-working group. And I think, overall, just respect. Not just respect from like students to teachers, but respect between administration and teachers and between teachers themselves. And I definitely felt as I was coming into the school district like there's a lot of backing between administration and teachers and willingness to support the teachers as they grow and try new things and try out different curriculum and different lessons and different ideas and willing to support the teachers as needed and willing to give the feedback should we ask for it.

A culture of perseverance within the school culture and the students

Culture was communicated by Admin.

Respect between administration and teachers, between colleagues, and between students

**Administrative support
Support from colleagues**

Nick Dressel 21:30

Okay. And so now, just kind of thinking about that a little bit deeper. Why were those the things that were most important to you?

Layla 21:43

I think just because I feel like that aligns more with my personality as a teacher and within my own teaching philosophy. In the hopes that you know, I support students, and I help them grow as individuals and helped support them as they become their own people.

Nick Dressel 22:09

So you mentioned that during the interview in the tour, you're able to kind of gauge, you know, some of these things just in the way that they spoke about and probably some questions that you asked them. When you were...when you decided to apply to [Midwestern rural school district]. Let me rephrase that. How did you learn about [Midwestern rural school district]...how did you come to decide even to apply there?

Layla 22:39

So most of the jobs I had found through the Department of Education through [Midwestern state], but the [Midwestern rural school district] position specifically, I

Aligned with her personality and philosophy

Job postings through the Department of Education

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>had learned about through my college, through the Department of Music, as we were going through the process of starting to apply for jobs. My...the head of our Education and Music Education Department had forwarded a couple of emails from different towns around the area that had forwarded information about positions, and that was specifically how I had heard about the [Midwestern rural school district] one was through an email.</p> <p>Nick Dressel 23:14</p> <p>Okay, did, just out of curiosity, that come while you were student teaching? Before you went out student teaching?</p> <p>Layla 23:22</p> <p>So that was while I was student teaching. So [Midwestern rural school district] sent an email that actually to the need for that position to be filled had emailed out to the College of Education during my first placement. So my first eight weeks of teaching, I would say I was about six weeks into my teaching is the end of March, when we had heard...the end of February, beginning of March, when we had heard about that position, and that was just because they had been looking to fill that position at that point. It had been</p> | <p>Current position was posted at her college in the Department of Music</p> <p>Department head forwarded emails with information about open positions</p> <p>End of Feb. or early March is when she found out about the position</p> |
|--|--|

overdue to be filled. So they didn't have (inaudible) filled that position yet.

Nick Dressel 23:57

Okay, thank you. What other factors Did you consider before you accepted your current teaching position? Or were there any?

Layla 24:10

I'm not sure there were a ton of others that I had necessarily brought into mind. I had, specifically with music, you know, we could look at different areas or different ages, different school districts teach different groups. There were some positions that I applied for that were specifically elementary because that was kind of where I had found that I enjoyed my teaching the most was with elementary-age students through music, and of course, my degree and certification were through K-12. But I definitely found, kind of like that, that elementary education niche that I was definitely enjoying. So a lot of the jobs, I wanted to make sure that that factor itself at least had some elementary education. I didn't want to look specifically at secondary. So when this position, and a handful of others, had come up, you know, it's a full K-12 educational experience. It had the K-6 requirement that

Fit mattered - wanted to each elementary music

I've been looking for the elementary side of things, but at the same time, you know, had the secondary side of things that I had experience with and felt comfortable teaching.

Yeah, I think that was the biggest thing, was making sure that it had some elementary teaching in it because I do find quite a bit of enjoyment from the little kids.

Nick Dressel 25:37

Awesome. Yeah. So is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about what motivated you to accept your first teaching position?

