



**Rural Teacher Recruitment
and Retention Practices:
A Review of the Research
Literature, National Survey of
Rural Superintendents, and
Case Studies of Programs in
Virginia**

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Executive Summary

In 2004, Edvantia, Inc. (formerly AEL) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) initiated an effort to identify successful strategies for recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers in rural areas. They reviewed non-rural-specific and rural-specific research and practice literature, surveyed rural superintendents across the nation, and conducted case studies of three Virginia programs that support teacher recruitment and retention.

Generally, the literature shows that the problem of teacher shortages varies across geography, demography, and subject area. The schools that find it hardest to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers are those in highly urban and rural areas (especially those serving minority or low-income students) and schools in the Southeast, Southwest, and the West. Especially needed are teachers in special education, bilingual education, math, and science. Edvantia/NASBE survey results and case studies amplify these findings and offer insights into challenges and promising practices in rural teacher recruitment and retention.

Literature Review

Rural-specific literature identifies four challenges related to recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas: (1) lower pay; (2) geographic and social isolation; (3) difficult working conditions, such as having to teach classes in multiple subject areas; and (4) NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers (e.g., many rural teachers will need certification in multiple subject areas, and professional development opportunities can sometimes be scarce in rural communities). Collectively, these challenges can place rural schools and districts at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers.

At the national level, the merits of a variety of practices are being examined and debated, including a “national manpower policy” for education, alternative certification programs, various incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff schools, mandatory induction and mentoring programs, and improvements in the culture and working conditions of schools. A survey of literature on state and district strategies reveals five major strategies currently being used for recruiting and retaining teachers: (1) grow-your-own initiatives, especially those that help paraprofessionals become certified teachers; (2) targeted incentives directed at teachers willing to teach in schools or subject areas in which the need is greatest; (3) improved recruitment and hiring practices; (4) improved school-level support for teachers, including formal induction and mentoring programs; and (5) use of interactive technologies to meet information and professional development needs.

A look at rural-specific and general literature shows agreement that effective recruitment and retention practices share four characteristics: They are (1) strategic,

(2) specific to the schools or subject areas that are hard to staff, (3) sustained, and (4) rooted in the community.

A review of the research and practice literature suggests 14 promising strategies for placing high-quality teachers in rural classrooms and keeping them there: (1) collect state and local data on teacher supply and demand, (2) base recruitment efforts on data analysis, (3) increase the pool of candidates by expanding or refining recruitment efforts, (4) include all vital partners in collaborative efforts, (5) offer targeted incentives, (6) evaluate efforts regularly, (7) invest in grow-your-own initiatives to develop teachers, (8) encourage universities to customize teacher education programs, (9) include building-level staff in the hiring process, (10) institute formal induction programs, (11) offer incentives for staying on past the first year, (12) improve the school's culture and working conditions, (13) involve the community in welcoming new teachers, and (14) invest in leadership development.

National Survey

A total of 597 superintendents from a random selection of 1,565 school districts completed the survey with valid data and returned the questionnaire, yielding an overall response rate of 38%. The responses of these 597 superintendents reflect the recruiting and retention practices of approximately 1,900 schools serving more than 718,000 elementary, middle school, and high school students from rural areas.

Survey results echo the literature review's finding that districts located near urban areas may have greater advantages when compared to districts not located near an urban area. Districts located near an urban area have more schools within the district and serve more students than those districts not located near an urban area. However, these same schools also report having fewer students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches, indicating that those schools not located near urban areas may have substantially more students living in poverty.

Rural districts reported that their greatest challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers are geographic and social isolation as well as being in close proximity to higher-paying districts.

The most frequently cited recruitment methods were the use of statewide/local/Internet advertising, personal contacts, and networking. Strategies for locating potential teachers included involving building-level staff in the recruitment and hiring process, promoting the advantages of living and teaching in a rural area, and offering more competitive salaries. Given the resources present in rural districts, the limited reliance on the use of targeted incentives, housing and relocation assistance, and collecting relevant data on teacher supply and demand is not surprising.

Teachers who stay in rural districts are thought to do so as a result of enjoying their position and the overall school and community environment, as well as the salary

and benefits or the stability and convenience of being in one area. While some superintendents indicate that teachers leave for personal reasons or to relocate, other reasons include poor money and benefits, dissatisfaction with working in a small school and living in a rural environment, and reduced opportunities.

