

SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER RETENTION IN A SMALL RURAL
MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

This applied research study was designed to determine how to solve the ongoing problem of teacher retention in a rural Mississippi school district. This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to determine how to solve the problem of teacher retention within one relatively small, rural Mississippi school district. After identifying common influencers, the researcher proposed a plan to offer a systematic retention plan for improved teacher retention that can be used within one rural Mississippi school district. The plan included guided instruction and established a program that addresses many of the issues that were discovered using a mix-method approach of both qualitative and quantitative data.

keywords: teacher retention, rural schools, teacher attrition, Mississippi educational system

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my family who made many sacrifices to help me fulfill my goals. My hope is that I can one day be able to repay them all the time, guidance, and encouragement they have offered me throughout this journey. This manuscript also would never have been possible without the daily presence of my Heavenly Father who held my hand, guarded my heart, and refueled my determination with His presence.

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List of Abbreviations

Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

English Language Learners (ELL)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this applied research study was to solve the problem of teacher retention in one rural Mississippi school district. With over one-third of the state of Mississippi suffering from a critical teacher shortage, poor teacher retention is more prevalent among the rural schools within the state (Leins, 2019). This chapter will contain detailed information on the following components of the study: background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research question, definitions, and summary.

Background

Historical Context

One can look back as far as 1933 to see the issue of poor teacher retention slowly emerging in the state of Mississippi. During this era, the premise behind the teaching profession was drastically different, yet some of the same issues faced today were beginning to present themselves; teachers felt unprepared and unappreciated (Williams, 1933). Teachers need to feel that they have the support of all parties involved in the educational decision-making process (Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, & Labat, 2015). In 1997, the Mississippi government passed the Mississippi Adequate Education Act, or MAEP, which was intended to take an allotted amount of the state's budget to see that every school in the state received adequate funds to ensure that all students received an adequate education. MAEP was designed to establish an even playing field for all students in terms of academic and enrichment opportunities; however, this act has only been fully funded twice over the last twenty years (Briggs, 2018). Since part of the funding for MAEP falls on the district, this shortfall by the state has placed yet another burden on districts that are already considered in crisis (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). This funding deficit

has forced many Mississippi schools to rely heavily on their communities and federal dollars for funding. According to Ballotpedia.org (n.d.), during the 2012- 2013 school year, Mississippi, when compared to neighboring states such as Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas, spent less money per pupil at an average of \$8, 130.00. Louisiana was closest to the national average of \$10,700.00 as they spent an average of \$10, 490.00 per student (Ballotpedia, n.d.). In 2014, Mississippi voters brought Initiative 42 to the ballot. This bill was designed to hold the legislatures accountable for fully funding MAEP through a constitutional amendment, but with a small margin of 51.6 % of voters voting against it, the districts found themselves with the same funding woes (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017).

Many federal grant applications can take a great deal of time and resources away from an already struggling rural district only to find that the rate of success with funding is attached to its own improbabilities. Since federal grants come with both time and personnel challenges that rural schools can find difficult to overcome, federal funds become even more elusive to small rural districts (Fishman, 2015). The combination of limited local tax-based allocations and additional federal allocations is causing rural schools to feel an immense pressure to locate, attract, and retain quality teachers in the classrooms. This pressure has introduced a vicious cycle since most of these schools have considerably less to attract the top of the line when compared to the more affluent districts of the state.

Fishman (2015) argues that even when successful programs are introduced that could benefit small, rural schools in their endeavor to attract well-trained teachers, eventually more money is poured into the more suburban counterparts. For example, projects such as Teach for America have seen success in both the suburban and rural school atmosphere, but since the

continuation of such success can rely on the philanthropy of larger corporations, rural communities, once again, find themselves falling short.

Another factor influencing funding for rural districts is the grading system that lends itself to community biases as well. The state of Mississippi has a grading system in place for all public school districts. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, this grading system was adopted in 2013 to serve as an indicator to the public as to how well a school was performing in terms of students' academic proficiency (Mississippi School and District Grading System, n.d.). This five-point grading system was based on a rubric where schools could earn point values based on the indicators of student achievement and student growth. These indicators are determined by a series of state assessments that are created by an outside testing firm hired by the Mississippi Department of Education (Mississippi School and District Grading System, n.d.). Federal funds are also tied to the grading system. Those with low-performing scores are given an increase in federal funds, yet these funds are tied to specific tasks and obligations that must be filled to become the beneficiary. This creates another problem in that the highly qualified teachers working within these low-performing districts have no problem finding jobs in higher-performing districts that require less federally mandated paperwork and tasks. For the cycle to stop, the initial indicators for teacher retention in this rural school district must be identified to create a model program that will result in an increase in student achievement by decreasing the amount of quality teacher turnover.

Social Context

Several issues have been the impetus for a recent increase in interest regarding the research concerning teacher attrition and retention in the state of Mississippi. The teacher shortage in the state of Mississippi has been a legislative issue for several years; however, at the

close of the 2019 school year, over 63 percent of surveyed teachers in the state of Mississippi declared they were in full support of a one-day "sick out" to bring more attention to the lack of funding by the Mississippi legislators (Harris, 2019). At the same time, public school teachers seemed equally upset that the legislative body designed to protect the institution of public schools seems to be funneling more and more money into private and charter schools within the state (Harrison & Skinner, 2019). The number of prospective teachers continues to decline as the number of elementary degrees being awarded has declined by 30 percent since 2010 (Harris, 2018). The lack of resources and support is taking its toll on Mississippi teachers, and the call for a crisis is just one indicator that, if Mississippi expects to produce college and career-ready citizens, more research must be done to alleviate the problem of both teacher attrition and retention.

Theoretical Context

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954), there are certain levels of needs that must be met before an individual can be satisfied and continue to thrive. Szabo (2016), points out that for students, the affective domain, the domain that drives a student's attitude and motivational level, is most influential in shaping a student's passion for learning; however, schools are mainly focused on the cognitive domain of the teacher. Fisher and Royster (2016) took the theory a step further by designing a hierarchy of needs as they relate to teachers. Ironically, the contributions one sees met at almost every school such as equipment, training, and supplies, fall at the bottom of the pyramid. Unfortunately, there is some disconnect within schools as the pyramid builds towards aspects such as security, association, and respect (Fisher & Royster, 2016). To improve teacher retention in this rural Mississippi school district, research must determine where that disconnect is occurring for teachers - specifically those teachers

employed by districts who serve rural schools. While research supports that teachers across the state are dissatisfied with the level of support and funding associated with education in both rural and urban schools throughout the state (Harris, 2018; Harrison & Skinner, 2019; Skinner, 2019), the needs of teachers in rural districts can differ from those of their suburban counterparts (Rooks, 2018). Being able to identify specific motivational factors for teachers in the rural school setting will allow the findings to result in a well-developed program designed to guide rural districts in the most effective human resource strategies for improving teacher retention.

Maslow (1954) believed his theory of needs was applicable to the teacher regarding his or her students. The researcher can also apply this same hierarchy of needs to the teacher. The research should determine what physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs must be met for a teacher to reach the level of job satisfaction that will result in improved teacher retention.

Problem Statement

With over a third of Mississippi school districts being identified as having a critical shortage of teachers, the problem of poor teacher retention is prominently present among the rural schools in Central Mississippi (Leins, 2019). As the number of teachers entering the field of education continues to dwindle and the workload and pressure of the classroom is on a continuous climb, solutions must be found to ensure that rural Mississippi schools are receiving their fair share of quality classroom educators (Harris, 2018). With suburban districts within the state passing bond initiatives to attract and retain quality educators (Harris, 2017), the small pool left for rural schools to choose from is resulting in schools among Mississippi's rural areas having no choice but to hire underqualified or inexperienced educators. Kaden, Patterson, Healy, and Adams (2016) pointed out, "Often under such circumstances, students and community members resign themselves to a revolving door of teachers" (p. 130). Goodpaster, Adedokun,

and Weaver (2012) reiterated that ignoring the importance of hiring and maintaining quality teachers in the classroom can have detrimental consequences regarding student success. These consequences have been found to not only impact the students of the inadequate teacher but can become a cankerous circumstance to the school (Hanusek et al., 2016). Because the positive impact that quality teachers can have on student achievement has been well established throughout the research, ignoring this issue will result in a disservice to the students in Mississippi rural schools. The applied research in this study is designed to examine this issue within a specific rural school district to determine a plan that can help alleviate the problem that has been proven to have a significant impact on student achievement.

This study will focus on one rural school district in Central Mississippi that has a significantly consistent teacher turnover rate. The district, according to the Mississippi Department of Education grading system, is rated at a "C" level. Researchers such as Kaden, Patterson et al. (2016) have pointed out that teacher retention and student success are interrelated; therefore, a significant portion of the responsibility for the lower rating in this district can be attributed to poor teacher retention. For student success to increase, studies such as this must identify the underlying factors causing poor teacher retention and develop strategic plans to mitigate these factors in favor of teacher retention. By using a multimethod of both qualitative and quantitative data collection, this study analyzes themes presented by a variety of classroom teachers to determine how this problem can be assuaged.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of teacher retention for a small, rural Mississippi school district and to formulate a solution to address the problem. This study will utilize a multimethod design through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach will consist of interviews with teachers in the small rural Mississippi school district. The second approach will use an online discussion forum that will present teachers with specific questions to discuss. Finally, a quantitative survey will be conducted with teachers in the district using a Likert-scale to rate questions that have been developed by reviewing the current literature specifically on the topic of teacher retention in rural school districts.

Significance of the Study

Student success has many contributing factors; studies have shown that one of the most significant factors is that of teacher retention (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Hodges, 2013; Muller, Alliata, & Benningoff, 2009). The ability to attract and retain quality teachers is an integral element in creating a successful growth mindset within a school (Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016). The Mississippi Department of Education uses a grading system based on student proficiency and growth to determine the district on which this research was conducted warranted a "C" rating for the 2018-19 school year (msrc.mdek12.org, n.d.). For schools to make significant impacts on student academic growth, they must be presented with a plan that guides them with identifying contributing factors and offers specific solutions to poor teacher retention. According to Muller et al. (2009), the quality of the teacher's environment and successful student learning are in direct relation to each other. Understanding the contributing factors that lead to poor teacher retention can help schools make adjustments that will have a significant impact on student success. Higher student achievement can result in higher college entrance exam scores,

which will lead to higher scholarship attainment. Also, by increasing student academic success, the community will benefit from a better-educated workforce.

Research Questions

Central Question: How can the problem of teacher retention in a rural Mississippi school district be improved?

Sub-question 1: How would teachers in an interview solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?

Sub-question 2: How would teachers in an online discussion board solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?

Sub-question 3: How would teachers in a quantitative online survey solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?

Definitions

1. *Teacher Retention*- placing and keeping qualified teaching candidates in the classroom (Mueller, Alliata, & Benninghoff, 2009).
2. *Rural Schools* – Schools outside the suburban and inner cities. Rural schools have specific challenges unique to them in terms of teacher recruitment and retention (Rooks, 2018).
3. *Mississippi Adequate Education Program*- A system introduced by the Mississippi State Legislature designed to ensure that Mississippi public schools receive adequate funding based on student population. Each district is required to contribute up to 27% of funding based on income provided through local ad valorem taxes. This formula also depends on average student attendance and is reevaluated every four years to adjust for the cost of living. (www.msparentscampaign.org/, n.d.).

4. *Mississippi Department of Education Grading System*- A five-scale letter grading system used by the department to determine student achievement within the Mississippi school districts (www.mdek12.org, n.d.).

Summary

The issue of poor teacher retention has become an increasing burden on Mississippi's rural school district. The issue continues to force the administration to place under-qualified teachers in today's rural classroom and seems to have severe ramifications on student achievement (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). The goal of this study is to identify the contributing factors and offer a plan to improve the problem. Offering other rural districts, a solution to the issue of poor teacher retention will improve the overall quality of education for all students in rural classrooms.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this applied research study was to solve the problem of teacher retention in one rural Mississippi school district. To find the appropriate answer to this prevalent issue, additional research was conducted to identify the specific needs of rural Mississippi teachers to develop a course of action that can serve as a model for other rural school districts throughout the state of Mississippi as well as the rest of the nation. Mississippi schools have a long and curious history. The idea of a free public school system was first introduced in 1802 by Governor W.C.C. Claiborne but was not fully established with a superintendent and school boards until 1870. The adoption of the Mississippi Constitution in 1890 introduced racial segregation in the public school system and brought with it an influx of small rural schools being established across the state. In 1904, Mississippi had a total of 7,080 rural school districts with students attending an average of 129 days in a one-room building, and they were not separated by grade levels (Sansing, n.d).

By 1910, county schools were being consolidated, and Mississippi had over one thousand rural schools employing over four hundred teachers. After the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) recognized the blatant difference in the quality of instruction and facilities between the white schools and the black schools, they spearheaded a campaign that developed into the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. This decision determined that the educational system across the United States was heavily biased in favor of white public schools. However, the integration of Mississippi schools did not fully occur until the spring of 1970 after the Supreme Court ruled in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, that all segregation must occur “with deliberate speed” (Alexander v. Holmes County

Board of Education, 1969). The 1970s also brought about a comprehensive overhaul for Mississippi teachers as well. Teachers in the state benefitted from a renewed emphasis on the importance of early childhood education as well as the need for more sufficient teacher compensation. The Mississippi legislature eventually passed more reform through the Education Enhancement Act of 1992. This legislation dealt schools additional funds to public schools and allowed them to conduct much needed updates and repairs to many of the facilities (Sansing, n.d).

By the first of this century, Mississippi public schools included over 150 school districts with three of those being agriculturally based schools. By this time, the state also funded a school for the blind and deaf, math and science, and school of arts, and employed over thirty-six thousand classroom teachers who earned an average salary of approximately forty thousand dollars (Sansing, n.d) With the increasing number of students in Mississippi public schools, the state began suffering from a critical teacher shortage. This crisis resulted in the Critical Teacher Shortage Act of 1998, which offered scholarships and other incentives to those teachers who agreed to teach in critical geographical as well as academic areas (Mississippi House Bill 609, 1998). While much has been done to assuage the teacher shortage, very little has been done to address a plan to assist schools with retaining those quality teachers once they are hired. This problem is compounded within the Mississippi rural schools.

There is a substantial amount of research on the increasing problem of teacher retention, yet the majority of the research that has been conducted tends to focus on the topic in general rather than highlighting the real divide between teacher retention in the rural areas and the more affluent suburban schools. According to Leins (2019), one out of every three schools in the state of Mississippi currently suffers from a teacher shortage; that shortage is felt even more

prevalently within rural school districts. In 2018, the state reported over 2000 teacher vacancies with a 40% decline in teacher preparation programs within the state's universities (Wierman, 2019). Even with the recent suspension of licensure testing by the Mississippi Department of Education due to Covid-19, many schools are still reporting several vacancies within their districts (Mdek12.org. n.d).

To become a teacher in the state of Mississippi, prospects are offered both traditional and alternate routes. According to the Mississippi Department of Education website (n.d), the traditional route includes a bachelor's degree in the field of education, at least a 21 on the ACT, a successful score on the PRAXIS exam, and an internship. For professionals who have a degree in content other than education, Mississippi offers several alternate route programs such as The Master of Arts in Teaching Program, The Mississippi Alternate Path to Quality Teacher Program, The Teach Mississippi Institute, and The American Board for Certification. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, four of these programs have testing, extensive coursework, and internship requirements, however, the internship for the alternate route is completed concurrent to one's first year of teaching. Currently, the state of Mississippi offers only the traditional teaching route for those who wish to teach in kindergarten – third grade (www.mde.org, n.d).

To obtain an administrator license, the state offers three paths to licensure. The first is the traditional route where a prospective administrator would return to the college classroom and take at least 30 hours of coursework in the desired field. Next, the state offers an alternate route business track, which allows candidates with a business degree and extensive supervisory experience to take alternate courses and obtain an administrator's license. Finally, a prospective

administrator can obtain a license by completing the coursework in an alternative program offered through various colleges and institutions within the state (www.mdek12.org, n.d).

Chapter Two will examine and analyze the current literature concerning teacher retention and correlate the current information with this applied research problem. The literature reviewed in this chapter examines different aspects of teacher retention, as well as several different perspectives reflecting on why this problem exists on such an extensive level. This chapter will also explore the impact that poor teacher retention has on student achievement, the school, and the community.

To identify the impetus behind poor teacher retention and develop an effective strategy to solve the problem, one must examine the current literature, identify any gaps in the current research, and use the information obtained through this study to fill those gaps so that other rural districts can be presented with a rational solution. Mason and Matas (2015) reported that the United States leads the way in researching teacher retention; this research has been the catalyst for many other research models. This specific study on teacher retention in a rural district in Central Mississippi aims to use the information already discovered and pair it with the information garnered through this mix-methods study to determine the best solution.