Layla 25:48

I think part of it, too, was [Midwestern rural school district] just so willing to just jump for it and willing to offer me the position. There hadn't been a ton of turnaround between the time I had interviewed with them as to when they had offered me the position as opposed to, you know, a couple of the bigger districts. They had to wait for their handful of applicants to fully go through the interview process, and then they had to discuss it, and then they offer you the position. With [Midwestern rural school district], you know, it was such a small pool of applicants that they were pretty quick in their turnaround of okay, we've interviewed everyone, now we would like to

Felt school was eager to hire her

Small district was able to act faster than larger districts when offering her the job

offer...extend the position to you. That it was, it was definitely a part of it, too, was definitely a first come, first serve when it came to me. You know, they were, they were the first ones willing to put their foot forward and say we would like you. And I had taken, you know, just a little bit of time to see, you know, kind of feel out the positions, and I had had a couple offered to me, but you know, I really respected the fact that they were, they were certain that they wanted me to be in their district. And that definitely influenced me and, kind of, as I was moving forward with that.

Nick Dressel 26:55

Okay. Well, [Layla], thank you so much for taking the time to do this for me tonight. I really, really do appreciate it. As I mentioned before, I'll go through, and I'll clean up the interview transcript, and I'll get that sent out to you probably before the end of the week. It'll be in an email, and there's another little Google form that you'll open, and you'll have some choices on approval levels. You know what I mean of the transcript (okay)? So, as you go through and you read it, if you approve it, you'll click Yes. If you approve it with changes, you can tell me what changes need to be made, and I'll make those (absolutely).

Respected the district was certain they wanted her

Influenced her take the position

Or, you can, or you can say, I don't approve, you know, that's always your option, always your choice. Okay. So anyway, just keep an eye out for that. And I'll get that sent to you. I just want to say congratulations, you know, on your first teaching gig, and I hope everything's going (thank you, smiling) really well for you and that the first quarter was a good first quarter, and that you're enjoying your position and the students and everything that goes along with teaching.

Layla 28:03

Well, thank you. I'm definitely surviving, that's for sure.

Nick Dressel 28:08

Sometimes that's what we got to do, you know, I've always (interview ended, and we spoke off the record for a few minutes).

APPENDIX O: SAMPLE OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

| In Vivo Codes | Significant Statements | Axial Codes |
|---|---|---|
| Family in smaller rural areas | I had family that lived in smaller rural areas. | Experienced small towns growing up Influential teacher that made her feel safe to take risks Experienced teaching in HS; learned how teachers can make a difference |
| Experienced small-town living | I had kind of experience small-town living through visiting my extended family | |
| Influential teacher - strong relationship | I think the biggest one that influenced me was my orchestra teacher. She had actually been my strings teacher for the entirety of my doing strings. | |
| Teacher made her feel safe | I think the best way to describe how she made me feel she just made me feel (slight pause) safe | |
| Safe to take risks and make mistakes | I think some of the best teachers out there make their students feel safe, like they could be willing to take the risks, and make the mistakes, and to try new things | |
| Worked one-on-one with kids (group leader) | And then, once I hit ninth grade, she had seen me kind of as a leader in my groups and a leader in the school and asked me to come back to the kind of be a helper with the group and work with kids one on one, and help them with their music. | |
| Provided first glimpse of what teaching music looks like | And that was a huge transformative experience for me because, you know, it was my first actual glimpse of, you know, this is what teaching music looks like | |
| Making a difference | And to feel like I was making a difference to that overall group in the kids' overall education with music | |
| Grandfather was a music educator | my grandfather had been a music educator in central [Midwestern state] for about 20 years, | |
| In Vivo Codes | Significant Statements | Axial Codes |
| Stories about how he inspired and had positive impact on his students | But, I had heard all these stories about how he inspired his students, and he would have, like, past students come up to him; we'd be camping, or we would be out somewhere, and someone would magically appear in the small world that we have and say, you know, I don't know if you remember me, but you taught me to play the clarinet, and I just loved your class so much, and I found a joy and a love for music that I never thought I would have, and I've taken that with me as I move forward. | Educator in family; heard stories of the kind of impactful teacher her grandfather was |
| Impactful a career in education can be | And it was really inspirational to see, kind of, with my grandpa, how he made all those impacts and how impactful the career of music education, or just education in general, how impactful that is on so many lives. | |
| The biggest thing in life is family | I think the biggest thing for me in my life is family. My mom is my best friend. I'm really close with my siblings. I have a brother who has a kid, so I have a nephew that, you know, is slowly growing up and just turned four. | |
| Supportive family | My family is super supportive of me, and wanting to pursue this job. And I think because I was so, so close with them, they really just wanted me to choose something that made me happy. | |

