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ABSTRACT

Although the problem varies across the United States, overall there is a shortage of rural teachers, especially in the subject areas of math, science, and special education. Recruiting teachers for rural settings requires targeting persons with rural backgrounds, attacking the negative stereotypes surrounding rural schools, and stressing the benefits of teaching in rural schools. Institutions of higher education could help recruit teachers for rural areas by encouraging students to visit rural districts, posting job openings, selling the positive aspects of rural teaching, inviting rural educators to be guest lecturers, providing rural internships, increasing interaction with rural personnel directors, preparing for teaching in multiple subject areas, sponsoring recruiting fairs, offering masters degree programs through summer school, and preparing teachers to direct extracurricular activities. Retaining rural teachers requires the coordinated effort of the school and the community. The community can recognize new teachers' accomplishments and invite them to local activities. The school can ease the transition of new teachers by assigning mentors, providing administrative contact and support, providing frequent inservice programs, providing release time for inservice and professional development activities, streamlining paperwork, offering orientation programs, locating adequate housing, providing merit increases for exceptional performance, and establishing the support of the school board. (Contains 29 references and 3 tables.) (TD)

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TEACHERS IN RURAL AREAS

BY

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Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Areas

The rural segment of American schooling is significant, making up almost two-thirds of the more than 14,000 school districts in 1997-98, including some urban school districts with rural schools (Howley, 2000). More than 45 percent of the nation's public schools are located in rural areas and small towns (Harmon, 1997). Almost 40 percent of the nation's public school teachers work in these rural schools (National Education Association, 1998). Consequently, attracting and retaining quality teachers will be instrumental in creating and implementing the higher standards for student academic achievement being advocated in rural schools (Harmon & Branham, 1999). This paper first describes characteristics of the "ideal" rural teacher, then presents the challenges and practices for attracting and retaining teachers in rural areas.

According to the report "The Supply and Demand of Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States" (Yasin, 1999), for the 1998-99 school year, there were 2,780,074 teachers in public schools. Over a million of those teachers (approximately 40 percent) were in the six states of California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Ohio, and Texas. These six states also contain almost 1,400 rural school districts.

The number of elementary and secondary school teachers is projected to increase by 1.1 percent annually to a total of 3.46 million by the year 2008 (Gerald & Hussar, 1998). Elementary school teachers will increase to 2.05 million and secondary school teachers will increase to 1.19 million by 2008 (Gerald & Hussar, 1998). Similarly, elementary and secondary student enrollments are projected to increase to 54.27 million for the same time period. However, other factors such as teacher retirement and increased immigration will continue to increase the number of students, and thus the need for more teachers.

The projected demand for teachers may outpace the projected growth in the supply of teachers. Some researchers and policy makers estimate that school districts will have to hire about 200,000 teachers annually over the next decade to keep pace with rising student enrollments and teacher retirements for a total of 2.2 million additional teachers (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). However, some researchers point out that shortages are limited to particular regions and communities and argue that there is not an over-all teacher shortage. Moreover, most of the new teachers are needed in the specific subject areas of bilingual education, special education, mathematics, and physics and chemistry (Darling-Hammond & Berry, et al., 1999; Bradley, 1999). In addition, the growth in the minority student population points to a need for more teachers of color. Urban and poor communities will have the greatest need for teachers, with more than 700,000 additional teachers needed in the next decade.

According to the National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse (2001), teacher shortages are particularly acute in urban and rural areas, where there is an immediate need to fill teaching positions in all areas, from elementary grades to high school classes. The American Association of School Administrators (1999) observes that the main problem of rural school districts is

attracting and keeping quality teachers. The rural teacher shortage affects all subject areas but particularly math, science, and special education.

Collins (1999) points out that the rural teacher recruitment and retention problem varies across the United States. Some states have teacher surpluses; others have shortages. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education, an adequate number of teachers is trained each year. The problem is with distribution (Bradley, 1998).

While the supply of teachers has grown over the past ten years, the projected demand for teachers indicates that the supply must continue to increase over the next decade. The demand for new teachers may vary by district, depending on local population growth, immigration rates, teacher retirements and attrition, and teaching salaries offered (Yasin, 1999).

The Rural Teacher

Before addressing issues of attracting and retaining teachers in rural areas, it seems prudent to address what it means to be a "rural teacher." Otherwise, one might assume all persons with a teaching credential ought to consider themselves qualified to teach in a rural school. Such an assumption could be very misleading as one considers the realities of teaching in rural areas, realities that most school superintendents and their local boards of education will have in mind as they seek to recruit and retain the ideal teacher.