Theoretical Framework

When considering the issue of poor teacher retention in any school, one must question what needs are not being met by the school, leadership, co-workers, or even the community. Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs is based on the concept that motivation comes through a process of meeting an individual's basic human needs. The theory suggests that there are basic needs that must be met before a person can move to a level that allows for psychological needs to be fulfilled, which leads to a level of self-actualization or fulfillment. In the self-fulfillment

stage, motivation increases as needs are being met. Inversely, when need deficiencies occur, motivation begins to dwindle (McLeod, 2018). The foundation of this theory, as well as how it relates to teacher retention, is the premise that every individual can reach the highest stage of the hierarchy of human needs; however, they are often disrupted by a deficit in the lower levels. The goal of this study was to determine what discrepancies in teachers' basic needs are present in a rural district that may cause a teacher to leave and what can be done to relieve those shortfalls.

Maslow's (1954) theory can easily be applied to teacher retention. If the basic needs of teachers, such as rest and warmth, are not met, there is very little chance that they will be able to move past this deficit to build the relationships that are necessary to foster a strong sense of belonging. Locke (1969) determined that the main factor of one's job satisfaction cannot be found within the job itself but rather in the relationships built within the job. The lack of such relationships can be identified as an insufficiency in basic needs, which can be a catalyst for seeking a position in another school or district (Sharplin et al., 2011). The same literature points out that there have been numerous attempts to assuage this problem through mentoring groups and "help-seeking" programs to aid teachers with amalgamating to the school and its community; among the teachers that have been offered such benefits, there is a higher level of job satisfaction (Rooks, 2018). Collaboration groups, such as the mentoring and "help-seeking" programs, are not only beneficial to the teacher from a professional perspective; they also meet the psychological needs of intimacy and friendship outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2018).

Other contributing factors that must be met to achieve self-fulfillment are a feeling of high self-esteem and a strong sense of accomplishment or worth. The value placed on the teaching profession itself varies from country to country. In countries like Japan and Finland, the

profession is highly favored; yet, among other countries like the United States, the profession has become a devalued profession, leaving teachers feeling a lack of worth (Price & Weathersby, 2017). Muller, Alliata, and Benninghoff (2009) determined that in addition to teachers teaching simply because they love the activity, a feeling of social value is one of three main components of teacher satisfaction, which also included a supportive work environment. Often, teachers, especially those that are considered novices, are not offered the necessary support, or they experience a feeling of isolation (Redding & Henry, 2019). These teachers are under tremendous pressure to perform; however, they are hesitant to reach out for help from their more experienced counterparts based on the fear that they will appear incompetent (Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2011). This pressure to perform, paired with the reluctance to ask for assistance, can be a source of great anxiety to a teacher and could be the motivating factor behind a teacher leaving a school where he or she feels very little sense of accomplishment (Redding & Henry, 2019).

While many programs have been designed over the years to assist in helping teachers become a cohesive and active members of their respective school communities, one study in Alaska found that the pressure to undertake such a diverse gamut of responsibilities is even still more prevalent in rural schools (Adams & Woods, 2015). Unfortunately, the reason teachers must fill multiple roles within rural districts is a direct result of limited resources (Adams & Woods, 2015; Rooks, 2018). Such a lack of resources is an increasing problem in the rural South (Leins, 2018). Again, the pressure to perform combined with the limited resources to do so can be another cause for a teacher to seek a position in a different school where he or she feels the support and resources are more conducive to providing the expected results (Huk, Terjesen, & Cherkasova, 2019).

Muller et al. (2009) maintained that the three most important elements of teacher satisfaction were driven through self-determination rather than any extrinsic elements, such as financial rewards. Oftentimes in the low-income, rural schools, teachers begin with a strong sense of self-determination but become discouraged very quickly based on the working conditions and lack of support (Redding & Henry, 2019). Thomas et al. (2019) supported the same premise that the beginning teacher's needs could be placed into three intrinsic categories: a certain level of content knowledge, self-confidence, and a sense of the school. Unfortunately, these needs are not being met for many novice teachers; this is leading to teachers who feel less motivation towards the fulfillment of their tasks (Muller, 2009; Newburgh, 2018). Teachers do not only want to feel a sense of self-worth and belonging, but they need to feel a sense of community if there is to be a significant improvement in teacher retention in all schools. This factor is much more ubiquitous in rural areas (Silverman, 2005). This principle also aligns with Maslow's theory (1954) in that, to improve teacher retention, there are basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs that must be met (McLeod, 2018).

Another concept that is often paired with Maslow's (1954) theory is the Motivation-Hygiene theory by Frederick Herzberg (1966). This theory, also known as the two-factor theory, dictates that there are two levels of an individual's state of mind in which one is not dependent on the other. These two states are happiness and unhappiness (McLeod, 2018). When approaching from the perspective of the teacher's job within a district, these states would be referred to as satisfied and unsatisfied. According to Timmerick (1977), certain hygienes must be present in all situations for one to achieve a level of happiness or satisfaction. These hygienes are comparable to the basic needs outlined in Maslow's (1954) philosophy. If a teacher's basic needs or hygienes

are not met, there will be very little chance of the teacher ever reaching the level of job satisfaction necessary to improve teacher retention.

As this study is designed to improve teacher retention in a specific school district, it will take a theoretical approach by considering Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Motivation- Hygiene Theory (1966) and will use that approach to examine the specific needs of teachers within a rural Mississippi school district. Sharplin et al. (2011) identified teacher efficacy as "A psychological characteristic of individuals who believe they are capable of mastering a desired goal" (p. 138). This applied research used both qualitative and quantitative tools to determine the needs of the teachers within this district to help them reach a level of efficacy, support, and autonomy that will improve teacher retention within this rural Mississippi district.

Related Literature

The Mississippi educational system has a history of being below average and in great need of attention. The problems faced by Mississippi schools are far more pronounced in the rural areas, and the state has fifty percent of its students enrolled in a rural school. Mississippi's rural students have the second-lowest achievement rate in the nation and have fewer among them who go on to pursue advanced education after graduating high school (Showlater, Hartman, Johnson & Klein, 2019). This study will help determine what implications these factors have on the retention of teachers within one rural Mississippi school district. The problem of poor teacher retention is not distinct to the state of Mississippi or even the United States. Studies in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom are also reporting an increase in teachers walking away from their teaching careers while it is in its early stages (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Longaretti & Toe, 2017). These problems, though, are not necessarily involved with teacher

retention as teacher attrition is the more appropriate label. While some researchers tend to use the words "retention" and "attrition" interchangeably, it is essential for this research that one recognizes the discrete difference between the two terms. Mason and Matas (2015) produce a distinction between teacher attrition and teacher retention that is often overlooked by other literature on the topic; this distinction is crucial to conducting any research on why a teacher may choose to leave the profession. Attrition is the term assigned to a teacher leaving the field of education altogether for reasons other than retirement, while retention is the act of maintaining faculty already employed by the school (Kelchtermans, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2015). To further differentiate between the two, Kelchtermans (2017) reasoned that the distinction between attrition and retention is not as relevant as the need to define the characteristics of a good teacher and determine why they are leaving the classroom. This distinction can be used simultaneously with a teacher retention plan to promote excellent retention rather than just retention itself. There is little benefit for any school to spend a great deal of time and effort on the retention of a teacher who is producing poorly (Borman & Dowling, 2008). This clarification is significant to the research conducted on the Mississippi school district to ensure that the results are valid and acceptable to produce an equitable solution. Although much of the literature on the topic of teacher retention focuses on attrition as well, this study will focus specifically on teacher retention.

In addition to clarifying any misconceptions, when researching any topic, it is vital to recognize where the gaps in research appear. Both Mason and Matas (2015) and Kelchtermans (2018) acknowledged that there were significant gaps in the research focusing specifically on teacher retention. After analyzing seventeen peer-reviewed studies from all over the world, Mason and Matas (2015) determined what most in the field of education already know: there is a

broad gamut of reasons why teachers are choosing to leave the field of education. These rationales can fall between various categories and can range from quality of leadership and departmental policies to personal and psychological factors and can even include environmental issues such as student behavior (Huk, Terjensen, & Cherkasove, 2019).

Many of the themes outlined by Mason and Matas (2015) and Huk, et al., (2019) have been highlighted in other studies as well, but, to better ascertain what can be done to develop effective teacher retention strategies, there is an indisputable need for research that focuses more thoroughly on these individual themes. Referring to Maslow's theory, more research is crucial to determine how to meet the needs of quality teachers to keep them in the classrooms. Both Mason and Matas (2015) and Sharplin et al. (2011) identify key factors that range from the basic level of human needs to the most advanced level of self-efficacy. One cannot expect stellar teacher performance if the teacher feels any sense of dissatisfaction (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). While they both made excellent inquiries into the issue of teacher retention, there was a significant gap in research as there was no specific data attached to rural school districts.

Another significant gap is identified by Hodges, Tippins, and Oliver (2013) as they pointed out that, while rural schools are held to the same expectations as their metropolitan counterparts, there is very little research being conducted on specific rural education issues. According to Beltman, Mansfield, and Harris (2015), the resiliency of teachers in low-socio-economic areas is much more fragile and often leads to teachers working in these districts for shorter periods of time. To solve the problem of teacher retention in rural school districts, more studies must be conducted on the situations and challenges that are specific to rural schools.

One problem specific to the district in this study is the increasing amount of English language learners that are enrolling. With the increase in enrollment comes a higher need for bi-

lingual teachers. These teachers are scarce in even your suburban areas and even more rare in the rural setting. According to Fogle and Moser (2017), Mississippi and Alabama have seen the most growth among English language learners. This is mainly due to the industries that have been designed to attract migrant workers. The main industry in the area in which this district is located is the poultry industry. State-wide, the poultry industry employs over 25,000 Mississippians (Tabler & Wells, 2017). In fact, the county with the highest concentration of poultry workers neighbors the school district in this study. Tyson Foods, Inc. is considered one of the leading poultry-producing companies in the nation and has a facility right amid this district. During the early 1990s, the industry created an influx of migrant workers into the district's area from countries like Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, and Mexico (Stuesse, 2017). The diversity among these migrant workers has made it increasingly difficult for districts in this region and their teachers to centralize a plan for incorporating all English language learners into the curriculum, which places, yet another difficulty on the rural classroom teachers.

Children in Rural School Districts

To understand the challenges that rural districts face regarding attracting and retaining highly qualified classroom teachers, one must first look at the children they are being asked to instruct. What is the typical background of a child within the rural classroom? What unique challenges has that student had to overcome to be in that classroom? What opportunities have been afforded to his or her suburban counterpart that has not been afforded him or her that could have a significant impact on success in the classroom? These questions are crucial questions to ask because without these answers we will not fully understand the gamut of diverse challenges that a rural teacher must overcome versus his or her suburban colleague.

The importance of early childhood development has been the topic of a great deal of research over the last few decades. According to Alnesser and Westgard (2017), a lack of proper childhood development can have a significant impact on a child's overall school performance, as well as hindering a child's social development. Both consequences of poor development are crucial considerations when one notes that development has been found to have a significant tie to the poverty level at which a child is raised. Rural schools are far more likely to experience higher levels of poverty and poverty that seems to be generational (Mattingly, Johnson, & Schaefer, 2011). In a 2007 report, David Monk designated that 250 of the United States 'most poverty-stricken counties, 244 were in rural areas and 2.5 million of the 8 million public school students met the criteria to be considered living in poverty. With one of the main contributors of poor early childhood development being significant poverty levels, it is conclusive that teachers in early grades within the rural districts are more likely to have to confront the challenge of significant early childhood gaps among his or her students.

Another significant difference between the rural and suburban student is the amount of prior experiences and opportunities rural students bring into the classroom. Rural students do not have the same access to beneficial educational experiences such as museums, theater, or other early mediums of educational enlightenment (Hubbard & Van Tassel-Baska, 2016). Fishman (2015) even points out that the further a district is from an epicenter, the higher their chances are of performing well on national assessments such as NAEP, or the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Rural versus Metropolitan

Rural school districts make up approximately one-fourth of our nation's public-school population, yet they are the most difficult to staff (Gagon, 2016). Rooks (2018) reported that

many teachers assigned to small, rural areas feel deprived of the cultural, social, and geographical advantages enjoyed by their metropolitan counterparts. Some of the most common characteristics associated with rural areas included limited options in terms of merchants and entertainment, limited economic opportunities, and limited options for extensive social interactions (Monk, 2007). These limited opportunities often lead to a struggle for the rural schools to retain qualified teachers as they are in constant competition with metropolitan areas that can offer more money, more resources, and more opportunities for career advancement (Gagnon, 2016). When teachers find themselves within a reasonable distance from an area that can offer more money and more attractive benefits, it becomes increasingly harder to entice them to stay (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019).

When comparing rural schools to their metropolitan counterparts, rural schools are impacted much more severely by the inability to retain quality, experienced teachers, especially in the critical areas of math and science (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). Being from such rural surroundings, the lack of relationships between rural schools and university teaching programs can also hamper the opportunity to attract and retain quality teachers (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). The teachers that are hired in most of the rural districts are recent graduates with minimal experience or young teachers who are less likely to hold an advanced degree in his or her subject area. These factors place suburban school students at an advantage when considering teacher content knowledge is the most consistent impetus for student success (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Metzler & Woessmann, 2012).

The 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, offered flexibility to the states when determining the definition of teacher quality and implementing tools for measuring the quality of instruction (Saultz et al., 2017). Gagnon (2016) considered the impact that ESSA

has made concerning the issue of teacher retention in rural schools. While the ideas and concepts outlined in ESSA, such as loan forgiveness and alternate pathways to certification, do offer an attempt to solve the problem, it can be counterproductive to rural areas that are forced to hire from a limited applicant pool of alternate route educators as the metropolitan or urban schools choose from the pool of more experienced teachers (Saultz et al., 2017). ESSA also requires that states adopt programs and curriculums that are evidence and research-based; however, not all this research and evidence can be attributed to rural areas. Although the evidence may show impressive results in an average classroom, the same dynamics and resources are usually not present in a rural classroom (Showalter, et al., 2019) This missing link between research and results can cause a great deal of frustration for the rural classroom teacher. To create an effective model for the solution, one must examine where these incentives and programs prove inadequate from the perspective of a rural classroom teacher.

Programs in Place

Over the years, educators have been overlooking the potential for amazing educators as they sat right in their classrooms as students. Recently, some schools have begun to recognize this potential through the development of teacher academies. This concept places students in a cohort class that introduces them to concepts such as effective classroom instruction, conducive classroom culture, and impactful learner engagement (Cammill, 2017). By creating a partnership between the student and the school community, these programs are designed to offer foundational skills of education while creating an environment of collaboration and support that will encourage the student to return upon his or her subsequent college graduation (Gist, 2019).

A variation of the teacher academy concept is the "Grow Your Own" initiative. The concept behind this program is to find potential educators inside one's rural district and offer

them the support they need as they go through the process of becoming a teacher (Gist, 2019; Quinones, 2018). By recruiting high school students who show an interest in teaching, display academic prowess, and have the qualities of a compelling prospect, the programs hope to see alumni return and make an impact within the district that offered them the support and training they needed (Jorgenson & Moon, 2002). These programs are also introducing these students to possibilities that he or she may not have otherwise known were possible as students from rural districts tend to have less exposure to the prospect of college (King, 2018). Programs such as "Grow Your Own" encompass many of the ideals that have been identified as possible avenues to improving teacher satisfaction and include some of the essential elements of teacher retention as the collaboration between a teacher, the community, and the school staff (Malloy & Allen, 2007). Research supports the positive impact that these types of programs can have on teacher efficacy and have proven to be beneficial to new teachers as they enter the classroom with a stronger sense of support. (Quinones, 2016). Programs such as "Grow Your Own" and teacher academies have taken on various forms in other states throughout the nation, but there must be further research to determine what impact they have specifically on the development of teacher retention within rural schools.

Rural School Districts in Mississippi

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2016-17) reports that the median number of students attending rural public schools in the United States is 95, 965 while the number of students in the state of Mississippi stands at 234, 375. Brenner, Elder, Wimbish, and Walker (2015) report that in 2015, one out of every three districts in Mississippi was considered a critical shortage district with a significant number of unlicensed teachers in critical subject classrooms. One of the hardest-hit rural areas in Mississippi in terms of teacher shortage is also the most rural

area: the Mississippi Delta. Davis and Wright (2019) reported that the teacher shortage in Mississippi is six times worse than it was twenty years ago, and this shortage is felt most heavily in the Mississippi Delta Region. The Delta is the geographical definition of rural and is a prime example of why research must be conducted on how to resolve this crisis. A 2017 study conducted on 151 Mississippi schools found that three common indicators contribute to the unfortunate teacher crisis in Mississippi (Anthony, Franz, and Brenner, 2017). These three factors are a high percentage of minority students, rural locations, and areas that do not generate a significant amount of funds to support education within the community. The issue of a teacher shortage in Mississippi is focused mainly on the race of one's students and the location of one's school (Anthony, Franz, & Brenner, 2017). Unfortunately, there is very little a school can do to change those factors; therefore, the focus must be placed on the indicators that can be controlled. This research study's goal was to look past the elements that cannot be changed and determine the indicators that can be manipulated and resolved.