Case Studies

In 2002, Virginia received a three-year \$13.5 million federal Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant to develop and implement strategies to train and retain high-quality teachers. The grant was used to fund five recruitment and retention efforts. The Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia and NASBE used a case study approach to examine four of these programs: the Teachers for Tomorrow Program, a precollege recruitment effort; the Career Switcher program, aimed at attracting mid-career teacher candidates; the Teacher Mentoring Pilot Program, which supports a variety of new teacher induction programs; and the Teach in Virginia Program, a statewide Web-based teacher recruitment program.

Data were collected via document reviews and semi-structured interviews in participating schools located in seven rural Virginia school divisions. Documents reviewed included Virginia Department of Education reports and program descriptions and materials. Interviews were conducted with 51 individuals, including 3 state directors, 6 division and school administrators, 4 program instructors, 19 students, 6 teacher candidates, 6 mentors, and 13 beginning teachers. A survey was conducted of contact persons in 37 school divisions that participated in the Teach in Virginia Program.

Each of the programs studied is in the early stages of implementation; therefore, little data exist to indicate the overall effect on rural teacher recruitment and retention. Preliminary data indicate, however, that each of these programs holds promise. The researchers concluded that two factors are critical to the programs' continued success: ensuring adequate funding and allowing rural school districts to adapt programs to meet their needs.

Background and Purpose

A growing body of research indicates that the most important thing schools can do to improve student achievement is to ensure there is a high-quality teacher in every classroom. Other recent research suggests that the problem of shortages in qualified teachers is primarily one of distribution. The greatest shortage is among teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in traditionally hard-to-staff schools, including urban and rural schools (Hare & Heap, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001, Voke, 2002). The more stringent teacher qualifications required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) have intensified the urgency for dealing with the problem of supplying all classrooms with qualified teachers.

The circumstances of rural districts and schools create special challenges. The small populations and geographic isolation of many rural schools affect their access to resources, including the size of the pool of applicants and the ability to offer competitive salaries and teacher support programs. Rural schools face this problem both in specific grades and in specific curriculum areas (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guinn, 2003; National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 1998).

According to information collected for the Common Core of Data (CCD) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2004), in the year 2002–2003, 7,824 school districts were classified as rural (i.e., have locale codes of 7 or 8). These rural school districts comprised 24,350 schools serving 7,618,077 students with approximately 523,191 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers.¹ Rural school districts make up nearly half (49%) of all public school districts in the nation.

Information on effective rural teacher recruitment and retention is thin, and states and school districts are clamoring for guidance from studies on “best practices.” More diverse paths for entering the teaching profession could broaden the applicant pool and improve the likelihood of hiring and retaining effective, creative teachers. Educators and policymakers recognize the need to expand recruitment and retention efforts and are responding with a range of programs to entice potential candidates into the field and keep them there.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) agreed to partner in 2004 to (1) review current literature on rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts, (2) survey districts across the nation to learn about approaches they are taking, and (3) follow innovative models being implemented in rural school districts in Virginia.

¹ It should be noted that FTE data were not available for teachers in 75 districts with locale codes of 7 or 8. Further, CCD statistics indicated that 35 districts had no FTE teachers but did not serve students.

Review of the Research and Practice Literature

The purpose of the review of literature was to locate research- and practice-based information on rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts. Also reviewed were significant national reports that address teacher recruitment and retention in general, as well as in hard-to-staff schools. The result is a summary of characteristics shared by those models and practices that show promise or evidence of success.

Methodology

Using the ERIC database, key-word searches were conducted to identify research reports and journal articles published between 1993 and September 2003 on the topic of rural teacher recruitment and retention.² The initial descriptors used were *geographic isolation, one-teacher schools, rural areas, rural education, and rural schools*. Major descriptors used to narrow the search were *faculty mobility, teacher employment, teacher persistence, teacher recruitment, and teacher shortage*. This search located 43 papers, reports, and journal articles.

Also searched were the U.S. Department of Education Web site and the Web sites of national organizations concerned with rural education, including the Rural School and Community Trust, Organizations Concerned about Rural Education, the National Rural Education Association, and the American Association of School Administrators. Finally, an Internet search was conducted, using combinations of the descriptors used for the ERIC search as well as the phrases *best practices, successful models, and successful programs*. Reference lists of recent reports were scanned; sources that seemed significant or highly relevant were reviewed.