Interviews with 31 rural superintendents in New York reveal characteristics they consider important for a prospective teacher candidate: certification (preferably multiple certification), overall quality and experience, and comfortable "fit" with the rural environment (Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Rural School Districts, 1988). Stone (1990) reports, however, that prospective teachers are often unprepared for rural realities that demand knowledge in multiple subjects and know-how in conducting a range of school activities.

Seifert and Simone (1980-81, p. 14) also describe "ideal" characteristics for teachers in smaller schools, a common size for many schools in rural areas. Their list of ideal characteristics include:

1. Certified and able to teach in more than one subject area or grade level,
2. Prepared to supervise several extracurricular activities,
3. Able to teach a wide range of abilities in a single classroom,
4. Able to overcome the student's cultural differences and add his/her understanding of the larger society, and
5. Able to adjust to the uniqueness of the community in terms of social opportunities, life styles, shopping areas, and continuously being scrutinized.

The literature shows clearly, according to Lemke (1994), that rural administrators find it extremely difficult to locate and hire qualified teachers who will fit in with the school and

community and will stay in the job. The "ideal" rural teacher is certified to teach more than one subject or grade level, can teach students with a wide range of abilities in the same classroom, is prepared to supervise extracurricular activities, and can adjust to the community.

Not all rural communities are the same. Each school board, superintendent, and school will likely define and articulate its perception of the ideal teacher within its unique rural context. Nachtigal (1982, p. 270-27: cited in Horn, 1985) concludes:

The important factors that differentiate a rural community in one part of the country from a community of similar size and isolation in another part of the country appear to be related to (1) the availability of economic resources, (2) cultural priorities of the local community, (3) commonality of purpose, and (4) political efficacy.

Table 1 reveals Nachtigal's research (1982, p. 270: cited in Horn, 1985) regarding some differences between rural and urban areas.

Table 1. Differences Between Rural and Urban

| Rural | Urban |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Personal/tightly linked | Impersonal/loosely coupled |
| Generalists | Specialists |
| Homogeneous | Heterogeneous |
| Nonbureaucratic | Bureaucratic |
| Verbal communication | Written memos |
| Who said it | What's said |
| Time measured by seasons of year | Time measured by time clock |
| Traditional values | Liberal values |
| Entrepreneur | Corporate labor force |
| Made do/respond to environment | Rational planning to control environment |
| Self-sufficiency | Leave problem solving to experts |
| Poorer (spendable income) | Richer (spendable income) |
| Less formal education | More formal education |
| Smaller/less density | Larger/greater density |

It is the great diversity in rural areas from one part of the country to another that has frustrated those educational policy makers and teacher education institutions that have sought to embrace the "one best way" approach to education reform and teacher preparation. While innovations in telecommunications (e.g., Internet, TV) and other technological innovations have narrowed some of the lifestyle differences between those who live in the city and country, the ideal teacher in rural America is more often than not expected to think global and act local.

The Challenge

In 1985 Miller and Sidebottom developed a booklet for the American Association of School Administrators to help administrators address the challenge of finding and keeping the best teachers in small and rural school districts. They maintain that three basic assumptions underlie any recruitment and retention plan: (1) recruitment is a year-long, ongoing activity; (2) recruitment requires help from everyone in the school and community; and (3) quality attracts quality--school district must have a visible commitment to quality. They also reveal some of the causes for a teacher shortage in rural areas:

- ☞ Social and cultural isolation
- ☞ Poor pay and salary differentials
- ☞ Limited mobility
- ☞ Lack of personal privacy
- ☞ Rigid lock-step salary schedules and monetary practices
- ☞ Lured away by higher paying private sector businesses and industries
- ☞ Strict teacher certification practices and tests
- ☞ Lack of reciprocal certification to enable teaching in another state
- ☞ Recruitment cost (time/costs to gather information)
- ☞ High rate of teacher turnover (30-50% in some areas)

Miller and Sidebottom (1985) stress recruiting and retaining good teachers in rural and small schools is complicated by inadequate pay that does not compensate educators for living in isolation. New teachers become easily discouraged if they haven't been prepared for rural living and teaching. These circumstances, along with a negative stereotype generally regarding rural areas, work against attracting the best teaching candidates. Often the result is too few good educators in the hiring pool overall.