Difficult Subjects Areas in which to Hire and Retain

Most vacancies in Mississippi schools can be found in the subject areas of math, science, and special education (Harmon, 2001 as cited in Anthony, Franz & Brenner, 2017). Despite their best efforts, teachers in Mississippi's math and science classes continue to produce scores below the national average; one of the main contributors is the strain on resources and the inability to attract and retain quality certified math, science, and special education teachers (Sindler et al., 2018). Some studies suggest that a vicious circle is at fault: Students are not being prepared on the secondary level for the higher math and science courses required to receive a teaching degree in the field. Nevertheless, how can students be adequately prepared when the pool of quality teachers is so low? (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Since a smaller number of students feel prepared

for college-level coursework, fewer students in rural areas attend colleges, and even fewer colleges close to the rural areas have teacher education programs (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). Unfortunately, the cycle continues to repeat.

Science, in particular, is a subject that requires a great deal of personal classroom instruction to perfect one's skill set, and experienced science teachers are becoming harder and harder to attract and retain in rural schools. In 2008, Biology and higher-level sciences instructors were reported to have been the most likely subject area teacher, with the exception of special education, to migrate away from the rural district or leave the profession altogether (Hodges et al., 2013). Compounding the problem of retaining quality science teachers, is the lack of proper facilities to perform some of the required activities within a higher-level science course (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Many rural areas, although rich with the environmental resources to develop meaningful learning experiences through science, lack the resources needed to offer access to these experiences (Showalter, et al, 2019). For districts like the one in this study to produce strong science-minded problem solvers that are fully prepared for their next level of academia, studies must continue to be conducted to determine what can be done to retain quality high-level math and science instructors.

Special education teachers are also becoming a rare commodity. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.), in the 2017-18 school year, the district in which this research is being conducted had a total of 2,912 students enrolled district-wide. Of the 2,912 students, 515 held an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). These legal documents require that students receive direct instruction by or with the aid of a special education teacher. To further compound the problem, like Johnson, Ohlson, and Shope (2018) pointed out, diversity within rural schools is changing at a rapid pace. With

this increase in diversity, schools, specifically, rural schools, are seeing an influx of special needs students. Though schools may be seeing their caseloads increase, rural districts tend to hire a smaller number of teachers (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). The number of special needs teachers in rural schools continues to decline, with many attempting to teach without the necessary resources to support special needs students (Sutton, Bausmith, O'Connor, Pae, & Payne, 2014). Since special education teachers in the rural districts lack the resources and support that their metropolitan colleagues have, special services teachers in rural districts report a much higher ratio of job dissatisfaction (Berry & Gravelle, 2013).

Another specialized teacher issue is that of the English Language Learner (ELL) teacher. Johnson et al., (2018) report that, on the national level, the overall population of rural schools is on the decline; however, the rate at which ELL and minority students are entering these rural schools is at a steady increase. In the 2017-18 school year, this district had 268 ELL students enrolled in the district (National Center of Educational Statistics, n.d.). When ELL teachers are not available, a big portion of the responsibility to aid these children is placed on the Special Education teacher (Johnson et al., 2018; Sutton et al., 2014). This shift in dynamics puts an extended strain on the Special Education teachers that work in rural districts who are already working with limited resources. Over time, this strain can lead to teachers looking for opportunities in more affluent districts that can offer more support and resources for his or her students (Johnson et al., 2018).

According to the Mississippi Department of Education, 12,100 ELL students are receiving some type of special services within Mississippi public schools (Mississippi School and District Grading System, n.d.). With 44 percent of Mississippi's public schools considered rural, the proportion of ELL students in Mississippi's rural schools is overwhelming (Mississippi

School and District Grading System, n.d.). The United States Census Bureau Report (n.d.) states that 5 percent of children ages 5-17 within this rural district live in a home where a language other than English is spoken. As this number continues to increase, this rural district will likely experience increased difficulty in finding and retaining quality special needs teachers as well as teachers in subjects like math and science.

Funding and Incentives

A variety of incentive plans have been designed and implemented in Mississippi to attract teachers to rural schools (Jeter, 1999). Most of these incentive packages do come with a stipulation that supports retaining these teachers in the district, if only for a few years. Some states with high teacher turnover in their rural districts have begun to offer loan forgiveness plans that prorate their payments based on how long a teacher dedicates to a rural school (Rooks, 2018).

In Mississippi, programs such as the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching program, are a collaborative effort between two of the state's largest institutions, Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi, to attract and retain quality teachers in the state of Mississippi by offering full scholarships and stipends, such as fully sponsored study abroad programs to qualified candidates (www.metp.org, n.d.). Another program geared at relieving the financial burden on teachers was the William Winter's Loan forgiveness; however, the 2018-2019 school term brought an end to the long-standing student loan forgiveness program offered through the William Winter's Institute (www.msfinancialaid.org/wwts, n.d.). This program was a great enticement to students who did not want to enter their career burdened with student loan debt but ironically ended due to lack of support and funding (www.msfinancialaid.org/wwts, n.d.).

However, neither of these programs is specifically centered around ongoing retention, nor do they place an emphasis on retention, specifically in the rural areas.

In 1999, a housing assistance program was introduced that offered the opportunity to purchase a home in the rural Mississippi Delta area for only a 1 percent down payment if the buyer agreed to commit to teaching at least three years within that rural district area (Jeter, 1999). The premise behind this program was to offset the cost of housing to attract new teachers to the area and eventually see an increase in teacher retention. However, Wright (2019) reports that, of all the rural districts in the state, the rural Delta was still 114 times more likely to experience a teacher shortage than all the other rural Mississippi districts. While the district in this study is not in the Delta area, the burden of teacher retention is also significant in this rural area. Thus, discovering ways to help this district can eventually produce a model for schools like those in the Delta region.

Some researchers argue that incentives do not offer a solution to the problem of teacher retention. Muller, et al. (2009) suggest that incentives have minimal impact on teacher retention since teachers are driven more by the social esteem of the career rather than any financial compensation. However, Podolsky, et al. (2017) contended that financial compensation has a major impact on a teacher's decision to remain within a school or a district. Teachers enter the field of education with the understanding that they will never be paid the equivalent of other college graduates, but they do expect a level of compensation that will allow them to supply their basic needs in a modest middle-class lifestyle. Additional literature points out that teacher retention has very little impact on teacher retention, but rather can be supported through a more extensive focus on professional development, a consistent mentorship program, and an environment that promotes confidence in one's ability to create and maintain an effective

classroom (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013). Once again, this concept supports the theory that teachers must have those basic needs met to reach the psychological level of esteem and self-fulfillment that will result in job satisfaction.

Working Conditions

The working conditions within a school or district can play a significant role in teacher retention; this is especially true in economically disadvantaged schools (Redding, 2019). In fact, a 2016 study looking into the impact that school psychologists can have on teacher retention, found that it is the school's ecology that essentially has a more significant impact when compared to individual roles such as administrators and psychologists (Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016). Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) point out that there are four courses of action that result due to employee dissatisfaction. These actions include leaving the job, becoming vocal regarding the source of dissatisfaction, displaying a passive and indifferent attitude towards the task, or simply staying with the job with menial job performance. This study focuses on those teachers that leave his or her position in search of a more satisfying option. When teachers are enticed by another district near them that offers an equivalent salary but better working conditions, they are likely to transition to the district that offers a more desirable environment (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). When the same reporting requirements, certifications, and policies are placed on teachers in rural districts as those in metropolitan areas, the rural schools are at a clear disadvantage when trying to attract and retain highly qualified educators (Fishman, 2015). Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) reported that many teachers find themselves focusing more on the administrative tasks rather than on teaching the content that their students needed to be prepared for the next level. In addition to impeding the progress of their students, teachers acknowledge the rationale behind some of this paperwork, but the increasing volume of these tasks is

removing the passion out of the occupation. Larger districts in more metropolitan areas are privy to additional staffers and consultants that take on roles that are usually compounded onto the rural classroom teacher, which in turn makes it far more tempting to move to the position that offers less of the mundane tasks that usually have very little to do with content or student achievement (Fishman, 2015).

When studying the school leader's perspective of teachers in a low socio-economic area, Longaretti and Toe (2017) determined that even the leadership in these rural districts understand that teaching in these schools requires much more resiliency than that of their more metropolitan counterparts. The need for more resiliencies implies that working at a rural district requires a certain level of toughness that some teachers may not be prepared to offer, at least not for an extended amount of time. Sharplin, et al. (2011) conducted a study on 29 novice teachers who were employed in a rural school district and concluded that when the rural schools were able to provide resources that met the high demands of teaching in a rural area, such as professional conductivity and stress management resources, less stress was reported among the faculty. This reduction of stress is a significant factor, but even with these findings, it is important to note that within this study alone, 40% of the participants still left their teaching position at the conclusion of the school year (Sharplin et al., 2011).

A study of teacher retention in a rural area in Alaska reported that teachers in these remote areas that serve the underprivileged and non-white students are more likely to leave when offered a different opportunity (Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016). Therefore, even if a rural school does find and hire a quality, experienced teacher, the literature supports the theory that the teacher will most likely always have the temptation of better working conditions elsewhere, thus leaving when the opportunity presents itself.

Another indicator of teacher retention that can be considered a working condition is the relationship among the parents, the school staff, and the community. Teachers in a rural school district, such as the district in this study, can have a greater impact on student achievement by having a clear understanding of the community and what role the community plays within the school (Longaretti & Toe, 2017). Integrating themselves into community activities is an effective way to build relationships with parents; however, while some teachers find the camaraderie of a small community appealing, teachers who value privacy and autonomy will find the close-knit qualities associated with a rural community out of their comfort zone. (Rooks, 2018).

Teacher Burn-out

Some educators, both experienced and novice, experience a complete disassociation with the passion that originally drew them into the field of education. Huk, Terjesen, and Cherkasova (2018) associated this loss of drive with the mental and physical exhaustion of the job as well as a sense of low productivity that many teachers experience in the classroom. The same study highlighted the fact that many teachers feel that there are tremendous expectations placed on the classroom teacher, yet the resources do not match the demands.

According to the same 2018 study, student behavior is the strongest contributing factor to teacher burnout (Huk, Terjesen, & Cherkasova, 2018). When considering student misbehavior as a contributor to teacher burnout, one must consider the literature on just how impactful the factor can be. Hasting and Bham (2003) point out that different teachers experience different levels of stress in regard to student behavior; therefore, for some teachers, this factor may be extremely significant while to others, it is barely a consideration when it comes to remaining in a classroom or within a specific district.

To understand the impact that teacher burnout has on teacher retention, one must review the literature to determine if there is a significant difference between the behavior of students in rural schools when compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Smokowski, Cotter, Robertson, and Guo (2012) discovered a significant correlation between student anxiety and negative student behavior. Furthermore, the study indicated that high levels of student anxiety contribute, in many cases, to an increase in student aggression. This aggression, as a mental issue, is left untreated more often within the rural communities due to the negative stigma attached to seeking help as well as the lack of resources readily available for treatment. Students in an urban or metropolitan setting are much more likely to seek the necessary help and, in turn, display less aggression towards their teachers and classmates.

Impact of Leadership Style on Effective Teacher Retention

According to Ch, Ahmad, Malik, and Batool (2017), a leader is one that inspires individuals to work towards a goal with a sense of dedication and determination. Few individuals play a more crucial role in teacher retention than that of school principals. A principal is not only the building administrator, but they are also tasked with molding the overall culture of one's school (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Principals are given a vast amount of responsibility. According to du Plessis (2017), many administrative decisions must be made at a central office location, which causes an administrator to spend a significant time away from campus. The more rural the school, the further a principal may have to travel, which increases his or her time away from his or her staff. Time spent away from campus can create a disconnect between an administrator and his or her staff. While this disconnect can be detrimental to building a strong support system for teachers, it can also increase a teacher's level of dissatisfaction.

Teachers with higher levels of job satisfaction correlate with higher levels of student achievement and attribute more to the overall success of his or her school (Demirtas, 2010). According to Jabeen, Khan, and Shah (2019), a strong sense of expectations, support, and basic resources from an administrator can be effective tools in battling a lower level of job satisfaction among his or her teachers. Considering the impact that a principal can have on teacher retention, it is important to evaluate the different styles of leadership presented by school administrators. A principal who involves his or her teachers in the decision-making and delegation process is considered a democratic leader, while one who does not consult with teachers or other members of leadership is considered an autocratic leader (Ch et al, 2017). After conducting an extensive quantitative research study, Ch et al. (2017) determined that displaying the characteristics of an authoritarian leader increases the likelihood of job dissatisfaction among the school staff.

The Impact of Teacher Evaluation Policies on Teacher Retention

While a strong administration is essential to teacher leadership, the policies that leader implements in terms of teacher evaluations have been documented as more problematic in rural schools when compared to suburban school districts (Gilles, 2017). President Barak Obama instituted a competitive grant program in 2009 designed to improve failing high-poverty, rural schools across the nation. One of the most significant reactions to this program was the creation of strict teacher evaluations that could be used as a direct reflection of teacher effectiveness as they were tied to a teachers' students' standardized test performance (Stern, 2013). These evaluation systems are encouraged by their ties to federal funding and pressures individual states to design and implement teacher evaluation systems as evidence of the state's dedication to student growth and success. (Gilles, 2017). According to a 2016 study on the impact of high stakes teacher evaluation systems, well over $\frac{3}{4}$ of educators in one urban school district reported

that the stringent teacher evaluation systems put in place by state mandates could be construed as intimidation tactics and demeaning in regard to the level of professionalism placed on the occupation (Paufler, 2018). Stern (n.d.) points out that, among several other factors that include ample resources, fair wages, and both teacher and student equity, "good schools" are schools where teachers are not plagued by constant scrutiny and are not labeled by a test score but, rather, they are treated as professionals and experts in their field.

While many teachers feel that the current evaluation systems can be perceived as daunting and invasive, others feel that it is the technique behind the evaluation procedure that has the most impact. Many teachers report that feedback, when directly tied to professional development opportunities, can be extremely helpful, but when it is only used to simply meet an administrative obligation, it is not perceived as practical or beneficial (Tuma, Hamilton, and Teal, 2018). Tuma, Hamilton, and Teal also reported that teachers find observations and feedback from their peers and mentors much more valuable in terms of increasing instructional effectiveness than the results of evaluations conducted by higher-level administration. The question of positive versus negative impact can be directly related to rural school districts when one considers that teachers in lower-poverty schools report a much smaller instance of feedback from mentors or coaches.

Impact of Retention on Student Achievement

Frequent teacher turnover can have a huge impact on overall student achievement. One 2000 study determined that the number of teachers within the rural schools graduating from a top-ranked university was nearly half of those in their metropolitan counterparts (Monk, 2007).

A 2014 mandate by the United States Secretary of Education was designed to ensure that students in lower-income school districts were not being taught by a higher number of

underqualified and inexperienced teachers. As part of this mandate, each state's education department had to devise and submit a plan that outlined how each state would comply with this demand. In many rural schools, the challenges of meeting these mandates are compounded by the high number of disadvantaged populations and lower human capita (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). In addition, when a highly qualified teacher leaves a rural district, there is only a one in ten chance that he or she will be replaced by a teacher of equal caliber (Sawchuk, 2012). Bennet et al. (2013) pointed out that there are many cases where schools are forced to focus more on simply filling the positions that are vacated rather than focusing on the quality of instruction the new teachers may offer. The focus of filling the position with an individual regardless of their level of expertise has a detrimental impact on student achievement and can continue to negatively affect students as they fall behind in essential subject areas. The low education attainment of teachers can also contribute to the lack of advanced college preparatory classes, which leaves the students at a disadvantage when attempting to take their education into the advanced level (Monk, 2007).

Many rural districts report that losing just one teacher within their district can have more of an impact than the urban counterparts who may lose several within that same year; This point is supported by the fact that rural districts simply have less human capital from which to choose (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2013). The inability to attract and retain quality teachers can often lead to a school having to cancel courses or having teachers teach outside of his or her disciplines (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Hodges et al. (2013) concluded that teacher retention not only has an impact on the overall success of students, but it also has a tremendous impact on overall student growth. Students losing their teacher at any point in the school year have been recorded as experiencing over a 7% drop in standardized scores when compared to students who maintain the

same teacher (Redding & Henry, 2019). As teachers remain in the same classroom, they become more familiar with that environment; that familiarity can create camaraderie and a common bond among the other teachers as they work to achieve a shared goal. This collaboration can have a positive impact on the students within that school. (Hodges, et al., 2013). With the instability of the teacher workforce in Mississippi and throughout the nation, the impact that quality teachers can have on the outcome of student achievement can no longer be a second-level priority.

Benefits of Working in a Rural District

When attempting to solve the problem of teacher retention in a small rural school district, one cannot overlook the benefits of working in a rural area. Rooks (2018) pointed out that there are several benefits to teaching in a rural community. Some teachers enjoy the rural lifestyle in terms of education, and they tend to capitalize on the many roles they can play in their students' lives by forming strong bonds (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Smaller schools can result in smaller classes, which allow teachers to offer more individualized instruction. Teachers in rural districts report being happy with his or her class size far more than their metropolitan counterparts. (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). These smaller classes also offer an increase in the opportunity for relationship building, which has been shown to have a substantial impact on student success (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Another attraction for some teachers is the bond between the school and the community, which usually results in more parental involvement as well (Rooks, 2018).

