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ABSTRACT

Profiles of teachers from 30 rural and 10 urban Utah school districts who left the teaching profession were gathered via school district superintendents who were asked to identify teachers who left the profession during the school year and those who left the profession following the close of school. For those who left during the school year, data were obtained from district records. For those who completed the year, data were obtained from the teachers via a survey questionnaire. Although 5 rural school districts reported no turnover, general profiles revealed an approximate 19% rural teacher turnover rate as compared to a less than 9% urban teacher turnover rate. Salary was the most frequent reason for leaving following the school year and maternity the most frequent reason for leaving during the school year. The ratio of men to women resignations in rural districts approximated the men-to women turnover ratios for the whole state. Positions most frequently vacated were in the elementary grades (1-3). (AH)

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PROFILE OF RURAL UTAH TEACHERS LEAVING THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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Paper presented to the Utah State Board of Education, Provo, UT, June, 1982.

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Wallace E. Allred and Ralph B. Smith

Introduction

Much has been said and written about "teacher turnover" during the past few years. Concern has been expressed that the more experienced teachers are leaving the public schools; that certain subject matter areas are losing an inordinate number of professionally prepared individuals; and that teachers are leaving the profession to accept better paying positions elsewhere.

Concerns, such as those noted above, led the investigators to look specifically at teachers leaving the rural schools of Utah during two different time periods:

1. Those who left during the school year (1980).
2. Those who left following the school year (1981).

Procedure

Thirty of the 40 school districts in Utah were identified as rural for the purposes of this study. Superintendents of the 30 rural school districts were asked to identify those teachers who left the profession during the school year as well as those who resigned following the close of school. For those who left during the school year, data were obtained from district files. For those who completed the school year, but who resigned following the school year, data were obtained from the individual teachers through a survey questionnaire.

Data Presentation

Information was gathered from 23 of the 30 rural districts on teachers who left during the school year and from 27 of the 30 districts on teachers who resigned following the end of the school year. (See Table I.)

Fourteen rural school districts reported no resignations during the school year, and five rural school districts reported no teacher resignations following the school year. All ten urban districts reported teachers leaving both during and following the school year.

TABLE I
UTAH SCHOOL DISTRICTS REPORTING TEACHERS LEAVING

Districts	During School Year				Following School Year			
	Urban	Rural	Total	Percent	Urban	Rural	Total	Percent
Reported Teachers Leaving (Data available)	9	9	18	45.0	8	22	30	75.0
Reported Teachers Leaving (No-Data)	1	7	8	20.0	2	3	5	12.5
Sub-Totals	10	16	26	65.0	10	25	35	87.5
Reported No Teachers Leaving	0	14	14	35.0	0	5	5	12.5
Totals	10	30	40	100.0	10	30	40	100.0

Number of Teachers Leaving the Public Schools

Table II reports the number of teachers leaving Utah school districts during the period of the study. It is clear, in terms of numbers, that urban districts experienced greater numbers of teachers leaving both during and following the school year. This is to be expected since the urban districts employ many more teachers than do the rural districts (about 6:1). The Table makes it clear that the 30 rural districts experienced less disruption during the year than was true of urban districts.

The rural districts lost only 59 teachers while 319 resigned from the urban districts (a ratio of about 1:5.4). However, following the school year there were 388 teachers who resigned from the rural districts and 712 who resigned from the urban districts of the state (a ratio of about 1:1.8). This clearly suggests a disproportionate number of teachers leaving the rural districts. Thus, while the total number of teachers leaving rural schools (447 of 2346 or 19 percent) may not seem substantial, the percentage is high when compared to the urban districts, where the percentage was only 9 percent.

TABLE II
NUMBER OF TEACHERS LEAVING UTAH SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Teachers	During School Year			Following School Year			Combined Totals		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Teachers Reported Leaving	319	59	378	712	388	1100	1031	447	1478
Teachers Participating in Study	312	26	338	289	207	496	601	233	834

Note: There were 2,346 rural teachers in the state and 11,785 urban teachers for a total of 14,131.

Sex of Teachers

The sex of teachers leaving the rural schools reflects the predominant number of women teaching in the public schools of Utah. Of the 233 rural teachers participating in the study, 141 (60.5 percent) were women and 92 (39.5 percent) were men. (See Table III.) These ratios approximate the percent of men and women teachers employed in the state of Utah as a whole (59 percent women, 41 percent men).