These issues are likely to be exacerbated in the current school reform and public accountability climate that is placing a premium on quality teachers who can enable all students to achieve high academic standards. As Collins (1999) notes in a digest for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, to recruit rural teachers means administrators must target candidates with rural backgrounds or with personal characteristics or educational experiences that predispose them to live in rural areas. Research findings from 31 rural school districts in New York reveal that of 63 teachers identified by their superintendents as "successful" long-term teachers, over half had chosen their current jobs because they grew up or had family in the area, thought the area was good for raising a family, or liked the general friendliness of small schools.

While small schools and towns can be desirable places to live, they present difficult challenges in recruiting teachers (Matthes and Carlson, 1987). Luft's (1992-1993) study regarding teacher recruitment and retention practices of rural school superintendents in Nevada

and North Dakota represents school districts with towns of less than 2,500 residents. Factors that make it difficult to recruit teachers in small rural communities include:

- ☞ Lack of social life
- ☞ Distance from university
- ☞ Isolation
- ☞ Lack of services in community
- ☞ Low cost housing availability
- ☞ Limited opportunity for spouse employability
- ☞ Lack of colleagues at secondary and specialized assignments
- ☞ No willingness to relocate
- ☞ Lack of enrollment in some areas
- ☞ High workload
- ☞ Lack of money
- ☞ Lack of promotion opportunities
- ☞ Lack of support group

In rural areas, unlike some urban areas, teachers are often paid well and held in high esteem, working conditions are satisfactory, and there are fewer opportunities for other professional employment for women (Horn, 1985). How well these characteristics hold true today as we enter the new millennium may vary considerably among rural communities. Proximity of the rural community to an urban area or the community's circumstances regarding participation (or not) in a more highly technological, service-oriented, and globally-oriented economy could influence local job opportunities, population growth, and other conditions greatly. Unless the rural community without adjacency to an urban area has a unique niche that fosters development of a tourism industry, retirement-destination, or government-related employment, many isolated rural communities are likely in decline, experiencing the lose of both jobs and students.

Mutual support among small school districts is also an important element in finding and keeping teachers (Swift, 1984). Horn (1985) suggests the blame for rural schools being less competitive in recruiting teachers can be placed on:

- (1) excessive instructional demands of multiple subject areas (and grade levels)
- (2) undesirable characteristics of communities (geographic, personal, cultural and professional isolation; inadequate/unsatisfactory housing)
- (3) low salaries
- (4) lack of opportunities for professional development and advancement
- (5) inadequate (unrealistic) preparation in college for teaching

Recruitment Strategies

In the current labor market that places a premium on teachers who can get results in an

high stakes testing environment, and that must respond to early retirement incentives as well as the dawn of baby boomers now reaching retirement age, rural schools must aggressively pursue all strategies that hold promise to attract quality teachers. Rural school district superintendents in New York maintain strategies for teacher recruitment efforts must identify teachers who will be satisfied and effective in rural schools. The strategies must also raise the positive visibility of rural schools and attack the negative stereotype surrounding them. Without the ability to compete with more wealthy districts who can "buy" the best teachers, rural school systems will need to play to their strengths in attracting prospective teachers to their communities.

According to Stone (1990), recruiting teachers for rural settings requires effective recruitment strategies that target persons with a rural background. Realistic marketing is the key in this effort, and it must stress the real benefit in teaching in rural schools, such as few discipline problems, less red tape, more personal contact, and greater chance for leadership.

Helge and Marrs (1991) point out that recruitment and retention of special education teachers and related services have been persistent problems of rural school districts nationwide. They maintain that effective recruitment strategies for rural areas have four main components: (1) emphasis on qualities of rural schools and communities that reinforce intrinsic motivations and meet teachers' social, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs; (2) appeal to persons with lifestyles, interests, and attitudes consistent with local cultural norms; (3) use of individualized "hot buttons," such as advertising the rural lifestyle as an escape from urban problems or using the "Peace Corps" approach; and (4) "selling" the school district through creative marketing techniques.

Selling the positive aspects of teaching in a rural school and community is essential to attracting teachers. Such strengths identified by Dunne (1977) include small instructional unit size, opportunity for providing individualized instruction, fewer interpersonal and organizational problems, opportunity to get to know each child as an individual, able to approach problems without generalized policies, greater student and parent participation in school and school activities, and heterogeneity of social class. Miller and Sidebottom (1985, p.3) also reveal some positive aspects of teaching in a rural area: relatively small class size, few discipline problems, opportunities for independent teaching and decision making, lower cost, and enjoyable pace of living.