Summary

The history of the educational system in the state of Mississippi includes separation and divisiveness yet has seen many modifications that promoted collaboration and unity. There is one area, however, that still needs much attention, and that area is the plight of the rural school systems. Not only are these districts not privy to the same resources and funds as the

metropolitan districts, but they are also in dire need of a strategic plan to attract and retain highly qualified teachers.

Examining the current literature on teacher retention confirms that there is an epidemic plaguing our rural school districts in the state of Mississippi, the nation, as well as many countries around the world (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). There is a significant amount of research that has been conducted on teacher retention, but very little has been focused specifically on addressing the needs of central Mississippi rural school districts. With most of the research regarding Mississippi schools being steered towards the Delta Region, there is a strong need for studies to be conducted in other areas of the state as well. The focus of this applied research study is to determine what that criterion is in a specific rural Central Mississippi school district and determine how those criteria can be met to improve teacher retention.

To solve this problem, one must look at the current research that suggests that certain criteria must be met to achieve a higher level of teacher retention. Factors such as competition with more affluent metropolitan schools and the daunting tasks of filling difficult subject area teacher roles are compounding the problem, and teachers who are offered extensively more resources in larger districts are finding it too tempting to resist the move. Researchers, such as Podolsky et al (2013) and Muller et al. (2009), disagree on the effectiveness of teacher incentive programs. Regardless of the current incentives and programs being offered at the district and state levels, there seems to be very little improvement in reducing teacher turnover as the numbers continue to rise nationwide. This study was intended to elaborate on the research that has already been conducted by offering a model that can serve as a prospective solution that can be used for other rural districts in the state.

The review of the current literature indicates that there are a plethora of factors that influence teacher retention in rural school districts. Some studies indicate that the school ecology is the single most significant indicator of teacher retention, while others claim that the inducements are not present in the rural schools like they are in the metropolitan areas. There are incentives, programs, and plans that are currently in place; however, a review of the current literature indicates that further research should be conducted to offer a more clearly defined plan that is specifically directed towards rural districts. This plan can be used as a course of action to improve teacher retention for other rural districts in the state of Mississippi as well as throughout the nation.

By looking at various indicators that may or may not have a direct impact on teacher retention, districts will have access to specific information that can be used to design and implement effective teacher retention plans. Through analysis of the available literature, it is apparent that this need is more prevalent among rural school districts; therefore, this study can specifically target the rural district on which this research will focus.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this applied research study was to solve the problem of teacher retention in one rural Mississippi school district. This chapter contains detailed information on the following components of the study: research design, research questions, setting, participants, the role of the researcher, procedures, and data collection and analysis methods.

Design

According to Hodges, Tippins, and Oliver (2013), the recruitment and retention of quality teachers is an integral element to student success. This applied research study will use a multi-method design and will incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods to determine a solution to the teacher retention problem in this rural Mississippi school. The first form of data collection will be interviews with teachers within the district. The second form of data collection will be an online discussion forum with teachers within the district. Finally, the quantitative method of data collection that will be used is an online survey sent to teachers within the district.

Research Questions

Central Question: How can the problem of teacher retention in a rural Mississippi school district be improved?

Sub-question 1: How would teachers in an interview solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?

Sub-question 2: How would teachers in an online discussion board solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?

Sub-question 3: How would teachers in a quantitative online survey solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?

Setting

The setting of this applied research is one rural school district in Central Mississippi. To maintain the privacy of the institution, the name of the district in which this study was conducted is being withheld. The district's central office is in the county seat, but schools are spread throughout the county. In the 2017-18 school year, the district employed 192 teachers (Profiles of USA Public Schools, 2019). There are five separate campuses within the district. There are two high schools, one junior high school that houses 6th -8th grades, and two elementary schools within the district. In the 2017-18 school year, the student-teacher ratio at this district was 16:1. Student count in the district is 2,914. All teachers are paid in accordance with the Mississippi payment scale with a \$500.00 supplement offered by the district, which every district offers. This number is based on the tax revenue of the town in which the district is located. Some districts in Mississippi can offer a supplement to teachers pay as high as \$1,300.00 (www.msbusiness.com, 2019).

All school days within the district are organized in a similar fashion with teachers beginning their contracted workday at approximately 7:25 and concluding before 3:30. This district does employ six instructional coaches as a resource to the teachers and has an established mentor program in each school. These instructional coaches travel to campuses to meet with teachers on an as-needed basis. This district was chosen based on its location, low teacher retention rates, and student-to-teacher ratios.

Participants

Purposeful sampling is used when there is a probability that human judgment will be involved in the participant selection process (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Since this study is intended to examine the correlation between a teacher's personal experiences and teacher retention, the

participants will be chosen through purposeful, non-probability sampling. According to Phillips (2015), nearly half of teachers either leave the profession or change the school at which they teach within the first five years of teaching. Therefore, after receiving permission from the Superintendent of Education (See Appendix A), the researcher began compiling a list of staff that met the criteria of being a certified teacher who was within the first five years of employment in the district. This list was compiled by contacting each building level administrator from each of the five schools in the district. The individual lists were assembled into one master list that contains 200 individuals. This master list included all certified teachers in grades K-12. Any teachers assigned to the researcher through instructional coaching duties will be removed from the initial list. This left the number of teachers remaining at 184. After requesting the list of emails of certified staff from the district's human resources department, the remaining teachers' names were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The names were entered into an online random name generator. To ensure that the proper number of participants was reached, an additional ten invitations were sent for each data collection method. The first 25 numbers (i.e., participants) were invited to participate in the online survey in an effort to ensure 15 responses are received. The generator was used again making sure that no names were repeated. If there were repeated numbers, those numbers were skipped. The next 30 numbers (i.e., participants) were invited to participate in the online forum to ensure at least 20 teachers participated in the forum. The same procedure was repeated for the final 20 numbers (i.e., participants) to provide at least ten participants who were willing to schedule the interview. Since all schools have different campuses, all interviews were conducted at a central location or via an online meeting platform.

For the quantitative element of this research, a request to participate in an online survey (see Appendix B) was sent to a total of 25 participants. The consent form (Appendix C) sent to these participants included the objective of the study, procedures used, expectations, author of the study, and information regarding how the researcher gained the information used to contact the participant (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This request contained a hyperlink to the survey that was designed using CheckMarket®, but to ensure that all participants had full access, a URL address of the website was also included, as well as a QR Code. Explicit instructions were included on how to complete the survey, how to import the URL address into a web browser, and how to use the QR Code (Bickman & Rog, 2009). An incentive of a monetary gift card drawing was made available to all participants who complete the survey.

The next 30 different participants from the randomized list were sent a request to participate in the online discussion forum (Appendix D). The participants who agreed to take part in the forum through a consent form (Appendix C) were given a pseudonym to protect his or her anonymity and to ensure that he or she felt comfortable being open and forthcoming with his or her responses (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The list of the pseudonyms will be kept in a secure location and will only be viewed by the researcher.

Twenty additional participants were randomly selected to participate in an interview. (Appendix E) The participants will be contacted through the district's email portal and sent a consent form (Appendix C). Again, to warrant the validity of the research study, each participant was reminded that his or her answers were and will remain anonymous (Bickman & Rog, 2019).

The Researcher's Role

After spending most of my career working in a rural school district, I have firsthand knowledge of the impact that poor teacher retention can have on both students' success and the

overall school climate. The inability to find highly qualified teachers within our rural schools leaves principals with very few options and often causes them to focus more on simply having someone in the role rather than having the best individual in the role (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Many feel that the issue of teacher retention is a financial issue; however, the issue of teacher pay is not as significant a motivator for teachers as other indicators (Shrifrer, Turley, & Heard, 2017). Some rural school districts have even offered monetary incentives to attract and retain quality teachers, and they have found that these incentives had very little impact on teacher retention (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). This misconception motivated this applied research to determine the issues that are driving many teachers to leave our rural schools.

Since I am currently in a role as an instructional coach in the district, I did not include any of the teachers I am currently coaching in this study. These are the only certified teachers that were omitted from the selection process. This omission was to avoid any bias and assumptions that might have been presented due to any professional relationships that may have developed.

The hiring and retention of highly qualified teachers is forcing administrators to fill the classroom with inexperienced and underqualified teachers (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Being a member of the instructional team in this rural school district directly ties me to the study, and I will be directly impacted by the results of the research. The role of this researcher was to conduct a reliable and valid study to alleviate this problem. After receiving permission from the administrator, the researcher contacted the solicited recruits through the district's email circuit by producing an explicit and detailed description of the study. These emails were sent individually and included the researcher's institutional email address for identification. I conducted face-to-face interviews, and all interviews were transcribed and returned to participants to increase

reliability. The Internet survey was reviewed and analyzed by the researcher to determine common themes. The online discussion board was also reviewed by the researcher to determine word patterns that follow the common themes within the survey and interviews. All data were analyzed by the researcher and are presented in both written and visual form.

Procedures

The foremost responsibility of all researchers is to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before proceeding with any data collection or collecting participants (see Appendix F). Securing permission lends a standard of respect for the research one is currently conducting as well as any research that will be conducted in the future (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The first step in this research will be to secure IRB approval through Liberty University. Once approval was secured, the researcher sought approval from the school board and superintendent of this school district (see Appendix A). Carefully constructed emails to explain the purpose of the research were sent to the participants (see Appendix C). These emails included the objectives, procedures, expectations, and information as to how I received their individual contact information (Bickman & Rog, 2009). From the original 45 participants, ten teachers remained after the online survey and online forum pool had been collected. After agreeing to participate through a consent form, the researcher used the Internet scheduler Sign-up Genius® to allow teachers to schedule an appointment to conduct their face-to-face interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) stressed that interviews are an important qualitative method because they allow the researcher to see the topic being studied from the participants' perspective. The participants were asked to answer open-ended questions regarding how they felt teacher retention could be improved in this small, rural school district. The answers to these interviews were transcribed, and the researcher shared the transcription with each participant to ensure the accuracy of the

transcription. The information gained in the interview was coded to identify themes, and the information was placed within specific categories based on those common themes.

A review of the literature was utilized to develop a quantitative online survey that was sent to each participant through an emailed link that followed the same protocol as the previous email. In this email, the participants were invited to participate in the online forum that was set up using Padlet®. Participants were given step-by-step instructions on how to join the forum, expectations, purpose, and a detailed description of how any obtained information would be used. The quantitative survey included a Likert-scale on 10 questions that were asked based on the literature published about teacher retention in rural school districts. This information offered statistical data that was used to summarize the overall results of this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection and analysis, the themes within this research were determined through the frequency of the specific problem words as they occurred throughout the interviews as well as the online forum and surveys. The identified words were placed into categories and were compared with the statistical data collected in the quantitative portion of the research, which consisted of the online survey. After all the information was collected and carefully reviewed, triangulation offered the researcher the opportunity to look for a convergence of themes among all three methods of data collection (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This information allowed the researcher to identify common themes and determine what is needed to improve teacher retention in this rural Mississippi school district.

Interviews

The first sub-question for this study explored how teachers in an interview can solve the problem of teacher retention in a Mississippi rural school district. The purpose of this interview was to extend open-ended questions to the participant to determine how to solve the problem of teacher retention in this school district. After securing a central location, teachers were sent a consent form and a scheduling tool named Sign-Up Genius®. This tool allowed the participants to schedule the interview at a time that meets their convenience. A review of the literature is the basis of the following open-ended questions:

According to Gist (2019) districts are beginning to design programs that offer training and guidance to promising high school students in hopes of recruiting them back into the classroom, what was your personal reason for entering the field of education?

1. How long have you been in the field of education?

This question was asked based on the research that determines novice teachers are more likely than more experienced teachers to leave the field of education. (Redding & Henry, 2019). By determining how long the teacher has been in the field, the results of this study will better reflect the impact that the length of employment has on retention within the district.

2. How long have you worked in this school district?

This question was asked based on the research that states that the working environment can have an impact on teachers' willingness to remain in the school district in which they currently serve. (Beltman, Harris, & Mansfield, 2016).

3. In what other school districts have you previously worked?

Recruiting in rural districts is more difficult than that of metropolitan areas (Gagnon, 2016). This question helped decipher if this district has been able to attract teachers away from other districts.

4. What do you feel are the most prominent differences between this district and other districts in the surrounding areas in terms of teacher resources?

This question will help determine the significance of available resources in this district. According to Huk, Terjesen, and Cherkasova (2019), school resources is one antecedent that can have an impact on teacher satisfaction.

5. What do you believe are the main reasons that the state of Mississippi is experiencing a teacher shortage?

This question was asked in response to research that indicates the increasing teacher shortage issue facing the state of Mississippi. According to Betz, Wright, & Skinner (2019), the state is experiencing the worst teacher shortage it has ever faced.

6. Since it is in a rural area, what are some positive qualities that this district possesses?

Rooks (2018) points out that there are several positive benefits of working within a rural district. This question was to determine the positive aspects of working in this specific district.

7. Since it is in a rural area, what are some negative qualities that this district possesses?

Areas of low socio-economic status report a higher rate of teacher turnover. (Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016). This question will help determine what negative factors may influence teacher turnover within this low socio-economic area.

8. What do you believe are some of the main reasons that this district is experiencing teacher retention issues throughout the schools?

There are several challenges for teachers such as limited resources and unsupportive leadership. (Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016). This question helped to identify the main challenges within this district.

9. On a district level, what policies and procedures do you feel the district should implement to improve teacher retention in this district?

McHenry-Sorber and Campbell (2019) determined that teacher retention is significantly impacted by the policies and procedures on a district level. This question was asked to determine which policies and procedures this district should implement to improve teacher retention.

10. On a school level, what do you think can be done to improve teacher retention in this district?

The school environment has been proven to affect teacher retention. The collaboration and support that a teacher feels within a school community can have a positive or negative impact on the school's ability to retain quality teachers. (Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016). This question will help determine the influence that the ecology of the school is currently having on teacher retention.

11. What are some goals that you would set for this district regarding teacher retention?

An integral aspect of teacher retention is the effective support and affirmation received from the professionals with whom the teachers work. (Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016). This question was included to determine the goals that need to be met for this district as it creates an effective plan to improve teacher retention.

The results of these interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher returned the transcription to the interviewee to ensure accuracy, which increases the reliability of the overall analysis of the results. The results of the qualitative and quantitative data were carefully

reviewed, and common words and themes were identified. These themes were analyzed and coded based on their reoccurrence throughout the data and were evaluated as they relate to the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the account of findings was reported through both written and visual format.

Online Forum

The second method of qualitative research collected for this study was through an online forum known as Padlet®. After teachers agreed to the terms of the forum through an email form that explained the purpose and protocol, the teachers were given a series of open-ended questions to discuss within the forum. Each person was given a screen name to provide anonymity. This forum will span a three-week period. There will be at least 15 participants in this forum, and they will all be teachers within the school district. One new question was introduced each week, and participants were asked to answer with a minimum of 150 words. The participants were encouraged to respond to at least two of their colleagues' responses. The teachers were reminded of the privacy that would be maintained through this forum. Using current literature on teacher retention the following questions were developed to obtain information specific to this school district:

1. What do you believe is the reason that this district faces a problem with teacher retention?

Goral (2019) reports that teachers are dissatisfied with the profession on many levels that include administration as well as compensation. This question helped determine the level of satisfaction among teachers within this district.

2. What are some specific ways you think teacher retention could be solved in this district?

When teachers receive an array of supports such as mentoring and common collaborative times, the rate of teacher retention can be improved by half (Goral, 2019). In an effort to determine which programs would be most beneficial to the teachers in this district, this question will guide the establishment of teacher retention programs.

3. What problems with teacher retention do you feel are specific to this district?

Tricarico, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppy (2015) found that while most districts do offer support programs for teachers, novice teachers still struggle with unrealistic expectations for themselves as well as their students. This question helped to determine if teachers in this district are receiving an adequate amount of support to ensure that they have a realistic perspective of the profession.

After notes were reviewed and analyzed, reoccurring concepts and ideas were be noted and used to create a short list of coded words to compare with the other data retrieved in the interview as well as the Internet study. These codes were further broken into themes, and these themes were compared with published literature on the subject of teacher retention in rural school districts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The results of these findings are reported in both written and visual format.

Internet Survey

The final stage of data collection in this study will be conducted through an Internet survey. Using a demographic survey as well as Likert-Scale survey, at least 15 teachers were asked to answer ten questions designed to determine specific statistical data that was to be used to conduct triangulation with the data collected through the qualitative methods. Bickman and Roth (2009) support the use of online surveys when a researcher is obtaining information from a particular group, such as individuals who work within the same company. By approaching

teachers who all work within the same rural school district in Central Mississippi, this research project meets those qualifications. After examining the information obtained in all three data collection methods, the researcher analyzed the results and used the process of triangulation to support the themes identified through the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Demographic questions.