| In Vivo Codes | Significant Statements | Axial Codes |
|---|---|---|
| Sounding board because during the application process | But it was always nice to have them as, like, a sounding board because as I was going through the application process, and finding different jobs | Importance of supportive family during application process - Most important thing was to be happy |
| Supportive feedback during application process | And they were really good at giving me just feedback, like, well, that sounds like you and your personality and what you enjoy. Or that sounds like that might be a little too much for you to handle, or that seems a little too out of left field, or that sounds just perfect. | |
| Supportive friends in teacher prep program | And they were really similar, kind of, helping me get feedback and helping me through that because we all kind of know, especially in the (inaudible) of music, that unless you get into the big city, there's a low probability of all of us ending up in the same place. So how can we help each other find a place that would at least make us happy? | |
| Education is a draining job | I think education, specifically, is such a draining job | Importance of supportive friends with similar career goals - Most important thing was to be happy |
| Behavior management, lesson planning, learning styles | You have to manage behaviors, and nobody's really getting the lesson that you put down because even with your best planning, it just doesn't go with their learning style that time. | |
| In Vivo Codes | Significant Statements | Axial Codes |
| Family and friends help get through hard time - listen and support | And I feel like family and friends are the ones that like help you get through that. You know, they're the ones that support you or listen to you, or you know, offer to bake you that cake if you need the extra carbs (laughing) to help you feel good about your life or, um, or just kind of, kind of, that extra support as you kind of get through those rough days because as much as education is amazing there are those, those days where it's not so, not so easy. | Teaching is challenging - supportive family and friends make it easier to get through hard times |
| Searched for jobs in the general vicinity of family | It was, it was a large factor. Um, I had looked at a ton of positions just in the general vicinity of my family, and that was a lot of the ones that I was even just applying to. | |
| Being close to family was important | Family is really, really important to me, so being close to them was a huge factor in what I was even just looking for in the first place. I didn't want to go, you know, 10 hours away or, and make it hard for me to see my family or to see my friends, you know. | |
| A large weight was proximity to family when choosing job | A large plus, and a large weight into what I was considering, was that proximity to my family. | |
| | | Proximity to family was paramount |

| In Vivo Codes | Significant Statements | Axial Codes |
|--|--|--|
| Community groups | Communities that had groups that I could get engaged with, um, communities that, um, were more welcoming, kind of had had more of the welcoming feel to as you drove into town. | A sense of belonging in the town and school |
| Welcoming feeling in the town | Communities that, um, were more welcoming, kind of had had more of the welcoming feel to as you drove into town. | |
| Welcoming feeling in the school | The few students I saw in the school, or the few teachers I saw in the school kind of, how did they make me feel? Did they make me feel welcome? Or was it more of a standoffish feel to someone? | |
| Small towns can be clicky | Small towns have the chance of being extremely clicky if you're not from the town. Sometimes there are towns that make it hard that you know you're not from there, you're not welcome here kind of thing. | |
| Services in the town were not a huge factor | I don't think, a huge considering factor for me. Services wise. | Specific services not important - knew what the town |
| Travels to larger town for services | Probably about once a week. I'm especially because [Midwestern rural town] we don't have a grocery store. So if I need any groceries or anything like that, I have to travel to [larger Midwestern town] to get those things. So yeah, I'd say probably about once a week. Sometimes I make about once every two weeks, but for the most part, probably I think most frequently once a | |
| In Vivo Codes | Significant Statements | Axial Codes |
| Administrative and collegial support | And I definitely felt as I was coming into the school district like there's a lot of backing between administration and teachers and willingness to support the teachers as they grow and try new things | Positive, focused, and supportive school culture |
| Aligned with her personality and philosophy | I think just because I feel like that aligns more with my personality as a teacher and within my own teaching philosophy. In the hopes that you know, I support students, and I help them grow as individuals and helped support them as they become their own people. | |
| Job postings through the Department of Education | I had found through the Department of Education through [Midwestern state] | A sense of belonging in the town and school |
| Current position was posted at her college in the Department of Music | But the [Midwestern rural school district] position specifically, I had learned about through my college, through the Department of Music, as we were going through the process of starting to apply for jobs. | |
| End of Feb. or early March is when she found out about the position | I would say I was about six weeks into my teaching is the end of March, when we had heard...the end of February, beginning of March, when we had heard about that position, and that was just because they had been looking to fill that position at that point. It had been overdue to be filled. So they didn't have (inaudible) filled that position yet. | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Felt school was eager to hire her | I think part of it, too, was [Midwestern rural school district] just so willing to just jump for it and willing to offer me the position. | School acted quickly to hire her - felt wanted |
| Short turnaround | There hadn't been a ton of turnaround between the time I had interviewed with them as to when they had offered me the position as opposed to, you know, a couple of the bigger districts. They had to wait for their handful of applicants to fully go through the interview process, and then they had to discuss it, and then they offer you the position. | |
| Respected the district was certain they wanted her | I really respected the fact that they were, they were certain that they wanted me to be in their district. And that definitely influenced me and, kind of, as I was moving forward with that. | |