TABLE III
SEX OF TEACHERS LEAVING UTAH RURAL DISTRICTS

Sex	During School Year	Following School Year	Totals	
			Number	Percent
Men	7	85	92	39.5
Women	19	122	141	60.5
Totals	26	207	233	100.0

Teaching Assignment

Table IV identifies the teaching level of those leaving the rural schools. The majority of those leaving the rural districts were elementary school teachers (53 percent), while less than three percent of the teachers left middle schools. The total number of junior and senior high school teachers who left the rural schools was 78 which represented 33.5 percent of the total.

The Table illustrates the heavy exodus from the elementary schools following the school year. It is also noted that there were eight times as many teachers leaving rural districts following the school year as there were during the school year (207 to 26).

TABLE IV
TEACHING ASSIGNMENT OF TEACHERS LEAVING
RURAL SCHOOLS IN UTAH

Level	During School year	Following School Year	Totals	
			Number	Percent
Elem.	13	111	124	53.2
Middle	1	5	6	2.6
Jr. High	6	21	27	11.6
Sr. High	6	45	51	21.9
Mixed Sec.	0	17	17	7.3
Other*	0	8	8	3.4
Totals	26	207	233	100.0

* Other included counselors, media specialists, etc.

Grade Levels

The grade levels in the elementary schools which experienced the greatest turnover were grades 1, 2, and 3, the critical years for children. The subject fields most frequently affected by teacher resignations at the secondary level were English and mathematics, followed by music, physical education, home economics, and science.

Teaching Experience

As summarized in Table V, it is evident that it was the less experienced teacher who left the rural schools, both during and following the school year. A total of 143 (61.4 percent) of those leaving the rural schools had four or fewer years of teaching. None of the rural teachers who left the profession had been in education over 30 years. Thus, while rural districts

retained the older, more experienced teacher, the districts are apparently faced with the continuing problem of replacing inexperienced teachers with more inexperienced teachers year after year.

TABLE V
TEACHING EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS LEAVING
UTAH RURAL SCHOOLS

Years Experience	During School Year	Following School Year	Total	
			Number	Percent
4 or less	17	126	143	61.4
5 or more	9	81	90	38.6
Total	26	207	233	100.0

Degrees

The survey made clear that the bachelor's degree was the terminal degree for most rural teachers. In this study, 194 (83.3 percent) teachers held the bachelor's degree with few moving beyond this degree. The high percentage of bachelor's degree teachers reflects the fact that most rural teachers are new and inexperienced. Table VI indicates that 15 percent of the teachers had an earned master's degree while less than two percent had completed a doctorate.

TABLE VI
TEACHING EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS LEAVING
UTAH RURAL SCHOOLS

Highest Degree Held	During School Year	Following School Year	Total	
			Number	Percent
Bachelor	20	174	194	83.3
Master	6	29	35	15.0
Doctor	0	3	3	1.3
Unknown	0	1	1	0.4
Totals	26	207	233	100.0

Reasons for Leaving

When analyzing the reasons cited by teachers for leaving the rural schools, there was an almost identical listing by those who left during the school year and those who resigned following the school year. However, one major exception was cited. For those who left during the school year, none specifically mentioned salary as a reason for leaving. But for those teachers who resigned following the contract year, salary was listed as the primary reason in 42.5 percent of the cases. Teachers leaving during the year cited reasons, such as new employment, which might be construed as salary-related, but salary, was not mentioned. Those leaving following the school year were explicit in citing salary as the reason for leaving the rural schools.

The most frequent reason cited by teachers for leaving during the school year was maternity, with 38.5 percent of the teachers identifying that reason. For those who left following the school year, about 15 percent noted maternity as a reason for leaving. Other reasons such as illness, marriage, and early retirement were listed by only about five percent of the respondents for

each category. Thus, the overriding reason cited by teachers for leaving the rural schools centered around salary considerations. If "new employment" and "moved from the area" were to be accepted as being salary-related, then over 61 percent of the teachers who left the rural schools of Utah did so for salary and salary-related reasons.