Horn (1985) suggests that you must sell the school and the community to the teaching candidate, in a positive and realistic sense. Paying the candidate's interview and moving expenses, emphasizing local school autonomy, and providing comprehensive fringe benefits help attract teachers (Matthes and Carlson, 1985). Small rural schools must become more aggressive, partly by identifying potential candidates early and by providing them with a thorough orientation of the school system and community. Student teaching experiences also must be more realistic for teaching in a rural area.

Miller and Sidebottom (1985) also stress the need for recruiters to be well-prepared, represent the community as well as the school, and stress the positive aspects of small communities. They maintain that how a district publicizes teacher vacancies, looks for potential teachers, and offers incentives will influence the success of any teacher recruitment effort. Recruitment materials must be thoughtfully developed and disseminated.

Recruitment materials should take into account the importance of local context and indigenous labor market forces (Hare, 1988). For example, three rural school systems in north Louisiana collaborate with the Louisiana Center for Rural or Small Schools (LaCROSS) to develop teacher recruitment materials. LaCROSS researchers interview school administrators, teachers, and local officials to determine the elements in each parish and its schools that might attract prospective teachers. Recruitment materials are then tailored to local market forces. For Jackson Parish, packets, videos, and slides emphasize a high teacher pay supplement, proximity to urban centers and area universities, availability of housing and recreational activities, and an industrial tax base. For Franklin Parish, packets, videos, and slides emphasize a developing urban hub and industrial base, advantages of small rural schools, availability of recreational activities, and a university branch campus. For very rural Tensas Parish, a brochure emphasizes the advantages of small rural schools and opportunities for certification, entry-level teaching, and teaching "back home."

Some school districts in rural areas of the U.S. use various "grow-your-own" strategies that focus on offering incentives to local persons with the potential to become teachers. Such efforts usually assist them in obtaining the needed education and training. For example, Future Teachers of America clubs encourage students to consider returning to their home communities once they have received their credentials (Lemke, 1994).

Institutions of higher education can be helpful in recruiting teachers for rural areas. Luft (1992-1993) reports how administrators of rural school districts in Nevada and North Dakota perceive university Colleges of Education could assist them in recruiting teachers. Administrators suggest that students be encouraged to visit rural districts, that the college post job openings, that the teacher educators sell the positive aspects of rural teaching, and that rural educators be invited as guest speakers in education classes. Other suggestions are for the College of Education to provide internships in rural areas, increase interaction between university personnel and the personnel director in rural districts, advise to prepare for teaching in multiple subject areas, sponsor recruiting fairs, offer masters degree program through summer school, weed out poor candidates, prepare teachers to direct extracurricular activities, and have students teach in both rural and urban areas.

Haas (1991) maintains that teacher preparation programs pay inadequate attention to preparing teachers for rural schools. She notes that a survey of teacher preparation programs in 27 rural states (Jones, 1987) reveals only 10 percent of 208 public and private institutions responding offered a preservice program to prepare rural teachers. Further, Haas notes that fewer than two percent of 14,000 faculty in a survey by Barker and Beckner (1987) report they engage

in research and/or publications on rural education or small schools.

In 1985, a small number of universities were offering rural education programs. Miller and Sidebottom (1985) provide a list, as follows:

- ☞ Brigham Young University, Provo, UT
- ☞ Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
- ☞ Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO
- ☞ East Carolina University, Grenville, NC
- ☞ Eastern Oregon State University, LaGrande, OR
- ☞ Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA
- ☞ Kansas State University, Manhattan KS
- ☞ New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas NM
- ☞ New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM
- ☞ Southwest Texas State University, San Macos, TX
- ☞ Southwest State University, Marshall, MN
- ☞ Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX
- ☞ University of North Dakota, Grand Forks ND
- ☞ University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA
- ☞ University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD
- ☞ University of Vermont, Burlington, VT
- ☞ Washington State University, Pullman, WA
- ☞ Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA

Whether these or other colleges and universities have rural education programs today is unknown. A critical need exists for research that can reveal how institutions of higher education are planning to address the specific teaching force needs of rural schools. History suggests that it will be the "urban crisis" that will draw the attention of most teacher preparation institutions, except perhaps for those colleges and universities situated in and traditionally committed to serving a rural region.