APPENDIX P: IN VIVO AND AXIAL CODING PROCESS

Research Question 1 - In Vivo Codes

“How do Past Educational Experiences Influence Motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural schools?”

Family in smaller rural areas, Experienced small-town living, Familiar with small towns, From the area and wanted to stay, Brother and sister-in-law are teachers, Like being with family, Switched major to education, Year-long student teaching influenced decision to take current job, Liked being hired in school where she student taught, Student teaching experience gave the confidence to interview, At the disposal of the school as a sub, Wish I would have had the option, Not rural. It's a very crowded city, Worked in the family business after student teaching, Previous job was very, very stressful, Previous job impacted sleep and health, Stress is different, but improved from previous job, Grew up in a small town, Husband is from the town where I teach, husband's home town so he was supportive, Big influence on why they live there, Small college, felt personal, College community supportive and homey, Enjoyed one-on-one time with professors, Experience student teaching in current school, Whole life around teaching, Dad is a superintendent, Moved around a lot, Go to school with dad, Walked around school with him, Met co-workers, Much smaller school, Experience how much someone can care about what they do, Understand everything that goes into it, Every decision - people will think what they want, Didn't want to be a teacher until senior year, Grew up all over the country, Family was always moving, Part of childhood in China, Gone to college twice, Not a useful degree, Just graduated again, Poli-Sci, Chinese, Philosophy not useful, K-12 SPED, Parents moved here (rural town), Get daughter out of Chinese education system, Daughter to know grandparents, College was close and online, Working full-time while in college, Influential teacher - strong relationship, Teacher made her feel safe, Safe to take risks and make mistakes, Worked one-on-one with kids (group leader), Provided first glimpse of what teaching music looks like, Making a difference, Grandfather was a music educator, Stories about how he inspired and had positive impact on his students, Impactful a career in education can be, Math teacher was amazing, Strict with clear expectations, I need to be better than she was, Private school, it was faith-based, Know what felt right and wrong, She would

have said that too, Felt strict, was aiding us later on, Made us the people we are today, Never make anyone feel like that, Wasn't kind, We weren't what she wanted us to be., Brother and sister-in-law are teachers, Sister-in-law loves what she does, Kids take class because of him, Hope kids like coming to my class, Loves how he teaches, Boyfriend lives in neighboring town, Start family, See how hard it is being far away, Friends still live in home town, I wouldn't want to leave, Compared to where he's from the school is high-tech, Impressed with all the food the kids can eat in the morning, Supportive teacher with high expectations, Make a difference, Give back, pay it forward. be a part of a support system for kids, College professors as role models, More involved with sports, 3 classes/day with PE teacher, Passionate about everything, Make a difference, Peer tutor program, Helping students with behavior problems, Students started performing better, I started liking it, Eclipse activity day, School counselor told me I'd be a good teacher, Played football in college, College was 6.5-7 hrs. away from home, Recruited to play at schools in eastern half of the state, Painted [rural Midwestern college] as the middle of nowhere, No one lives there except college students, Mom went through scholarship thing with older brother, Oh, this is a nice place, Love local, small communities, Everyone's happy to see each other, Politeness, Offered scholarship, Felt like home, Teetering on the idea of SPED, Peer tutoring in HS, Loved that a lot, Takes a lot of energy, Ended up going with PE

Research Question 1 - First Round Axial Coding

“How do Past Educational Experiences Influence Motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural schools?”