1. What is your age category?

- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

2. What is your race?

- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Other (please specify): _____

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

4. What is your highest degree level?

- High School Diploma
- Associates Degree
- Bachelor's Degree

- Graduate Degree
- Doctorate Degree

5. List any other districts in which you have been employed.

6. What grade level do you teach?

- Elementary
- Middle
- Secondary
- I teach at multiple levels (please specify): _____

7. I feel valued as a teacher in this district.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Hodges, Tippins, and Oliver (2013) found that de-professionalizing the profession of teaching has a direct correlation with teacher retention. Determining the level of value that the teachers feel this district places on the profession would aid the district in developing procedures or plans to ensure that all teachers feel a significant sense of value from the district level.

8. My district is committed to the well-being of its teachers.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

According to Tricarico et al. (2015), the success of novice teachers is notably impacted by the support of school leaders. Determining the level of support that teachers feel from school leaders will be significant in creating an effective plan for improving teacher retention.

9. I am encouraged to be innovative in my job (come up with new or better ways to perform my job).

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Stern (n.d.) points out that the ideal school setting would be one in which teachers are able to make decisions concerning their curriculum and are viewed as knowledgeable professionals in their field. This question will determine how important the ability to be innovative is to the teachers in this district.

Job Characteristics

10. My current job responsibilities are challenging.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

A heavy workload has a pronounced impact on teacher satisfaction. This question will help determine if teachers in this district feel that their workload is satisfactory (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

11. My job offers an opportunity for autonomy in my classroom.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Reeves (2018) indicates that many teachers leave the profession based on the lack of autonomy they are afforded in the classroom. This question will determine the level of importance autonomy has with the teachers in this district.

12. I have a clear understanding of what I am expected to deliver.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Evaluation systems in place for teachers can be intimidating for both teachers and school leaders. In order to feel confident in his or her teaching abilities, the expectations must be explicit (Paufler, 2018). This question will determine if the teachers feel that expectations are successfully relayed by their administration.

Colleagues

13. I have a good relationship with my direct colleagues.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Podolsky and Kini (2016) determined that a strong bond between colleagues can have a positive impact on teacher retention. This question will determine whether programs are needed within this district to improve collegial relationships among the staff.

14. I feel motivated by my colleagues.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

A positive working environment is crucial to teacher effectiveness (Podolosky & Kini 2016). This question will determine if teachers are extrinsically motivated by the individuals with whom they work. By making this determination, the district can dictate if there should be additional procedures added to current programs such as the new teacher academy or mentor teacher initiative.

15. Colleagues consult each other when they need support.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Redding and Henry (2019), report that without strong bonds among colleagues, novice teachers are more likely to make the decision to leave a school or the profession entirely. By asking this question, the researcher can determine if teachers in this district feel that they are receiving an adequate amount of support from one another. Since the district does have a mentor program in place for novice teachers, this information would help determine if there should be addendums made to the program to make it more effective.

Administrative Team

16. I trust the administrative team at my school and the information they provide.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Hughes, et al. (2015) concludes that a collaborative relationship between administration and teachers, specifically in hard to staff school, is an integral facet of improved teacher retention. This question will assist in determining if there is an effective working relationship established between the administration and teachers in the schools within the district. This information can be used to decide if there need to be additional mandates to improve the relationships.

17. The administrative team encourages collaboration across my organization.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Being able to foster collaboration among the staff members can improve the relationship among staff members. Having an administration that encourages this type of collegial relationship can also lead to less stress among the staff. (Hughes, et al., 2015). This question is

asked to determine if substantial collaborative activities are encouraged by the administration teams in the district.

18. The administrative team treats all teachers with equity.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Rooks (2018) highlights the stress and pressure that many novice teachers in rural schools experience due to the burden of multi-grade or specialized courses. This question will determine if the teachers in this district feel that the workload is spread evenly among all educators.

19. My administrative team makes sure I have clear goals to achieve.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

According to Rooks (2018), one characteristic that can serve as an indicator for teacher turnover is the administrator's ability to communicate explicit expectations for teachers. The information received from this question will be used to develop training and professional developments that can improve communication between administration and staff.

20. My administrative team regularly gives me helpful feedback on my job and performance.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The more rural and expansive the district is, the more time administrators are forced to spend time outside the classroom and off-campus traveling from school to school or to the district office (du Plessis, 2017). The district in this study has schools that span approximately 12-13 miles apart with the district office being located 13 miles from the furthest school. This

question will help district and school officials decide if it is necessary to develop a plan to reduce administrators' time away from campus so that teachers feel that they are receiving the necessary aid and feedback.

21. My administrative team listens to my concerns.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Du Plessis (2017) determined that an effective leadership practice is for the administration to be accessible and willing to listen to the concerns of all teachers. The researcher can use this information to establish if there is a need for improved communication among administrators and staff within this district.

Communication

22. I receive the relevant information I need to perform my job well.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Teachers who are offered a more constructive regimen and offered sufficient guidance on how to perform their duties are more likely to stay in that position (Jabeen, et al., 2019). Asking this question will allow the researcher to determine if the teachers in this district feel that they are receiving adequate guidance from the head of their institution.

23. The administrative team explains the reason behind decisions or actions taken by them.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Sawchuk (2012) reports that regular feedback and an expectation of strong performance can have a significant impact on teacher retention. This question will notify the researcher to whether there are communication issues that are detrimental to teacher retention in this district.

24. The communication tools in my organization are used effectively.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

An environment that fosters a collaborative relationship between the principal and teachers can be extremely crucial in hard to staff schools (Hughes, et al. 2015). Since the retention rate within this district is so high, one could consider this district a hard to staff district. Asking this question will determine the need for any programs or initiatives that might improve collaboration among the principals and teachers at each school.

Involvement

25. I enjoy being associated with this district.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Rooks (2018) determined that there are many attractive qualities that are specific to rural districts. This question will determine if any of those qualities are present within this district, and if so, are those qualities a determining factor in regard to teacher retention.

26. I am motivated to help my district be successful.

Rooks (2018) reports that teachers who were reared in rural areas tend to prefer to teach in those rural areas. Perhaps, this is due to a sense of community and belonging. This question will help the researcher determine what motivates a teacher's dedication to a small, rural school.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

27. I feel a sense of pride to work in this district.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The status from which a teacher is viewed has a significant impact on the level of pride he or she associates with the profession. This status can be portrayed by the schools in the manner of working benefits and autonomy (Price and Weatherby, 2018). Determining if teachers in this district feel a sense of pride through working in this district can identify any improvements that must be made in this area.

Work Pressure

28. There is a good balance between my work and personal life.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Learning to maintain self-care is crucial to being an effective teacher. (Aleccia, 2017). Asking this question will determine if the district is offering adequate support for teachers in regard to promoting self-care.

29. The work pressure at my job is acceptable.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

High-stakes testing and somewhat excessive accountability standards are pressures tied to the teaching profession that can lead to poor teacher retention (Aleccia, 2017). This question will identify any deficiencies the district may present in supporting the teachers with these pressures.

30. My organization pays enough attention to working conditions.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

When teachers work in conditions that are not conducive to productivity, the retention rate begins to decrease (Redding & Henry, 2019). Asking this question helps the researcher determine if there is a need for improved working conditions within the district.

Professional Development

31. My organization provides the necessary training to perform my present job properly.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Teachers report that a lack of pedagogical knowledge makes it difficult to determine effective resources and teaching strategies (du Plessis, 2017). Asking this question will allow the researcher to determine if there is a significant need for improvement within the district in regard to the available professional development opportunities offered to its teachers.

32. My administrative team/coaches counsel me in career development.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Kane and Rosenquist (2019) report that school-hired instructional coaches reported a stronger relationship with the teachers with whom they work, district-hired instructional coaches were able to spend more quality time in the classrooms. The district in this study employs

district-level instructional coaches. This question will allow the district to determine if the instructional model that is currently in place is effective.

33. My job provides me with opportunities to learn new skills and develop new talents.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Opportunities for effective professional development along with supportive administration have been proven to be a significant indicator when determining a teacher's job satisfaction. This impact is especially prevalent in low-income districts (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Since the district in this study meets the poverty level standards, this question would help determine the support level teachers feel within the district to identify any weaknesses that may contribute to poor teacher retention.

Rewards and Recognition

34. I clearly understand how my job performance is measured.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

In many rural districts, teachers find it difficult to find a balance between mandated evaluation standards and school-based expectations (Gilles, 2017). This question will determine if teachers within the district feel that they are adequately prepared for evaluations or accountability standards.

35. My salary is reflective of the workload I am asked to perform.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Recruiting teachers to rural districts can be difficult since the surrounding metropolitan district may offer higher pay and expanded resources. (Gagnon, 2016). This question will determine if the salary is a significant factor for retention in this rural district.

36. I am satisfied with my salary compared with others with similar jobs in other districts.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

There are many factors that lead teachers to consider the education profession. Muller (2009) reports that salary was not a significant factor. This question will determine if the different supplements offered from surrounding districts may have an impact on teacher retention within the district.

General Climate

37. In general, taking everything into account, I am satisfied with the working climate in my school.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Ingersoll (2001) reports that the effective organization of a district can increase the effectiveness of teacher retention initiatives. This question will allow the researcher to determine the overall satisfaction of teachers within the school district being studied.

38. How likely are you to recommend working within this district to a friend or family member? Choose on a scale of 1-10 with “0” being “Not at all Likely” and “10” being “Extremely Likely.”

Many teachers find certain the close-knit community aspect of teaching in a rural school district to be appealing while others find that same aspect a deterrent (Rooks, 2018). This

question will help the researcher determine if the teachers in this district find the community served through our schools is a positive aspect of working within the district.

39. Given the choice how long would you like to work for this district?

- < 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- > 5 years
- Until retirement

Teacher attrition and retention have been identified as an indicator that can be disruptive to the continuity of student success (Kelchtermans, 2017). This question will help identify if teachers in this district plan to return; therefore, offering students in the district a more consistent level of expectations.

40. Are you currently actively looking for another job?

- Yes, outside this district
- Yes, inside and outside this district
- Yes, inside the district
- No
- No answer

Kelchtermans (2017) reports that teachers need to feel a sense of camaraderie paired with efficacy to consider staying in a teaching position. Asking this question will help determine if there is a need for any specific programs that need to be developed to help build this dynamic within the schools in this district.

41. What are you truly satisfied with in this district? What makes you truly happy in your current job?

One key component of teacher satisfaction is the social acknowledgment of teaching success. (Kelchtermans, 2017). This question will help the district evaluate current incentives for teachers and design and implement programs that will increase public acknowledgment for those teachers who are experiencing success in the classroom.

42. What is a turnoff in your job or at the district level? What would you absolutely like to see changed?

Goral (2019) determined that the most significant factor for teachers leaving a school, or the profession is overall job dissatisfaction. This question will allow the researcher to determine what elements exist within the district that may be leading to dissatisfaction among the teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Joyner, Rouse, and Glatthorn (2018) point out that the three principles that must be adopted while conducting and reporting research findings are equity, honesty, and humane consideration. This study will not present any bias towards any ethnicity, gender, social class, or disability. According to Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2018), careful consideration must be given to excluding any circumstances of partiality within the research. To ensure any bias held by the researcher is removed from the study, none of the participants were under the researcher's direct supervision as an instructional coach. Permission was obtained from all participants, and the researcher will be honest with them in terms of expectations, objectives, and procedures. The privacy and anonymity of all participants were protected using pseudonyms and the use of obscure screen names made available only to the researcher and participant. The participants were made aware that there was minimal, if any, risk to their personal safety through

participation in this study. This study included participants in the process as they were allowed to review all transcriptions and will be a part of an open online forum (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

Beesley, Atwill, Blair, and Barley (2010) point out that successful teacher retention is not merely defined by keeping teachers in the classroom but by keeping successful teachers in the classroom. To determine what is needed to achieve successful teacher retention in this rural Mississippi district, this applied research project is necessary. Chapter Three contains the information needed to understand the proposed methods, data collection, and analysis of this applied research study. This chapter further details the setting, participants, and the researcher's role in this study while pointing out the ethical considerations of the study as well.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of teacher retention for a small, rural Mississippi school district and to use the information obtained through this study to formulate a solution to the problem. The data for this study was gathered through three collection methods: face-to-face interviews, an online survey, and an online forum. After all the data was collected, themes were identified through the frequency of certain words as they occurred throughout the online survey, online forum, and face-to-face interviews. The intent of this study was to answer the question of how teacher retention in a rural Mississippi school district can be improved.

Participants

Participants in this study were determined by filtering all teachers who were within their first five years of teaching in the district. After identifying all teachers who met the necessary criterion, all names were placed into a random name generator. The first 25 names to populate were assigned to the online survey component. Once the first 25 were removed from the generator, the names were randomized again. The second set of 25 was assigned to the online forum. Finally, the last 15 names after the last randomization were assigned to the interview process.

Online Survey Participants

After participants were generated for the online survey, it was sent to participants through district email. The qualifications to participate in the survey were outlined in the email, and all participants were required to be within their first five years of teaching in the district. The

participants must have been certified educators with a current teaching license. The researcher received 15 completed online surveys. The demographic information collected in

The online surveys are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information Collected in Online Survey

Number of Participants	15
African American	2
Caucasian	13
Males	4
Females	11
Age 20-29	2
Age 30-39	3
Age 40-49	8
Age 50-59	1
Age 60 or Older	1
Bachelor's Degree	8
Master's Degree	7
Specialist Degree	0
Doctorate Degree	0
Elementary Teacher	8
Secondary Teacher	7

Online Forum Participants

The participants in the online forum were determined by the same process and met the same criteria as the survey participants. A total of 15 participants answered three questions. Participants could respond to the comments of others, but all participants remained anonymous. No demographic information was collected from the online forum participants.

Interview Participants

All 10 individuals interviewed for this study were within their first 5 years of employment within the district. Due to the limitations introduced through the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewees were offered the option of conducting the meeting through online means. Only one participant chose to conduct his or her interview online. The remaining interviews were conducted face-to-face with the researcher. The demographics collected in the interview process are included in Table 2.

Table 2*Demographics of Interview Participants*

Participant	Gender	Years in District	Years in Education	Years in Other District(s)
Educator One	F	4	7	3
Educator Two	F	5	37	1
Educator Three	F	4	16	3
Educator Four	F	3.5	4	1
Educator Five	F	3	31	2
Educator Six	M	4	8	4
Educator Seven	F	2	3	1
Educator Eight	M	2	10	8
Educator Nine	F	5	6	1
Educator Ten	F	2	8	6

Educator One

The first interview participant met the qualifications for this study because she was in her fourth year with the district and has been a certified teacher for seven years. The participant has worked in schools in the state as well as outside of the state. When asked how this district relates to other districts in regard to providing the necessary resources for its teachers, the respondent stated, “We can get what we need if we know the right people to ask.” The participant made several references to the presence of a “clique” that received preference over others. The respondent found it difficult to identify a positive aspect of the district based on its rural location but pointed out that a negative aspect is the derogatory role that social media plays in the

communication between staff and teachers. This participant stated, “Most of the time, we as teachers are the last to know everything.” The interviewee did report that, while sometimes inconsistent, the administration at her school is a significant reason that she has remained at that school.

Educator Two

The next participant qualified for this study based on 34 years of educational experience. This teacher was in her fifth year at this school district. The participant has worked in one other educational system. When asked the main difference between this district and other districts in terms of resources, the pay was the top priority, while rigorous licensing requirements were cited for the state’s overall teaching shortage. The respondent also reported that while the administration at her school had high expectations concerning job performance, there was no indication that this had any significant impact on teacher retention. While the respondent pointed out that the location of the town is within driving distance to metropolitan areas, the negative aspect of this rural community is that there is very little tax revenue coming in to support the type of funding needed to aid in teacher retention.

Educator Three

The next participant qualified for this study based on 16 years in the educational system. She has been with this district for four years and has previously worked in three other districts prior to joining this one. When asked about the differences in terms of resources within the districts, the participant pointed out that funding was a large detriment to her progress. The

participant also identified teacher pay as a major contributor to the overall state's teacher shortage.

Educator Four

The next participant qualified for this study based on four years of experience in education with a little over three years being with this school district. The participant did work one semester in a nearby district. The respondent reported that this district has disadvantages in terms of what surrounding districts can offer teachers. One disadvantage the teacher pointed out was the lack of resources for both teachers and students. Like other participants, she reported that pay is the most dominant contributor to the state's teacher shortage. This educator indicated that "there is a lack of areas to rise" within the district and suggested more opportunities be made available to those who seek more advanced degrees. She also reported that teachers within the district are burdened with more responsibilities than that of other surrounding districts.

Educator Five

The next participant qualified for this study based on 31 years of experience in education. The participant is currently in her third year in this district after working in two other districts. The respondent reported that she has very few issues with the availability of resources within this district. When asked why the state of Mississippi is experiencing a teacher shortage, the participant credited the change in student behavior over the years, as well as lack of parental support state-wide. According to this educator, one positive aspect of working in a rural district is the teamwork that is displayed among the teachers and administrators, while a negative aspect is that many of the parents do not prioritize education. The participant contributes the lack of parental support to the main reason the district is experiencing poor teacher retention. After expressing that a lack of staff leads to teachers missing planning time and students missing

activities, one goal that the participant wanted the district to address is finding more support for teachers, so they have access to an ample amount of time for instructional planning and additional learning opportunities for students.