Bell and Steinmiller (1989) believe the real solution to attracting teachers in rural areas is not the reallocation of able students, but the development of strategies to increase the potential pool of students who complete college. This would include recruiting from alternative pools not currently oriented to the education profession. Identifying effective recruitment sources will be essential to attract such prospective teachers.

What sources are most effective in recruiting teachers in rural areas? Pesek (1993) addresses this question in a survey of over 300 elementary and secondary rural school principals in Pennsylvania. Analysis of the 115 returned questionnaires reveals how the principals rate the effectiveness of eight recruitment sources, using a scale of 1=ineffective, 3=moderately effective, and 5=highly effective (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mean Effectiveness Ratings of Recruitment Sources for Teachers

| Recruitment Source | Mean | n | Rank |
|----------------------------------------------|------|-----|------|
| Substitute Teacher List | 4.13 | 114 | 1 |
| Colleges & Universities | 3.84 | 111 | 2 |
| Journal & Professional Educator Publications | 3.21 | 111 | 3 |
| Employee Referrals | 3.09 | 105 | 4 |
| Newspaper Advertising | 2.99 | 114 | 5 |
| Walk-Ins (Unsolicited Resumes) | 2.89 | 111 | 6 |
| Directories & Direct Mail | 2.68 | 91 | 7 |
| Job Fairs & Conferences | 2.47 | 87 | 8 |

Pesek concludes that recruiting for “hard-to-fill” positions such as chemistry, physics, math, special education and dual certification teachers will be a challenge for rural school administrators. Because research reveals that black applicants consistently use formal recruiting sources more frequently than informal sources (e.g., referrals), more than one recruitment source should be used. Also, because many colleges and universities that serve rural areas have great difficulty in attracting minority students, a school district may need to expand its recruitment efforts to institutions outside its rural area.

Failure to evaluate the recruitment program or methods was common for over 75 percent of the principals responding in the Pesek study. As Pesek notes (1993, p. 29) “Whereas rural school administrators may believe that they are hiring the best candidates via a certain source, in truth that source may be associated with high turnover and/or individuals who are poor performers.” The value of evaluating the recruitment program is needed now more than ever in an accountability environment that expects students, teachers, and schools to perform at an increasingly higher standard.

Today, use of the Internet would certainly be a recruitment source. For example, many school districts now operate a school district web site that includes job vacancy announcements. Alaska and South Carolina have web-based recruitment centers. The National Rural Education Association provides links on its web site to two national web-based recruitment sites: National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse (<http://www.recruitingteachers.org/findjob/shortage.html>) and WantToTeach (<http://www.WantToTeach.com/>).

Retaining Teachers

Attracting qualified teachers obviously requires a well organized and implemented plan that aggressively incorporates some thoughtful recruitment strategies, as well as periodic

evaluation of the approach used to determine if teachers attracted are performing as expected and being retained. As previously noted, some rural schools may experience a 30-50 percent turnover rate of teachers.

In a teacher recruitment and retention study in 31 New York rural school districts (1988), of the 63 teachers identified by their superintendents as "successful" long-term teachers, over half had chosen their current jobs because they grew up or had family in the area, thought the area was good for raising a family, or liked the general friendliness of small schools. Few discipline problems, administrative supportiveness, and faculty collegiality were also identified as important factors in retaining teachers in the rural schools.

Stone (1990) points out that retaining rural teachers requires the coordinated effort of the school and the community. The community can recognize the new teachers' accomplishments and invite them to participate in various activities. The school can also ease the transition of new teachers by: (1) assigning a mentor; (2) streamlining paperwork; (3) providing a well-planned inservice program; and (4) arranging released time for visiting other teachers' classrooms. Stone also believes universities need to prepare teachers for service in rural areas, as well as develop cost-effective distance learning courses to keep rural teachers up-to-date.

Table 3 shows the practices administrators of rural school districts in Nevada and North Dakota use to retain teachers (Luft, 1992-1993). Administrators mention most often the practices of increasing administrative contact and support, providing frequent inservice programs, and providing release time for inservice and professional development activities.