TABLE VII
REASONS FOR TEACHERS LEAVING UTAH RURAL SCHOOLS

Reason Cited	During School Year		Following School Year		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Salary	0	0	88	42.5	88	37.8
Maternity	10	38.5	31	15.0	41	17.6
New Employment	5	19.2	22	10.6	27	11.6
Moved From Area	4	15.4	24	11.6	28	12.0
Illness	1	3.8	12	5.8	13	5.6
Marriage	3	11.5	9	4.3	12	5.2
Early Retirement	1	3.8	6	2.9	7	3.0
Other	2	7.8	15	7.3	17	7.2
Total	26	100.0	207	100.0	233	100.0

General Findings

1. Approximately 19 percent of Utah's rural teachers left teaching during the school year or resigned following the completion of the school year, whereas less than 9 percent of the urban teachers resigned.

2. Salary was clearly the most frequently cited reason for leaving teaching following the school year.

3. Maternity was the most frequently cited reason for leaving during the school year.

4. The ratio of men to women resignations in the rural school districts approximated the men to women resignations ratio for the state as a whole.

5. The largest turnover was among inexperienced elementary teachers in the first three grades.

6. At the secondary level, teachers in English and Mathematics resigned in larger numbers than those in other subject matter areas.

7. Nearly three-fourths of the rural teachers found it necessary to have a second source of income.

Resignations During the School Year

1. Fourteen of thirty rural school districts reported no resignations during the year, whereas all ten urban districts reported resignations.

2. Fifty-two percent of those leaving rural schools were elementary school teachers, while 24 percent were junior and senior high school teachers.

3. Of the total number of teachers leaving the rural schools of Utah:

- a. 24 percent taught grades one through three.
- b. 16 percent taught special education.
- c. 60 percent had taught for less than four years.
- d. 72 percent were women.
- e. 88 percent held the bachelor's degree as their highest degree.
- f. 48 percent held the basic elementary certification.
- g. 28 percent held the basic secondary certification.

4. As to reasons for leaving the rural schools:

- a. 38 percent left for maternity reasons.
- b. 20 percent left to accept new employment.
- c. 16 percent moved from the area.
- d. 12 percent left to be married.

5. Fifty-six percent had no prior teaching experience, and an additional twelve percent had taught for one year.

Resignations Following the School Year

1. Twenty-seven of thirty rural school districts participated in the study.
2. Thirty-five percent of Utah teachers who resigned were from the rural schools. (Only about 17 percent of the teachers in Utah teach in rural districts.)
3. Of the total number of rural teachers who resigned:
 - a. 59 percent were women.
 - b. 46 percent were elementary teachers.
 - c. 22 percent were senior high school teachers.
 - d. 10 percent were junior high school teachers.
 - e. 16 percent taught more than one grade.
 - f. One quarter (25 percent) of the elementary teachers taught grades one through three.
 - g. Secondary teachers who resigned in greatest numbers were teachers of English and mathematics. Then followed teachers of home economics, music, physical education, and science.
 - h. Over 60 percent had four or fewer years of teaching experience. (The older, experienced teachers tended to remain with the rural school.)
 - i. 84 percent held the bachelor's degree as their highest degree.
 - j. 47 percent held the basic teaching certificate.
 - k. Almost 90 percent were offered contracts for the following year.
4. As to reasons for resigning:
 - a. 43 percent cited salary.
 - b. 12 percent moved from the area.
 - c. 15 percent left for maternity reasons.
 - d. 4 percent left to get married.

5. While teaching in the rural schools, 72 percent found it necessary to supplement the teaching salary with a second income. However, in their new positions, only 38 percent found it necessary to have a second income.

General Conclusion

The information obtained through the study describes, somewhat, the plight of the rural schools of Utah. The number of teachers leaving the rural schools is out of proportion to their numbers in the state as a whole. Elementary teachers constituted the largest group of teachers to leave, with the majority of these teachers having been assigned to the first three grades, critical basic years for children if they are to learn. The secondary level saw an exodus of one-third of the teachers who left the profession, most of whom were in the critical areas of mathematics, English, home economics, and science--subject areas where recruitment is very difficult and where replacements are hard to come by.

Those who left the rural schools were inexperienced (four or fewer years) and they were most likely to be replaced by other inexperienced teachers. Seemingly, the rural district has become a training ground for new teachers.

Ways and means must be found to remedy the plight of the rural schools. Surely, the society in which we live can find the answers. Rural boards of education may have to give serious consideration to salary matters in the beginning and early career years if they are to attract and retain adequately prepared professional classroom teachers.