Experienced small towns growing up, Influential teacher that made her feel safe to take risks, Experienced teaching in HS; learned how teachers can make a difference, Educator in family; heard stories of the kind of impactful teacher her grandfather was, From the rural area she is teaching in, educators in her family, likes being with family, Student teaching experience at the school she was hired and also subbed, Positive and negative influences led her teach, Brother and sister-in-law also influenced decision to teach, proximity to family makes raising a family easier, Friends and family nearby, wouldn't want to leave, Reduced stress from previous job, Schools have many resources for students, Small town connections, Small college offered

personal connections, Intrinsic motivation developed from educator role models, Educator in the family - felt like he had an understanding of the education profession, Sports and PE teacher - passion to make a difference, Experienced teaching in HS; learned how teachers can make a difference, School counselor encouragement, college 6-7 hours from home, Preconceived notions of small rural towns, support from mom, small town quaintness is a plus, Small town felt like home, Considered different content areas within education based on his HS experiences, Mobile childhood, Career Switcher, Parents moved to rural town, Moved so daughter could know family, Moved to attend college, Experience living in rural community (China), Inspiring teacher - role model, Negative teacher - wants to be better, Love of learning from favorite teacher, Pass on love of learning to students, Supportive parents that encouraged teaching as a career, Family member is an educator, Parents taught English in China

Research Question 1 - Second Round Axial Coding

“How do Past Educational Experiences Influence Motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural schools?”

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Previous small-town experiences | College connections |
| Grew up in a small town | Secondary school connections |
| Moved to attend college | Personal touch |
| Small town felt like home | Relationships in the school - cooperating teachers, students, parents |
| | Pre-existing relationships |

Research Question 2 - In Vivo Codes

“How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

The biggest thing in life is family, Supportive family, Sounding board because during the application process, Supportive feedback during application process, Supportive friends in, teacher prep program, Education is a draining job, Behavior management, lesson planning, learning styles, Family and friends help get through hard time - listen and support, Searched for jobs in the general vicinity of family, Being close to family was important, A large weight was proximity to family when choosing job, Teaching is stressful, Someone to vent to, Friends, from school to talk to, Someone to listen, Somebody to talk to, Different if I was far away,

Talks to brother and sister-in-law, Principal asked me to apply, Wanted to apply, Comparable to her school, Felt like better community, Didn't want to teach in hometown public school, Kept position open until she applied, Thought interview was horrendous, Offered job on same day, Dream school, Didn't interview anywhere else, Wife is a teacher, Wife influenced him into getting into teaching, Two months vacation, hello!, Enjoys having the same vacation time as his wife, Wife teaches 4th grade in same district, Two month vacation, that's pretty good! Did not like being on call at his previous job., Wife encouraged him to improve his mental health., Well, my wife likes it her., A hurricane brought him and his family to the United States, Mom and sister live in the Midwestern rural town he currently teaches in, Midwestern rural, school district was good to them - grateful, Daughters were in U.S. since September, In, December, he and his wife left to visit daughters, Move to Midwestern Rural town for good in February, Wife got a job before they arrived, He got a job a few months later, The following year wife got job at Midwestern rural school district, Family is the only reason they landed in Midwestern state and town, Encouragement to step out of comfort zone, Don't limit me to a small town, Parents glad she had a job after graduation, First year of teaching is rough, Put my best foot forward, Pick you back up, Circle of support, This is where I want to be right now relatively close to around here, Provided foundation, just kind of happened, On the fence - wanted to live with roommate, Was placed in [current district] for student teaching, 20-minute drive from college, Come back for practice, Graduate, keep playing, get masters, Enjoyed talking to cooperating teacher, First period asking questions, Wants to be an administrator, Observed for a week, Took over week two or three, Sub certificate, Heard a position might be open next year, Talked to my dad, Stick it out (football), family lives with 2-hours of each other, Wanted me to move closer to home, Built great rapport with students, Didn't feel like a fish out of water, Felt like, almost home, Cooperating teacher asked if I would apply, Felt like a perfect opportunity, End college career, Still live with roommates, Hit the ground running Opportunity I didn't want to turn down, college football coach said apply, It wasn't like I was quitting, I got the job, Mom wanted me to leave at 26, Teaching is hard, Emotionally draining, Base of support, Rest of my life, Wasn't sold at first, Main motivation, Parents, sister, wife, daughter, Para for 3 years, School supported me, Job here when certified, Taught English in China, Teach English in U.S., Don't have a certificate, College degree, Six years experience