Educator Six

The next interview participant was qualified for this study based on eight years of educational experience. When asked how this school district compared or contrasted with other districts in the surrounding area, this educator's main concern was the lack of revenue that was being brought into the county and suggested that a viable option for supplementing funds for resources would be to organize a Parent-Teacher Organization at each school. In terms of the state of Mississippi's teacher shortage, this educator not only attributed the low pay scale, but he also attributed lack of teacher appreciation stating, "It's like we are held to the highest standards, but we receive the very, very least respect." When asked the positive qualities the district occupies based on its rural location, the participant praised the level of compassion and drive that the teachers possessed in his or her school. In his or her mind, this level of dedication could be contributed to the fact that both the teachers and the administrators want to see the school and district succeed on the next level. The lack of partnership between the school and the community was the only negative that this educator felt was a result of the rural location of the district. In terms of what the educator felt could be done to improve teacher retention on the district level, communication was a chief complaint. The participant pointed out that some major decisions are not discussed with teachers, regardless of the fact that it is the teachers who are directly impacted. In addition, in some cases, teachers were not made aware of these decisions before the community was aware of them. Two of the main policies that this participant suggested to implement at the district to improve teacher retention was a teacher appreciation program, as

well as a program that bridges the communication gap between administrators at both the school and district levels with the classroom teachers. Finally, the educator believed that his or her suggestions could work to build positive relationships throughout the district that would lead to a lower teacher turnover each year.

Educator Seven

The seventh participant met the qualification for this study based on her third year in the field of education. This is the participant's second year with this school district. This teacher pointed out that, while she does not teach a tested subject, the lack of resources is a significant problem at her school compared to the school from which she came. This participant believed that the teacher shortage in the state can be attributed to the lack of funds at the state level, as well as schools that use the funds. They must hire teachers to teach out of the subject area to accommodate coaching positions or other positions that should not take precedence over major subjects. One positive aspect that this educator contributed to the rural location is the lack of distractions that the students face outside of school, which she also believed that, based on how it is viewed, some could consider that aspect as a negative quality. Once again, this teacher also believed that if a strong mentor program for new teachers, as well as teachers in their first few years, would be implemented by the district, that could greatly improve teacher retention. In addition, on the school level, the administration should find a way to offer more classes to the students so that teachers have smaller class sizes and students are offered more opportunities to be better prepared for college or the workforce.

Educator Eight

The eighth participant met the requirements to participate in this study because he had been in the field of education for ten years. He has completed his second year in this district. He

has previously worked in four other districts. This participant believed that, while more funding would be beneficial, this district provided him with the necessities needed to do a good job. Like several of the participants in this study, he felt that the reason that Mississippi is facing a teacher shortage can be attributed to the state and its lack of funds offered to education and teacher pay. According to this participant, state testing and accountability standards do not come close to matching the rate of pay set by the state legislators. One positive quality that this district possessed, according to the participant, is the low crime rate within the rural area. According to the participant, "I don't have to worry about the safety of my kids coming to and from school." On the other hand, being in a rural area does not afford the students as many extra-curricular opportunities compared to more suburban districts, which this participant felt puts his students at a disadvantage on both an academic and athletic level. Another issue that could lead to improved teacher retention is continuity on the administrative level. This participant pointed out that high administration turn-over can contribute to high teacher turn-over and suggested that the district finds a means of working with struggling administration. Lastly, along with other participants in this study, this educator suggested that there be a direct focus on teacher incentives and measures of appreciation on both the district and school levels.

Educator Nine

The ninth participant in this study qualified to participate because she has been an educator for six years. She has been employed by this district for five years having worked at only one other surrounding district. While this participant felt that parental involvement is a positive aspect of this district's rural location, she admitted that the training she had in teacher education courses to prepare her for a blended technology classroom did not compare with the lack of technology within the district. Admitting that the pandemic has changed some of that,

there are still a great many technological benefits that the district has failed to incorporate. Once again, communication between teachers and administration at both school and district level were mentioned as a deficit within the district. This participant suggested that there be a focus on building camaraderie among the staff at all levels within the district. In addition, there needs to be a stronger and extended focus on the mentor program that expands far past the first or second year of a teacher's career. According to this participant, while there have been a few times she has been observed by the administration in her classroom, there has been no feedback offered in response to those observations. This feedback, as pointed out by the participant, could have been very beneficial to her in her first few years with the district.

Educator Ten

The tenth, and final participant, met the requirements for this study because she has been in the field of education for eight years. She is in the second year of employment with this school district having worked for only one other surrounding district. One of the deficits this teacher felt that this district has when compared with other districts in the area is the opportunity for professional development for all teachers, and she contributed the same lack of resources and support to the state-wide teacher shortage. One aspect that this educator felt could aid teacher retention in the district is some type of program that promotes communication and opportunities for participation between the community and the school district. In addition, the participant expressed that teachers would be more vested in the district if they felt that their opinion was sought, heard, and, most importantly, valued as professional educators. Finally, this participant indicated that there should be a system in place that encourages the administration to be more

involved in the day-to-day classroom activities while offering applicable feedback to his or her teachers on a regular basis.

Results

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of teacher retention for a small, rural Mississippi school district and to formulate a solution to address the problem. This study utilized a multimethod design applying both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach consisted of interviews with teachers. The second approach utilized an online discussion forum that presented teachers with specific questions to answer and offered them the ability to discuss among their peers using an anonymous platform. Finally, a quantitative survey was conducted with teachers in the district using a Likert-scale to rate questions that have been developed by reviewing the current literature specifically on the topic of teacher retention in rural school districts. Both the online discussion and the interviews were coded to identify varying themes. Those themes were compared with the results of the online survey to identify the most common causes of poor teacher retention in this specific school district.

Sub-question 1

Sub-question one for this study was “How would teachers in an interview solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?” Interviews were conducted among teachers who were within their first five years of employment with the district. The interviews were held face-to-face except for one individual who, due to the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19, preferred to conduct the interview via Zoom®. The themes that emerged through the analysis of the interviews were identified as the most significant factors contributing to poor teacher retention within the district. The researcher used Nvivo for a word

frequency analysis to determine possible themes among teacher responses. The codes and frequency of codes specific to these themes are included in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Codes in Interviews

Codes	Frequency
Communication with and among the administration	12
Teacher support, appreciation, and mentoring	11
Valuing the teacher's voice	10
Resources	10
Parental Support	9
Teacher Pay	7

Communication and Administration

The first theme to emerge from the interview process is the level of communication between and among the administration. The administration would be considered campus-level principals and district-level employees such as instructional coaches, federal and special programs, etc. with the highest level of district administration being defined as Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent. When identifying this theme, the researcher also included those participants who may have mentioned the lack of consistency between what they are told by administration and what actions transpire.

Educator one pointed out that while the administration at her location was good when a teacher does not have the support and respect from the administration, his or her job can be far

more difficult. This participant indicated that there is a lack of consistency among administration when dealing with all teachers and equity. She suggested that some teachers are treated more favorably in fear that that teacher may decide to leave. She also points out, “If you (administration) tell us you are going to do something, do it.” According to this educator, there are far too many concessions made to accommodate complaining parents or teachers ignoring any inconveniences these concessions caused other individuals. In her experience, dates have been changed for school events because a parent complains, but if parents of other students express that the initial date was more convenient, it stays as is. She states, “A rule is a rule, it doesn’t matter who it is”.

Educator two reported that she did not feel that there is an issue with communication on her school campus. She stated that while her administration did hold their teachers accountable for their jobs, they are fair and compassionate towards their faculty and staff. Educator three, however, explained that there is a lack of consistency when it came to students’ discipline. She stated, “They [administration]...stop giving them so many chances to mess up. Cut that out instead of instead of giving them [students] ten chances and then sending them to ISS for so many days...”.

When asked about the policies and procedures that the participant feels the district should implement to improve teacher retention, Educator four indicated, “One thing I noticed here is that there isn’t always great communication”. When asked the same question concerning policies and procedures, Educator five disclosed that often administration will not communicate with teachers regarding conflicts that may occur in the classroom and tend to listen to the parent or student’s version of events rather than the professional in the classroom.

Educator six reiterated, “Communication, in some areas, is ineffective.” He also pointed out that there have been several occasions where teachers are expected to complete a major task but are not informed of that task until the due date. He admitted that this lack of communication is frustrating to many teachers. Educator seven also indicated a problem with communication and pointed out that teachers are not treated with equity. She complained that some teachers are “nit-picked” while doing their jobs while others are allowed free reign.

Educator eight proposed that the consistency problem was more with retaining school leadership rather than the communication between leaders. He stated, “They’ve had principal after principal here, so when that dynamic happens, the teachers think of it (the principal) as ‘the flavor of the month.’” He also pointed out that this inconsistency leads teachers to wonder that if the principal leaving means there is a problem, and they should leave as well.

When educator nine was asked what she believed was some of the main reasons that the district was facing teacher retention issues throughout the schools, she reported there needs to be a focus on building relationships among the staff and indicated that there are definite communication issues within the district. Finally, Educator ten indicated, “There is a lack of communication across the board.”

Valuing the Educators

Many of the participants interviewed declared that the district did not value their voice as professional educators. References were made to decisions that were made that directly impacted their classroom, however, they were not consulted or even considered when these decisions were being made. This lack of collaboration led teachers to feel that their voice as professional educators was not held in high regard. In some regards, teachers referred to the voice they are not allowed to have outside of school based on the profession they have chosen.

Educator one indicated, “We as teachers are the last to know everything. The parents know it because it has been posted on social media before we know anything, and I think that is a negative for sure.” Teacher two did not directly mention the teacher's voice but did refer to the fact that teachers who have been employed by the district for an extended time do need more recognition. Educator three referred to the limited voice that teachers have inside the school as well as outside the school. She stated, “We have no free speech as teachers. We have no rights as normal people because we are teachers.”

When asked why this specific district is experiencing a teacher retention issue, Educator four did not refer directly to the lack of voice of teachers, but rather that teachers are stifled in terms of professional advancement within the district. She explained, “In this district, if you get your master’s degree in something specific, while you may get that pay raise, there is probably not a position in the district for whatever you get your Masters in, so a lot of teachers may look at other districts to be able to use the degrees that they have earned.”

Educator five stated the importance of getting teacher feedback. This professional reiterated, “We are the ones working with the kids every day...Let us know that our opinions are valued and that you know that we know what our kids need and what we’ve got to do to meet our goals”. Educator six elaborated that teachers who feel that they are valued may be more likely to take the pay cut that comes with working in this school district as opposed to surrounding districts that can offer a higher salary supplement.

Educator eight pointed out that allowing teachers to have input in programs and activities creates a larger sense of ownership and could have a positive impact on teacher retention in this district. Educator nine concurred. When asked what could be done on a school level to improve teacher retention in the district she stated, “...more outreach to the staff...on school level, on

every level.” She went on to explain that building a strong community among your staff members can create buy-in by your staff. Educator ten remarked, “I feel like the teachers in this district do not feel like they are ever heard or asked their opinion”.

All interview participants shared a mutual belief that a stronger voice by the district’s professional educators could have a positive impact on teacher retention throughout the district.

Resources

The theme of resources included code words such as funding and professional development opportunities. When asked about the availability of resources within this district, the consensus was that this district offered limited resources when compared to surrounding districts. In areas where resources were considered sufficient, availability was not offered to everyone equally. Educator one stated, “We get what we need if you know the right people to ask. If you are in the right clique, and you know the right people to ask the right questions, you can get pretty much whatever you want, but if you are not in the right clique...”

While Educator two pointed out that there is a gap in the pay supplement in the district as opposed to some surrounding districts. When asked about resources, Educator three pointed out that she spends a good portion of her own money to buy the additional resources that the school or district may not be able to provide. Educator four expanded on the lack of resources by indicating that the school in which she works does not even offer a specific workspace dedicated to the teaching staff making it difficult to prepare supplies for lessons or enrichment activities.

Educator five claimed that the amount of resources was not an issue for her, but, in fact, sometimes they were offered more than they might need and were forced to pick one or another. Educator four believed that funding was the main cause of lacking resources and felt that the establishment of some type of parent-teacher organization could rectify the problem of limited

resources as well as offer an opportunity to get parents more involved. Educator eight felt that limited resources were based on the type of class one was teaching. When referring to the non-tested subject she is teaching, she explained, “I am literally using books, making copies, and putting those copies online for my students.”

Educator eight felt that the resources in the district were sufficient and stated, “They provide me with everything I need to do a good job.” Educator nine pointed out that there is not necessarily an issue with resources in the district, but rather the confidence to communicate one’s needs for additional resources to the proper person. Educator ten concluded, “Other districts have many more opportunities for teachers as far as professional development...”.

Parental Support

Another theme that emerged in the coding process was parental support. While a few teachers felt that they had sufficient support from their parents, the majority felt that the lack of parental support was a significant factor in this district. Educator one stated, “The parents do not respect us; therefore, the children do not respect us.” Educator two did not offer any indication that parental support had been an issue for her. Educator three points out that student behavior is a significant problem. She asked the question, “Who is teaching them to behave?”.

On the other hand, Educator four claimed that in the school where she teaches, “Parents are more involved than I would imagine they would be in bigger schools”. Educator five reported that while some of her parents are supportive, many do not place a strong emphasis on education. She stated, “I have had other teachers mention that they feel like some parents didn’t see education as important when they were going to school, so now it is the same where their kids are concerned.” Educator six confirmed that there is an issue at his school with parental support.

He expressed, "...In order for us to be successful, we have to have a productive partnership with the parents as well."

Educator seven pointed out that the rural location can make communication with parents more difficult. She stated, "Communication is tough". However, Educator eight explained, "I can communicate with parents better because parents are more apt to want to pick up". When asked about the positive aspects of teaching in a rural area, Educator nine pointed out that parental involvement is high on the priority list in terms of building relationships and retaining quality teachers. When asked about some of the negative aspects of teaching in a rural district, educator ten concluded by stating, "They don't really try to reach out to the parents for parental involvement".

While not all interviewees felt that parental support was overwhelmingly absent, they all conceded that there is a need for initiatives that would improve parental support throughout the district.

Teachers' Pay

When asked why they felt the state of Mississippi was suffering a high teacher shortage, Educator one did not contribute the issue directly to teacher pay but did point out that teachers are simply not offered the respect they deserve. Educator two, although acknowledging that the majority of teacher pay falls in the hands of the state legislature, pointed out that teacher pay is a predominant issue that is causing poor teacher retention in the district. She communicated, "I believe pay is number one."

Educator three, when asked the main reason for Mississippi's teacher shortage explained, "The pay is not comparable to that of neighboring states". When Educator four was asked the same question, she replied, "I think the pay definitely has something to do with it". While

Educator four did not reference pay, she did state that the district does tend to overwork teachers during certain times such as testing. She stated, “When it comes test time, I can count on my one hand the number of times I have activity period. That hurts me as a teacher with my planning time. Plus, I am with my kids all day with no break. They need a break from the general classroom.”.

When Educator six was asked about the teacher shortage in the state, he replied, “Teacher pay. It’s almost like we are held to the highest standard, but we receive very little respect and the least amount of pay”. In addition, this professional pointed out, “Being that we are rural, and we are in the heart of Mississippi with limited funds, if they can drive thirty minutes down the road and get paid five to ten thousand dollars extra, then I am pretty sure most people would take that option”. Educator Seven did not cite pay as an indicator of poor teacher retention but did point out that some teachers are required to do far more than others. This participant stated, “We have coaches that are only teaching one thing when they should be teaching three just like everyone else...I am teaching more than half of what they are teaching”. The educator also questioned the amount of funding that is being spent on hiring quality educators to match the size of the school. The participant remarked, “Can we really not hire more than 36 teachers for a 4A school?”.

Educator eight pointed out, “A lot of it is teacher pay. You have to consider that someone is going to get a college degree. This is the highest level of any profession ...and they are required to maintain those qualifications and the lowest pay”. When asked about the cause of the state-wide shortage, Educator nine declared, “It is definitely pay. The pay is the lowest in the nation here”. Educator ten made no reference to pay as a direct cause of teacher retention.

Although all the educators interviewed do understand that the Mississippi State Legislature sets the base pay scale for teachers. They are also aware that districts may offer

supplements to that base salary. This supplement is based on tax revenue brought into the area by the consumers. In addition, any proposed increase in district supplements must be approved by the local school board.

Teacher Support, Appreciation, and Mentoring

The next theme that emerged was establishing and implementing more teacher support and mentoring programs. In addition to adding support, participants declared that there is a significant need for increased teacher appreciation programs district-wide. About teacher support, Educator one remarked, “Give us more ways to help our children”. Educator two focused more on the need for appreciation and incentive programs for the teachers themselves and expressed a need for this district to implement incentives for teachers who have been loyal to the district. These incentives could encourage and become goals for novice teachers in the district.