Table 3. Practices Used to Retain Teachers in Rural Districts

| Practice | Number Times Mentioned | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Nevada | North Dakota |
| Assign first year teacher to mentor teacher | 5 | 1 |
| Increase administrative contact and support | 9 | 9 |
| Increase use of secretarial and volunteer help to reduce amount of paper work | 3 | 2 |
| Provide frequent inservice programs | 10 | 4 |
| Collaborate with other districts to provide inservice programs | 5 | 7 |
| Provide release time for inservice and professional development activities | 12 | 6 |
| Teacher exchange programs | 3 | 2 |
| Provide for peer coaching | 1 | - |
| Referral service for affordable housing | 1 | - |
| District committee for curriculum development with release time | 1 | - |
| Salary | 1 | - |
| Community activities and appreciation | - | 1 |

Matthes and Carlson (1985) offer some retention practices for rural school administrators to consider: preschool/ongoing orientation programs, new teacher/master teacher pairing, regular classroom visits by administrators, professional days for school visitation, and workshop conference participation. Their study of teacher education graduates from the Universities of Iowa and Vermont reveal those accepting teaching positions in rural schools also consider other benefits, such as school climate, sense of community, and "traditional" values, more important than starting salary, but professional conditions and growth potential must exist to retain teachers.

The induction period can be a critical time for the new teacher in a rural area (Lemke, 1994). Teacher induction in rural and small schools poses particular problems as the new teacher must become acquainted with the community as well as the school. Strategies for successful teacher induction include carefully selected initial assignments, clear goals and feedback, an encouraging and nonthreatening environment, and opportunities to interact with experienced colleagues and parents. Collegial mentoring arrangements, separate from teacher evaluation, can be crucial in helping new teachers through the induction period. Helping staff acclimate themselves and grow professionally is a key chapter in the booklet Miller and Sidebottom (1985) prepared for the American Association of School Administrators on finding and keeping the best teachers in small and rural school districts.

In a 1988 survey, Lemke (1989) asks principals of 256 small or rural schools in four Southern California counties to identify support services for beginning teachers, continuing education programs, and inservice programs specifically designed to increase teacher retention. Principals reveal that they usually offer mentor teachers as support providers for new teachers. Meetings with other staff members are also frequently used to facilitate adjustment. The principals also pay for the teacher's travel to professional meetings. The survey's results indicate that (1) potential teachers could be better educated about working in rural areas; (2) districts should consider cooperative efforts for teacher inservice and continuing education programs; and (3) universities might make it easier for rural teachers to participate in graduate programs.

Improving teacher retention in small rural schools requires good planning. Seifert (1982) suggests three different kinds of major activities as strategies for retaining teachers in small schools. These include (1) direct impact activities--increased salaries, community involvement opportunities, and property acquisition assistance; (2) long range growth activities--inservice incentive systems, intra- and inter-district faculty exchange, and merit increases for exceptional performance; and (3) motivational strategies--paying professional organization dues, locating adequate housing, and establishing the support of the school board.

Summary

High stakes accountability for improving student academic achievement, incentives for early retirement, and an aging “baby boom” teaching population will likely place many small, isolated rural schools and their communities at a great disadvantage in attracting and retaining quality teachers. Teacher turnover may be 30-50 percent in some rural schools for some of the reason cited in this paper.

Attracting teachers for “hard-to-fill” positions will require school administrators, school boards, and their communities to become much more systematic and aggressive in teacher recruitment and retainment practices. Greater use of technology (e.g., Internet) for attracting teachers to rural areas is growing, as is its use in providing educational and professional development opportunities needed to retain teachers with skills for helping all students meet new standards for academic achievement. Presenting both the school and the community to the potential teacher is necessary to maximize understanding the realities, both negative and positive, of teaching in a rural area. Induction programs increase chances the new teacher will “fit” the community and school, and chose to stay past the critical first 3-5 years.

The need appears great for teacher educators, rural school district leaders, community organizations, parent groups, researchers and others to forge partnerships for addressing the critical issue of attracting and retaining quality teachers for rural schools. State department of education most certainly have a critical role in providing high quality teachers for rural areas. Expecting small rural schools located in isolated poor areas to attract teachers capable of turning around low performing schools (i.e., low student achievement) demands new ideas regarding teacher certification, school size, parent and community involvement, applications of technology, state education formula funding based on need rather than per pupil expenditure, and other important policy topics.

Preparing rural youth to take their rightful place in a rapidly changing world, either in rural or urban areas, makes attracting and retaining quality teachers a national and local imperative. The new millennium offers both students (and their parents) and teachers a “choice” in America’s system of public education. It seems unlikely that caring parents, if given a choice, will or should chose a school that fails to have qualified teachers. Sustaining the rural community in a democratic society, while also preparing each individual to reach his or her greatest potential, demands our best efforts to attract and retain high quality teachers for children, regardless of where they may live.

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