Good recommendation, Find a teaching job, Highest requirements, Applied for job on a Rez Interview, COVID happened - never heard back

Research Question 2 - First Round Axial Coding

“How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

Importance of supportive family during application process, Most important thing was to be happy, Importance of supportive friends with similar career goals - Most important thing was to be happy, Teaching is challenging - supportive family and friends make it easier to get through hard times, Proximity to family was paramount, Teaching is stressful - someone to talk to and listen helps get through the hard times, Personal touch - principal asked her to apply, Similar to her hometown school, but better community, Efficiency in hiring - offered job the same day as interview, Wife encouraged him to switch jobs, Family was already living in current town is the only reason they are here, Support not to settle, Circle of support to get through rough times, Being close to family was important, Placement distance from college made the option to continue as college athlete possible, Positive relationship with cooperating teacher, Subbed in the district during student teaching, Cooperating teacher told him the position might be open, Family wanted him to continue to play and move closer to home, Positive student teaching experience helped him make the decision, Cooperating teacher asked him to apply, Felt like the perfect opportunity - everything kind of fell into place, Encouraged to apply from college coach, Offered job right away after interviewing, Mom wanted him to move home after he wasn't eligible to stay on their insurance, The teaching profession is hard, Base of support to help during hard times, Wasn't sure about the rural life at first, but loves it now and wants to stay forever, Experience working in the school, School supported the idea of getting education degree, Past experience of non-certified teaching, Thought he'd be able to teach in the US, Midwestern state has high certification requirements, COVID shutdown prevented him from advancing into his first teaching opportunity

Research Question 2 - Second Round Axial Coding

“How do relationships with family and friends influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

| | |
|---|--|
| Teaching is challenging | Pay mattered |
| External circle of support to get through rough times | Benefits are a nice - less important than other factors |
| Friends and family nearby, wouldn't want to leave. | Forced extra duties were a deal breaker |
| Internal support - Admin, colleagues, parents, students | \$11,000 stipend for insurance wasn't a factor when he accepted the job, but was a nice perk |
| Distance from support structures matters | Resources for kids were more important than benefits |
| | Benefits like retirement, vacation, and spending time with kids were important |
| | Traveling to larger communities isn't a deal breaker, but adds expense and time |
| | Sense of safety |

Research Question 3 - In Vivo Codes

“How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

Community groups, Welcoming feeling in the town, Welcoming feeling in the school, Small towns can be cliquey, Services in the town were not a huge factor, Travels to larger town for services once or twice per week, Not for an eternity, Loves towns everybody knows everybody, Small community, Foundation for relationships, Better foundation to build from, Negative connotation to a family, I know your cousin, More like a family, Willing to help each other, No food shelters, No programs for at-risk youth, Resources available to anyone, All the time, Half of a grocery store, Go somewhere else for specific things, Those don't impact me most, Gas prices, Snow Days, Bad highways, Farther distance probably reconsidered, know someone to find housing, Hesitant to student teach because of drive, Gas prices, Price of things is just ridiculous, Adds time to day, Almost an hour a day in the car, Value sleep, no extra time in my mornings, Goes to larger community whenever he can to shop, Former city had more shopping resources, Doesn't mind two hour drive to access resources, Nobody likes traffic, You have to travel if you live here, (in previous job) he would travel to go to work, It was the