When asked what policies and procedures the district should implement to improve teacher retention, Educator three stated, “Support. Support for things that need to be done”. Educator four remarked, “Sometimes you ask for help and it is too much or not exactly helpful. Sometimes it is overwhelming”. Educator five pointed out that after talking with other educators within the district, many feel that they have very little support at all levels. When asked what policies and procedures should be implemented by the district, Educator five commented, “Show them (teachers) that you think they are important”. When asked the same question, Educator six replied, “It would be a lot better if we had more appreciation for teachers. You’ve got to sell your school, and make teachers want to stay”. Educator seven expressed both a need for teacher appreciation as well as a tremendous need for an organized and effective mentoring program. Educator eight maintained, “recognition works better than pay”. This participant pointed out that

appreciation can even come in the form of administration being willing to work alongside the teacher rather than supervising them much of the time. When referring to teachers in their first few years in the district, Educator nine remarked, “They are in their first few years. They feel like they are alone, and they are just trying to get through, whereas, if you empower them...”. Educator ten mentioned that teachers, especially novice teachers in the district, feel very little support or opportunities to develop themselves as more effective educators.

Sub-question 2

Sub-question two for this study was “How would teachers in an online discussion board solve the problem of teacher retention in a rural school district?” The focus group consisted of ten teachers who were currently employed with the school district. The researcher asked three open-ended questions, and teachers were allowed to answer in an anonymous format. They were also allowed to respond to each other’s comments. The codes that emerged from this focus group are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Codes in Online Forum

Codes	Frequency
District Supplement	9
Community Support	8
Teacher Appreciation	6
Consulting Teachers concerning essential classroom decisions	5
Testing and Accountability	4

Lack of consistency among leadership 3

The data from the anonymous online forum was collected and analyzed using the same format as the face-to-face interviews. Again, NVivo was used to identify codes and rate of frequency.

District Supplements

The first theme to emerge was the need for an increase in the district supplement. One educator stated, “Our district needs to push for a larger supplement to increase its teacher pay.” While another educator argued that the low teacher supplement is the biggest factor that the district is facing when retaining quality educators. When asked a specific way teacher retention could be solved in this district, one educator responded, “We need a higher district supplement.” When asked what problems with teacher retention were specific to this district, one participant claimed that a supplement to the state’s salary scale would make the district a more appealing place to work and pointed out that surrounding districts tend to be able to lure quality teachers away based on their higher supplements.

Community Support

The second theme discovered through the online forum is the lack of community involvement. One educator disclosed that the district and the community do not have an effective relationship. While another educator affirmed this by stating, “You have a large number of parents who feel that the schools are not providing the best possible education for their children.” When asked the primary reason that this district faces a problem with teacher retention, one participant claimed, “Everyone [schools and community] works against each other instead of working together.” When asked about issues causing teacher retention problems that were specific to this district, one participant replied, “Community support appears to be the biggest

issue in terms of retaining teachers.” Another educator divulged, “There is no community support in our district.”

Teacher Appreciation

The third theme to emerge was teacher appreciation. The participants in this forum all agreed that the methods this district uses to express appreciation to its professional educators need improvement. When asked about the specific measures the district could take to improve teacher retention in the district, one participant stated, “Showing appreciation for what teachers do is something that this district could improve upon.” Another educator declared, “Being made to feel valued really helps.” Other participants commented that feeling valued as a professional is essential to teacher morale, and efforts on behalf of the district need improvement. When answering the question about teacher retention issues that are specific to this district, one participant disclosed that feeling valued exceeds even the monetary limitations facing the district. The participant stated, “Once you don’t feel valued, regardless of the money, you’re out.”

Involving Teachers in Classroom Decisions

The next theme identified was the need teachers feel to be included in decisions that directly impact their classroom instruction or environment. To answer the question regarding why this district faces a problem with teacher retention, one contributor reiterated that this district tends to leave teachers out when making decisions that can have a large impact on the status of instruction in their classrooms. One stated, “These decisions affect teachers most, and most of the decision-makers have been out of the classroom so long, they have forgotten what it is like to be in the trenches.” Another participant pointed out, “The voices and concerns of the teachers need to be heard.” Yet another educator said the district needs to reevaluate its efforts to

make decisions by seeking the educators' perspectives. Many participants agreed that there is a certain level of decision-making that they cannot be a part of, but they felt that the teachers and students throughout the district would greatly benefit from the collaboration when the outcome directly impacts them.

Testing and Accountability

There is very little that a district can do in regard to the state-mandated testing; however, many educators in the district feel that the stress of these tests and the accountability attached to them is driving teachers away. One teacher pointed out that the dynamics of his or her classroom do not support the rigorous accountability measures of testing. The educator elaborated, "I often feel as if the dynamics of my classroom are not taken into consideration when looking at test scores." Another teacher discussed the pressure of having to meet the rigorous testing standards with limited support from the administration. Admitting that the problem is not exclusive to this district, one participant stated, "When education is micro-managed from the state level and it filters down to the local levels, people leave." Referring to the End of Course mandates as "useless," one educator indicated that it is the state's insistence to pressure students and teachers with these assessments, and that is driving many teachers away.

Lack of Consistency Among Leadership

The final theme that surfaced from the research is a lack of consistency among those in leadership roles. When asked the reason this district faces a problem with teacher retention, one educator replied, "One reason this district struggles to retain teachers is the lack of consistency and firmness at the leadership level. Policies change on a whim, and teachers are left scrambling to pick up the pieces of a failed policy decision." One educator went as far as to explain that certain people are held to a higher standard than others. She implored, "Make everyone adhere to

the same guidelines and rules.” This lack of consistency, according to one participant, can lead to low morale, which can be an indicator of poor teacher retention.

Sub-question 3

Sub-question three for this study was, “How would teachers in a quantitative online survey solve the problem of poor teacher retention in a rural school district in Mississippi?” A link to the quantitative online survey was sent to 25 qualifying educators in the district. Fifteen participants responded to the survey that contained 42 questions. The first 6 questions were demographic questions, while questions 7-37 were designed to gain information using a Likert-scale model. Answers ranged from 1 indicating that the participant strongly agreed with the statement to 5 representing a strong disagreement. Question 38 asked participants to rate their likeliness to recommend working in this district on a 10-point scale will 1 being the least likely and 10 being most likely. The last four questions on the survey were open-ended questions. The researcher used NVivo to determine the frequency and themes for the online survey. The frequency and average responses from this online survey are recorded in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequency and Average of Online Survey Results

Question	Strong Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel valued as a teacher.	4 26.6%	6 40%	2 13.3%	3 20%	0 0%
My district is committed to the well-being of its teacher.	4 26.6%	5 33.3%	1 6.6%	4 26.6%	1 6.6%

I am encouraged to be innovative in my job (come up with better ways to perform my job).	4	6	2	2	1
	26.6%	40%	13.3%	13.3%	6.6%
My current job responsibilities are sufficiently challenging.	7	1	3	2	2
	46.6%	6.6%	20%	13.3%	13.3%
My skills and abilities are fully utilized in my current job.	3	6	4	2	0
	20%	40%	26.6%	13.3%	0%
I have a clear understanding of what I am expected to deliver.	7	5	1	2	0
	46.6%	33.3%	6.6%	13.3%	0%
I have a good relationship with my direct colleagues.	10	3	0	1	1
	66.6%	20%	0%	6.6%	6.6%
I feel motivated by my colleagues.	7	6	0	1	1
	46.6%	40%	0%	6.6%	6.6%
Colleagues consult each other when they need support.	7	4	1	2	1
	46.6%	26.6%	6.6%	13.3%	6.6%
I trust the administration team at my school and the information they provide.	7	3	3	2	0
	46.6%	20%	20%	13.3%	0%
The administrative team encourages collaboration across my organization.	7	2	2	4	0
	46.6%	13.3%	13.3%	26.6%	0%
My administrative team treats all teachers with equity.	6	4	1	4	0
	40%	26.6%	6.6%	26.6%	0%
My administrative team makes sure that I have clear goals to achieve.	7	3	4	1	0
	46.6%	20%	26.6%	6.6%	0%

My administrative team regularly gives me helpful feedback on my job performance.	7	3	2	3	0
	46.6%	20%	13.3%	20%	0%
My administrative team listens to my ideas and concerns.	7	5	0	3	0
	46.6%	20%	13.3%	20%	0%
I receive the relevant information that I need to perform my job well.	4	8	2	1	0
	26.6%	53.3%	13.3%	6.6%	0%
The administrative team explains the reason behind decisions or actions taken by them.	6	5	1	3	0
	40%	33.3%	6.6%	20%	0%
The communication tools in my organization are used effectively.	5	4	1	5	0
	26.6%	26.6%	6.6%	33.3%	0%
I enjoy being associated with this district.	9	4	1	1	0
	60%	26.6%	6.6%	6.6%	0%
I am motivated to help my district be successful.	7	6	1	0	1
	46.6%	40%	6.6%	0%	6.6%
I feel a sense of pride to work in this district.	8	6	0	0	1
	53.3%	40%	0%	0%	6.6%
There is a good balance between my work and my personal life.	3	3	2	5	2
	20%	20%	13.3%	33.3%	13.3%
The work pressure at my job is acceptable.	3	5	3	4	0
	20%	33.3%	20%	26.6%	0%
My organization pays enough attention to working conditions.	4	4	3	4	0
	26.6%	26.6%	20%	26.6%	0%

My organization provides the necessary training to perform my present job properly.	4	7	2	2	0
	26.6%	46.6%	13.3%	13.3%	0%
My administrative team/coaches counsel me in career development.	4	4	3	4	0
	26.6%	26.6%	20%	26.6%	0%
My job provides me with the opportunities to learn new skills and develop new talents.	6	2	3	4	0
	33.3%	13.3%	20%	26.6%	0%
I clearly understand how my job performance is measured.	7	6	1	1	0
	46.6%	40%	6.6%	6.6%	0%
My salary is reflective of the workload I am asked to perform.	4	0	2	3	6
	26.6%	0%	13.3%	20%	40%
I am satisfied with my salary and benefits compared with other similar jobs in other districts.	3	2	3	5	2
	20%	13.3%	20%	33.3%	13.3%
In general, taking everything into account, I am satisfied with my job and the working environment in my school.	5	7	1	2	0
	33.3%	46.6%	6.6%	13.3%	0%

The data were analyzed by grouping survey questions together based on the results of the themes that emerged throughout the research. When asked about feeling valued in the district, 40% agreed with that statement while 20% disagreed. Thirty-three percent of teachers surveyed felt that the district is committed to the well-being of its teachers. However, 26.6% percent disagreed with that statement. When asked if the district encourages innovativeness in the

profession, 40% of the participants agreed, while 20% disagreed, and only 6.6% strongly disagreed. When discussing the challenges of the job, 46.6% felt that they were sufficiently challenged, while 13.3% disagreed and 13.3% strongly disagreed. Concerning the question that inquired if teachers within the district felt that his or her talents were being fully utilized by the district, 60% of individuals surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed. Over 70% percent of participants felt that the district did a sufficient job relaying job expectations, and an overwhelming 80% reported a good working relationship with his or her colleagues within the district. Over 80% reported that they feel motivated by the individuals with which they work, and 73.2% agreed with the statement that reported that colleagues within the district can consult each other for support. Forty-six percent strongly agreed with the statement that claimed that the information shared to them by their administration is trustworthy, and the same percentage reported that they feel encouraged by their administration.

There was a little dissension when the statement was made concerning administration and equity. While 40% agreed with the statement that the administration in the district treats all teachers with equity, 26.6% disagreed with this statement. In terms of clear goals, 46.6% strongly agreed that the administration relayed them; however, 26.6% disagreed, and 6.6% strongly disagreed. When referring to effective feedback by the administration, 46.6% felt that the district administration offers helpful feedback while 26.6% disagreed. Forty-six percent of participants did agree that the administration listens to his or her ideas and concerns. On the other hand, only 26.6% of participants felt strongly that they received the relevant information that they need to do their job well, and 33.3% of individuals disagreed with the statement that proposed that the district effectively uses the communication tools available.

Only 6.6% of individuals surveyed reported that they did not enjoy being associated with the district in which they worked, and 86.6% either agreed or strongly agreed that the district motivates them to be successful. Altogether, 93.3% of surveyed educators either agreed or strongly agreed that they have a sense of pride to work within the district.

When asked whether the balance between their work and personal life was good, 46.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 26.6% disagreed with the statement that his or her workload was acceptable. Fifty-three percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the district pays enough attention to working conditions. Only 13.3% disagreed when asked if the district provides them with the necessary training to do his or her job properly. When asked about whether the district administration counsels individuals in career development, 26.6% disagreed. Twenty-six percent also disagreed with the statement that the district provides them with opportunities to develop new skills and talents, while 33.3% strongly agreed. Forty-six percent strongly agreed that the district has done a good job relating how one's job performance is measured within the district.

When asked about salary, 60% of educators surveyed disagreed with the statement that claimed that compensation was well balanced with his or her workload, and only 33.3% were satisfied with his or her salary when compared to the same position in other districts. When educators were asked to take all factors into account, 79.9% reported being satisfied with his or her job and working environment.

Discussion

Recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas can prove more challenging than that of their metropolitan counterparts (Gagnon, 2016) Chapter two focused on the literature published on teacher retention in rural school districts. The literature highlighted subjects that included

teacher pay, student behavior, working conditions, as well as leadership styles. Three methods of data collection were used in this study to determine the collation between the current literature and the information obtained through this study.

Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) reported that on average, rural teachers are paid at least \$10,000.00 less than teachers in the urban classroom. Teacher pay was one of the key indicators that emerged during this research study. On the other hand, a 2012 program in rural Arkansas designed to retain teachers in their rural areas did not see much success regardless of a significant signing bonus of \$20,000.00 (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). However, in various forms, all teachers from the district in which this research was conducted reported that the financial deficits presented through the district are a concern and could be a definite indicator of poor teacher retention in the district.

The participants also indicated that leadership styles and policies are a significant factor impacting teacher retention in the district. Participants cited several issues with consistency, communication, and equity among administration throughout the district. Participants reported that there was a perception of poor communication present at the administrative level and suggested that an open line of communication among all staff members, regardless of their position in the district, could make teachers feel valued and more likely to thrive in the district. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) determined that supportive and effective school leadership can have a significant impact on teacher retention, especially in a district that experiences high poverty levels.

The results of this study also indicated that teachers feel that the district does not express a compelling level of appreciation for its teachers. A sense of value can attract potential new teachers to a district as well as play a role in retaining quality educators (Price & Weatherby,

2017). While some participants admitted that sporadic tokens of appreciation are occasionally offered in this district, they pointed out that more distinct and consistent tokens of appreciation could improve the level of retention within the district.

Many participants in this study reported a disconnect between the community and the school system. The lack of an effective relationship between the district and the community it serves has given the teachers in the district the impression that the community does not feel that their children are receiving a quality education. Some teachers reported that a significant portion of the community does not view the schools as a valuable tool with competent professionals at the helm.

Summary

According to Reeves (2018), “Recruiting and retaining our best teachers depends upon respect, feedback, leadership, efficacy, collaboration, and money” (Redefine the Profession section, para. 2). These factors seem to coincide with the participants’ responses. Within the researched district, there were several indicators noted that could be improved with consistently implemented programs and incentives. After reviewing the data, many reoccurring themes emerged and factors were identified that, if further reviewed and addressed, could positively impact the district’s teacher retention -- thus improving the level of success for students within this small, rural school district.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of poor teacher retention for a small, rural Mississippi school district and to use the information obtained through this study to formulate a solution to the problem. The data collected through this study were obtained using a multimethod research design using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The analysis of the data presented several themes that involved funding, issues with administration, lack of teacher appreciation as well as a lack of community support. This chapter will discuss some potential solutions to the problem as well as outline the funds needed to bring these solutions to fruition. Both the positive and negative implications of this study will be outlined in Chapter Five. The final stage of this chapter will present a plan to evaluate the proposed solution, a timeline for implementation, as well as any limitations of the solution.

Restatement of the Problem

Recruiting and retaining quality educators in a small rural district is one of the largest challenges they face (Gagnon, 2016). The district included in this study is no exception. The research in this study focused on providing the administration as well as the school board a viable solution to the teacher retention problem they are currently facing. The three data collection methods used in this study were face-to-face interviews, an online forum, and an online survey. The results of this study produced themes that indicated that participants feel that there are specific issues that the district should address to improve teacher retention.

Proposed Solution to the Central Question

The central question presented in this study was “How can the problem of teacher retention in a rural Mississippi school district be improved?” Based on the findings of this research study, the district could benefit from implementing teacher retention initiatives. These initiatives would focus on and address the three essential elements identified through this study, which are consistency and communication at the administrative level, teacher appreciation, and community involvement.

One of the central issues determined through the research was a lack of consistency and communication among the administration. This problem could be rectified by including more leadership training for administrators that focuses on effective communication skills. In addition, this training could offer different leadership strategies to administrators that can use to include educators in decision making that directly impacts them. These strategies might include sending out surveys and creating a school forum where topics that will impact the classroom can be discussed in a professional environment.

Another issue that must be addressed is that of teacher appreciation. The participants in this study reported that the district needs to implement a program that focuses on increasing teacher appreciation efforts throughout the district. This problem could be solved by creating a teacher appreciation committee that designates at least one token of teacher appreciation on each campus per month. Programs such as teacher of the month as well as other incentives can be displayed on each campus to improve teacher morale.

The committee for teacher appreciation can also help alleviate issues that some of the participants mentioned concerning a lack of community involvement. By reaching out and including community members on the teacher appreciation committee, the district would be

offering individuals within the community an opportunity to become part of the educational team that is working with the community's children. In addition, schools can institute volunteer programs where community leaders and members can volunteer to do things such as come into the classrooms and read to students. Schools can offer community events such as job fairs where members of the community are invited to come to the classrooms and discuss their different occupations. All of these suggestions offer an opportunity for the community to see the positive aspect of what is going on in the schools district-wide.

The most common theme of teacher pay is not as feasible to solve on the district level; however, as many participants pointed out if a teacher feels supported, valued, and respected professionally, the financial aspect does not weigh as heavily.

Resources Needed

The resources needed to implement these proposed initiatives are minimal. The district already employs several instructional coaches who conduct training throughout the district, and these coaches can provide training in alignment with the goals and strategies set forth by the district leadership team to support and mentor teachers. The district would need to commit to hiring an outside consultant who would present leadership training for administrators that focuses on the concerns found through this study. The outside consultant firm would be determined by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent and would be approved by the local school board. The vision of this training will be determined by the superintendent and will be relayed to the consultant as an outline for the leadership training.

The commitment for the teacher appreciation committee would be devoting a designated time to meet and discuss the monthly incentives, as well as procuring incentives at little or no cost from different stakeholders within the community. These stakeholders would be sought by

the committee members upon approval of the Superintendent and the local school board. The schedule for the teacher appreciation meetings will be established at the inception of each school year and will be contingent on the approval of the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent.

The same commitment of time would be required to increase the community involvement through volunteer opportunities within the different schools. Each school administrator would be responsible for identifying a plethora of volunteer opportunities that are specific to his or her school. Once the opportunities have been approved at the district level, the parent and community engagement specialist for the district can begin disseminating these opportunities through the means of various avenues of media such as the district social media platforms as well as local newspapers, flyers sent home to parents, as well as signage at each of the campuses.

Funds Needed

There would be a fee of approximately \$3,500.00 incurred for the training of the administration, and the other two elements of the solution would depend solely on volunteers, as well as donations from within the community. The goal of soliciting incentives from local stakeholders is to keep the cost of these incentives at a minimum. Since the district is considered a Title I district, any funds that were incurred from the incentive program would come from these federal funds. The only other cost incurred would be if the district decided to use an outside source for the leadership training for administration, and these funds would be billed to Title I funds as well.

Roles and Responsibilities

To make this program a success, it is recommended that higher-level administration, such as the superintendent and assistant superintendent, establish the precedents of the initiative while emphasizing the need for consistency. The superintendent and assistant superintendent will be

responsible for determining how many community events are required for each campus. This higher level of administration, along with school administrators, will also be responsible for selecting members to be placed on the district teacher appreciation committee. This committee will meet monthly. An outline of activities, possible stakeholders and incentive opportunities will be constructed during the first meeting. This outline will be forwarded to the superintendent to be placed on the upcoming board agenda which is held on the first Thursday of each month. As a precaution, as required for any action that requires Title I funds, a copy of the agenda and sign-in sheet will be collected from each meeting and forwarded to the director of federal programs to keep on file.

The campus administration would be responsible for designing and implementing the volunteer programs within his or her individual schools. In addition, principals will be responsible for creating on-campus community opportunities on his or her individual campuses. The administration will collect sign-in information for anyone who is volunteering and will forward these sign-in sheets to the Director of Federal Programs in the event that any Title I funds are used during the course of this program. While the administration on the campus will coordinate the volunteer opportunities, the Parent-Engagement Specialist for the district will be responsible for disseminating the information concerning the volunteer opportunities at each campus.

Timeline

This initiative could be implemented over the course of a school year. The process of research and training design would take approximately one week, which would coincide with the time that the administration would be returning to campus to begin preparations for the new school year. The establishing of the teacher appreciation committee could be done over the

course of a week with members being contacted with a time and location for the first meeting, which can be held during the beginning of year professional development days. As previously stated, the calendar for these monthly meetings as well as the location will be established during this first meeting and forwarded to the superintendent for final approval. Finally, the community volunteer piece can be implemented throughout the entire school year with the proper evaluation plan in place to measure the initiative's effectiveness.

Solution Implications

The literature has shown that there is a direct correlation between effective teacher retention and successful student outcomes. The positive outcomes of this initiative include increasing the teacher retention rate within the district. The implementation of leadership training will offer the administrators some tools and strategies to be more consistent and effective. Creating a teacher appreciation committee will relay to the teachers the message that the district values their presence within the district. Establishing a volunteer program in the schools will offer an opportunity for parents and community members to be vested stakeholders in the education of their students, which will lead to a sense of increased community support for the teachers. One of the negative implications is that there will be more outside visitors on each campus. With the community members on campus, there will have to be clear safety measures in place and adhered to on a consistent level.

Evaluation Plan

To evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative, the administration can provide periodic surveys to determine the need for improvements or changes for the upcoming year. The surveys could be the same study used to conduct the research presented in this study, and it will be determined by the superintendent who evaluates the results of the survey. Another effective

measure of initiative effectiveness could be to collect and compare the number of teachers who decide to seek employment with another district at the conclusion of each school year. The district could use the same Likert –scale type survey to reach out to those teachers who have decided to leave the district to receive their feedback on the initiative’s effectiveness, as well. Some weaknesses presented through this study are the fact that the most common theme of teacher pay was not something that could be addressed at the district level without involving the local government and a new tax initiative. Another issue with the initiative is that while administration emerged as a theme that impacts teacher retention in the district, there was no administration included in the data collection. Finally, the portion of the initiative designed to promote community involvement would rely a great deal on the community’s willingness to participate. Based on the results of the teacher data, the relationship that now exists between the community and the district may not be strong enough to support this facet of the initiative at its inception. A process of mending the relationship between the district and the community may need to take place prior to the commencement of this initiative. Based on the data collected, a topic for future research regarding teacher retention in this district might include collecting data to determine what measures could be taken to promote the community’s involvement in the initiative.

Summary

The district in this study has a history of poor teacher retention. As the research results indicate, this poor teacher retention is having a direct impact on the success of the district’s students. The purpose of this applied research study was to determine which elements need amending in order to create an environment more conducive to teacher retention. The themes

that emerged from this study helped determine that an initiative designed to improve certain elements of leadership, instill teacher appreciation, and promote community involvement would benefit this district. Ultimately, this improvement in teacher retention should result in an increase in overall student achievement.

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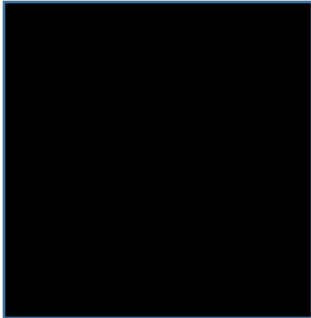
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APPENDIX A – Permission to Conduct Research




Superintendent
September 17, 2020



Assistant Superintendent

Dear Mrs. Yarbrough:

I am in receipt of your request to conduct research in . As an educator, I feel it is my obligation to support other educators in reaching their goals and aspirations in education. Your proposed research title is "How to Solve the Problem of Poor Teacher Retention in a Small Rural District". You have permission to conduct the research in the area in which you have requested. Please let me know if I may be of additional assistance to you.



APPENDIX B – Online Survey Participant Request Form

Dear Mrs. Jones:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand teacher retention in a small, rural school district. The purpose of my research is to create a plan of action that will help rural school district better retain quality educators, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and work in this district. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an online survey. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the procedure[s] listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

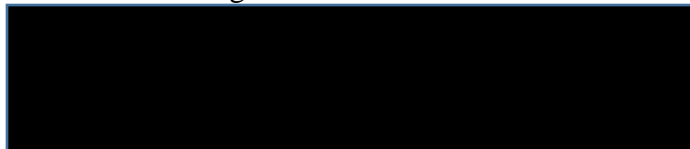
In order to participate, please click here to complete the attached survey <https://us.chkmkt.com/?e=206279&d=e&h=896E4A52FC8F699&l=en> .

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive a 100.00 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Danielle Yarbrough



APPENDIX C – Consent Letter

Consent

Title of the Project: Solving the Problem of Poor Teacher Retention in a Rural Mississippi School District

Principal Investigator: Melissa D. Yarbrough, Graduate Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years of age and be employed as a certified teacher in the [REDACTED] part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to research the topic of teacher retention within the [REDACTED] School District. The information in this study can be used to develop a course of action that can be used to design and implement better retention strategies for this district as well as other small, rural districts nationwide.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a face-to-face interview that will take place at a central location. This interview will take no more than 10-15 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed, and the participant will receive a copy of this transcription for his/her records.
2. Fill out an online survey. This survey will take no more than 10-15 minutes. While names and email addresses may be collected through this process the information obtained will remain completely confidential.
3. Participate in an online discussion using Google Forms ® where you will be asked 4 discussion questions specific to the topic of teacher retention within the [REDACTED] School District. This discussion should take no more than 10-15 minutes. While names and email addresses may be collected through this process the information obtained will remain completely confidential.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are that this study will help determine what factors impact teacher retention within this small, rural school district.

Benefits to society include a better teacher retention of highly qualified teachers has a positive impact on both individual student achievement and the community as a whole.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher[s] will have access to the records.

Include the following in this section:

- Participant responses will be confidential. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer drive and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher[s] will have access to these recordings. Individuals will receive a copy of the transcription of his/her interview.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Anonymous means you, the researcher, will not be able to link your data (e.g., survey responses, grades, etc.) to the specific participants who provided or are associated with the data.

Confidential means you will be able to link individual participants to the information they provide or are associated with, but you will not disclose participant identities or how named or identifiable individuals responded.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be entered into a raffle to win a 100.00 gift card. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes; however, they will be pulled and separated from your responses to maintain your anonymity.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

There are not expected cost for the participants of this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or this school district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher[s] at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from any focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Melissa Danielle Yarbrough. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or Danyarb1975@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair at [REDACTED] Ajones17@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher[s] will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Print Name

Date

APPENDIX D– Online Forum Participant Letter

Dear Mrs. Jones:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand teacher retention in a small, rural school district. The purpose of my research is to create a plan of action that will help rural school district better retain quality educators, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and work in this district. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an online forum using. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be gathered by the researcher as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

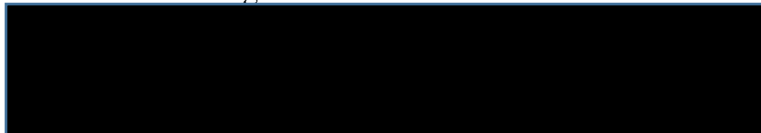
In order to participate, please click the attached link

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the sign-up sheet. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the interview.

Participants in this research study will be entered in a raffle to receive a \$100.00 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Danielle Yarbrough



APPENDIX E –Interview Participant Letter

Dear Mrs. Jones:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand teacher retention in a small, rural school district. The purpose of my research is to create a plan of action that will help rural school district better retain quality educators, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and work in this district. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Interview will be recorded, but participants will receive a personal transcript of the interview.

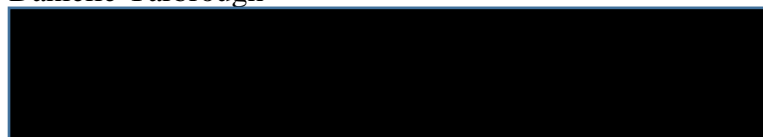
In order to participate, please [click here](#) to complete the attached link to sign-up for a time slot. All interviews will be held at the [REDACTED] or another public location where privacy can be offered or through an online meeting platform.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the sign-up sheet. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the interview.

Participants in this research study will be entered in a raffle to receive a \$100.00 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Danielle Yarbrough



APPENDIX F - Online Survey**Demographic questions.**

1. What is your age category?

- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

2. What is your race?

- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Other (please specify): _____

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

4. What is your highest degree level?

- High School Diploma
- Associates Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate Degree
- Doctorate Degree

5. List any other districts in which you have been employed.

6. What grade level do you teach?

- Elementary
- Middle
- Secondary
- I teach at multiple levels (please specify): _____

Directions: Rate these questions on a scale 1 -5 using the following format:

1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = No opinion 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

7. I feel valued as a teacher in this district (Price & Weathersby, 2017).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

8. My district is committed to the well-being of its teachers (McLeod, 2018).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

9. I am encouraged to be innovative in my job (come up with new or better ways to perform my job) (Stern, 2013).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Job Characteristics

10. My Current job responsibilities are sufficiently challenging (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

11. My skills and abilities are fully utilized in my current job (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

1

2

3

4

5

12. I have a clear understanding of what I am expected to deliver (Paufler, 2018).

1

2

3

4

5

Colleagues

13. I have a good relationship with my direct colleagues (Sharplin et al., 2011).

1

2

3

4

5

14. I feel motivated by my colleagues (Muller, 2009).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

15. Colleagues consult each other when they need support (Redding & Henry, 2019).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Administrative Team

16. I trust the administrative team at my school and the information they provide (Hughes, et al., 2015).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

17. The administrative team encourages collaboration across my organization (Hughes, et al., 2015).

1

2

3

4

5

18. The administrative team treats all teachers with equity (Hughes, et al., 2015).

1

2

3

4

5

19. My administrative team makes sure I have clear goals to achieve (Jabeen, et al., 2019).

1

2

3

4

5

20. My administrative team regularly gives me helpful feedback on my job and performance (du Plessis, 2017).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

21. My administrative team listens to my ideas and concerns (du Plessis, 2017).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Communication

22. I receive the relevant information I need to perform my job well (Jabeen, et al., 2019).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

23. The administrative team explains the reason behind decisions or actions taken by them

(Jabeen, et al., 2019).

1

2

3

4

5

24. The communication tools in my organization are used effectively (Jabeen, et al., 2019).

1

2

3

4

5

Involvement

25. I enjoy being associated with this district (Rooks, 2018).

1

2

3

4

5

26. I am motivated to help my district be successful (Rooks, 2018).

1

2

3

4

5

27. I feel a sense of pride to work in this district (Rooks, 2018).

1

2

3

4

5

Work Pressure

28. There is a good balance between my work and personal life (Sharplin, et al., 2019).

1

2

3

4

5

29. The work pressure at my job is acceptable (Sharplin, et al., 2019).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

30. My organization pays enough attention to working conditions (Redding, 2019).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Professional Development

31. My organization provides the necessary training to perform my present job properly (Jorgenson & Moon, 2002).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

32. My administrative team/Coaches counsel me in career development (Hamilton et al., 2018).

1

2

3

4

5

33. My job provides me with opportunities to learn new skills and develop new talents (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

1

2

3

4

5

Rewards and Recognition

34. I clearly understand how my job performance is measured (Gilles, 2017).

1

2

3

4

5

35. My salary is reflective of the workload I am asked to perform (Gagnon, 2016).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

36. I am satisfied with my salary and benefits compared with others with similar jobs in other districts (Gagnon, 2016).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

General Climate

37. In general, taking everything into account, I am satisfied with my job and working climate in my school (Redding & Henry, 2019).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Please choose on a scale of 1-10 with “0” being “Not at all Likely” and “10” being “Extremely Likely”.

38. How likely are you to recommend working within this district to a friend or family member?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

39. Given the choice how long would you like to work for this district?

- < 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- > 5 years
- Until retirement

40. Are you currently actively looking for another job?

- Yes, outside this district
- Yes, inside and outside this district
- Yes, inside the district
- No
- No answer

41. What are you truly satisfied with in this district? What makes you truly happy in your current job?

42. What is a turnoff in your job or at the district level? What would you absolutely like to see changed?

APPENDIX G- Face-to-Face Interview

What was your personal reason for entering the field of education?

How long have you been in the field of education?

How long have you worked in this district?

In what school districts have you previously worked?

What do you feel is the most prominent differences between this district and other districts in the surrounding areas in terms of teacher resources? (McLeod, 2018).

According to Mississippi.org (2019), our state is experiencing the worst teacher shortage it has ever faced, what do you feel are the main reasons that the state of Mississippi is experiencing a teacher shortage?

Rooks (2018) points out that there are several benefits of working in a rural school district.

Based on the fact that it is located in a rural area, what are some positive aspects the district possesses?

Based on the fact that it is located in a rural area, what are some negative aspects the district possesses? (Beltman et al., 2016).

What do you feel are some of the main reasons that this district is experiencing poor teacher retention throughout the schools? (Beltman et al., 2016).

On a district level, what do you think can be done to improve teacher retention in the district? (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019).

On a school level, what do you think can be done to improve teacher retention in this district?

(Beltman et al., 2016).

What are some goals you would set for this district regarding teacher retention? (Beltman et al., 2016).

APPENDIX H – Online Forum

What do you feel is the reason that this district faces a problem with teacher retention?

(Kelchtermans, 2017).

What are some specific ways you think teacher retention could be solved in this district?

(Kelchtermans, 2017)

What problems with teacher retention do you feel are specific to this district? (Kelchtermans, 2017)