people, Similar to where I grew up, Not afraid to help anybody out, Not a lot of services or support groups, Need, Useful, More need in countryside, Less support for students, Less resources, More useful here, Early childhood outreach, Sense of community, Collection of people, Love being part of community, Important for young children, Health resources, Two and a half hours away, Mental health & behavioral disorders, A couple of times per month, Every six weeks, Isn't convenient, Slight negative impact, Not enough to deter, Bigger stores, more options, would be better, Likes to be active outside, Feel safe, Not be afraid, Feel safe being alone, No grocery store, Not a lot to do here, That's how I grew up, Driving over an hour was normal for me, Grew up finding ways to entertain yourself

Research Question 3 - First Round Axial Coding

“How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

A sense of belonging in the town and school, Specific services not important - knew what the town had to offer before taking position, Likes the small town, but maybe not forever, Small towns - foundation to build relationships, Knows other families in the town - makes it feel like family, Few community resources - has to travel, but doesn't impact her because of where she lives, Travel adds expense and time to the day, Traveling for resources is just what you have to do, Welcoming and helpful community, limited services in town, Sense of safety, Specific services not important - knew what the town had to offer before taking the job, Wants to feel needed and useful, Preconceived notions about rural communities and schools - higher need and fewer resources, Feels like he is needed more in rural schools, sense of community is important, Travel for health resources, Travel to larger communities isn't convenient, but not enough to deter him from living in one

Research Question 3 - Second Round Axial Coding

“How does geographic isolation from a population center influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Previous experiences in schools | Small towns can be cliquy |
| School acted quickly to hire - felt wanted | Welcoming and helpful |
| Mission and culture aligned with personality and philosophy | Relationships |
| Sense of respect and team between him, the teachers, and administration | Tight-knit community |
| Welcoming and helpful | |
| Relationships | |
| Tight-knit community | |
| "Fit" desired grade level, content area, coaching | |

Research Question 4 - In Vivo Codes

“Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

School and district unity - mission focused - goal-oriented, Plan to accomplish those goals, Culture of achievement, A culture of perseverance within the school culture and the students, Culture was communicated by Admin., Respect between administration and teachers, between colleagues, and between students, Administrative and collegial support, Aligned with her personality and philosophy, Job postings through the Department of Education, Current position was posted at her college in the Department of Music, End of Feb. or early March is when she found out about the position, Fit mattered - wanted to teach elementary music, Felt school was eager to hire her, Short turnaround, Respected the district was certain they wanted her, Student taught there, Knew ins and outs, Feels like a second-year teacher, tight-knit feel and atmosphere, Made connection with principal, Subbing gave me a good feel of type of people school hires, Low turnover rate, In the community, been in community, don't plan to leave community, People want to stay, Relationship with co-teacher, Hyped it up, Made it sound perfect, Co-teacher experience huge role in wanting to be here, Everything I wanted; better district, Thought he was lying when offered the position, Knew position applying for, Vacation and salary were better than previous job, Learned about benefits and salary at the interview, Was vested in previous job before leaving, Teaching daughters is a benefit, Had to

complete HR and SPED course, Students first at all costs, Vetted school during student teaching, Asked veterans questions when student teaching, Talking to teachers and students before applying, Talked to students during student teaching, Prioritizing staff build-up, Wanted to feel welcomed, It was friendly, Made sure I was comfortable, Admin supportive and welcoming, No mentor program, Parent support in the classroom and community, Pay was a factor, Extra duty assignments, One school eliminated because of forced extra duties, Understand rural communities are small, Adapt to it being small, Experienced rural school as student teacher & growing up, If no experience - Culture shock, \$11,000 stipend, I have good insurance, Opportunity to build curriculum, Get ready for actual real-life, Develop my craft, Complete my master's, Make north of \$50,000, \$275/mo. Rent, Save as much as I can, Won't lose much when I move to a new school, Helped problem students, Really good for me, Built relationships, Like a sponge, Make an impact, Coaching, Did not want AD job, Maybe down the road, Picked up co-AD, Paid more for AD role, Like a sponge, Opportunistic place, What level to go into, Taught ages 2 to 62 in China, Teens and early 20's, Key years, Be a positive influence, Interested in high school, Thoughtful conversations, Explain deeper meanings, S.E.E.P. Program (para to teacher), Easier to graduate, Co-worker in the same program, High minority, high-needs, Be more of service, We want you here, They wanted to keep me, I wanted to stay, Knew the school, Knew the kids, Built relationships, Knew Gen. Ed. teachers, student-teaching gave me a head start, Liked people and school, Liked admin. Blessed in that regard, Supportive Admin, Part of the team, Sense of Respect

Research Question 4 - First Round Axial Coding

“Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

Positive, focused, and supportive school culture, Job posting was emailed by a professor (a feeling of personalization), School acted quickly to hire her - felt wanted, Knew school well because she student taught there, Made connections - tight-knit feel, Good community and school where people want to stay, Positive relationship with co-teacher during student teaching -Hyped up the school, Position and job responsibilities were clear, Benefits like retirement, vacation, and spending time with kids were important, Extra credits were needed., but not a big

deal, Experienced school during student teaching, Sense of belonging in the school, Pay mattered, Forced extra duties was a deal breaker, Small town experience matters, \$11,000 stipend for insurance wasn't a factor when he accepted the job, but was a nice perk, Small school is a starting point - plans to move on to larger school after he gets experience, Work on Master's Degree, Save money, Thinking experience and Master's Degree will even out pay when he loses \$11,000 stipend, Build relationships with students and colleagues, soaking up information and advice like a sponge, feels like he has already made an impact, Availability of coaching opportunity was important, Offered AD position - declined, but let the option on the table for later on, In second year will take on some AD responsibilities, The school offered many opportunities for advancement, Prefers teaching older kids. Can have more meaningful conversations with older kids, Para-to-teacher program, Be of greater service in schools with higher needs, School indicated they wanted him to stay in the school, Experience a para in school helped with the transition into teaching, Sense of respect and team between him, the teachers, and administration

Research Question 4 - Second Round Axial Coding

“Which school-based factors influence motivation to teach in hard-to-staff rural school districts?”

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Greater need in rural schools | Starting point for career |
| Need to feel needed and useful | Opportunities for career advancement w/in the school |
| Pass on love of learning and content | |
| Make a difference | |

APPENDIX Q: AXIAL CODES AND THEMES

| Sense of Connectedness | | SENSE OF SUPPORT | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Previous small town experiences | College connections | Teaching is challenging | Pay mattered |
| Grew up in a small town | Secondary school connections | External circle of support to get through rough times | Benefits are a nice - less important than other factors |
| Moved to attend college | Personal touch | Friends and family near by, wouldn't want to leave. | Forced extra duties was a deal breaker |
| Small town felt like home | Relationships in the school - cooperating teachers, students, parents | Internal support - Admin, colleagues, parents, students | \$11,000 stipend for insurance wasn't a factor when he accepted the job, but was a nice perk |
| | Pre-existing relationships | Distance from support structures matters | Resources for kids was more important than benefits |
| | | | Benefits like retirement, vacation, and spending time with kids were important |
| | | | Traveling to larger communities isn't deal breaker, but adds expense and time |
| | | | Sense of safety |
| | | | |
| SENSE OF BELONGING | | SENSE OF PURPOSE | |
| Belonging in the School | Belonging in the Community | Opportunities for Impact | Opportunities for Advancement |
| Previous experiences in schools | Small towns can be cliquy | Greater need in rural schools | Starting point for career |
| School acted quickly to hire - felt wanted | Welcoming and helpful | Need to feel needed and useful | Opportunities for career advancement w/in the the school |
| Mission and culture aligned with personality and philosophy | Relationships | Pass on love of learning and content | |
| Sense of respect and team between him, the teachers, and administration | Tight-knit community | Make a difference | |
| Welcoming and helpful | | | |
| Relationships | | | |
| Tight-knit community | | | |
| "Fit" desired grade level, content area, coaching | | | |

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