Limitations of Review and Research

Because demographic, economic, and legislative changes during the past century have had a continuous impact on rural communities and their schools, it was decided that the most recent literature would be the most relevant to this review, which aims to inform political and administrative leadership about current challenges and approaches to rural teacher recruitment and retention. For this reason, the ERIC search was limited to the most current materials, i.e., those published between 1993 and September 2003 that focused on recruiting and retaining rural teachers. The Internet search generated appropriate rural-specific information published between 1998 and September 2004. Because rural-specific research on the topic is sparse, the majority of this information consists of surveys, statistical reports, and policy briefings from state and national

² Due to the redesign of the ERIC system, collection of materials for the ERIC database ceased in the fall of 2003 for a period of approximately one year. Consequently, materials published or produced during late 2003 through the fall of 2004 were not available in the ERIC database and had to be located through other methods.

organizations. The literature search revealed that attention to the topic of teacher recruitment and retention in general has increased in recent years. In fact, the tremendous volume of non-rural-specific literature written on the topic since 2000 made reviewing all of it impractical. Therefore, the documents that received the most attention were those that were most recent, reported research studies on the topic or closely related topics, condensed or summarized other available literature, or were frequently cited or discussed in other reports.

Much of this literature emphasizes difficulties in urban retention and recruitment. Rural difficulties are often mentioned in passing, but rural-specific data and examples are rarely included. It appears that rural-specific literature on the topic has not kept pace with other literature on the topic; 24 of the 43 rural-specific documents identified via the ERIC search were published prior to 1999.

Findings

The literature review revealed both general and rural-specific problems related to teacher recruitment and retention.

The general problem of teacher recruitment and retention. Recent non-rural-specific studies show that the problem of teacher shortages varies across geography, demography, and subject area, leading a number of researchers to conclude that the problem is largely one of distribution (Ingersoll, 2001; Murphy & DeArmond, 2003b; NASBE, 1998; Voke, 2002). The challenge centers on identifying teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in “hard-to-staff” schools. Typically, hard-to-staff schools include those in highly urban and rural areas, especially those schools serving minority or low-income students. Shortages also exist in certain geographic regions in the country (the Southeast, Southwest, and the West) and in particular specialties such as special education, bilingual education, and math and science education (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guinn, 2003; NASBE, 1998).

Some researchers argue that teacher shortages are not so much the result of too few people entering the field, but of too many teachers leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future [NCTAF], 2003). According to Ingersoll’s analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics, almost a third of America’s teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching. Almost half leave after five years. In many low-income communities and rural areas, the rates of attrition are even higher (NCTAF, 2003, p. 24).

Challenges specific to rural districts. The rural-specific literature identifies four primary challenges faced by rural schools and districts: lower pay, geographic and social isolation, difficult working conditions, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified teachers (Collins, 1999; Jimerson, 2004; McClure, Redfield, & Hammer, 2003; Reeves, 2003).

Lower pay. According to the Educational Research Service (2004), staff in rural schools earned lower-than-average pay in every employment category. In 2003-2004, rural teacher salaries averaged \$41,131 compared to \$43,460 for small towns and \$50,844 for suburban areas (the biggest competitors for rural teaching talent). The Rural

School and Community Trust reported that the four lowest average salaries are all in Northern Plains states and, in general, the highest rural salaries are in large urban states³ (Beeson & Strange, 2003). Rural states tend to pay less than more populated/industrialized states and, within states, rural schools and districts tend to pay less than their urban and suburban counterparts (Jimerson, 2003). A 2004 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that rural superintendents see their districts' inability to provide competitive salaries for highly qualified teachers as a major obstacle to fulfilling the requirements of NCLB legislation.

Geographic and social isolation. Geography also plays an important role in rural schools' ability to attract and retain teachers. Geographically isolated communities tend to have greater problems in attracting teachers, while rural schools and districts located on the outskirts of suburban areas have greater difficulty in retaining teachers. Several researchers have suggested reasons underlying this circumstance. Collins (1999), in a review of the literature on rural teacher retention, cited a survey of teacher mobility in one rural district that found four main reasons why teachers leave communities: (1) geographic isolation, (2) climate/weather, (3) distance from larger communities and family, and (4) inadequate shopping (Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). Isolation is particularly unappealing to young, beginning teachers (Proffit, Sale, Alexander, & Andrews, 2002). On the other hand, rural schools located close to suburban areas are often able to attract teachers but tend to lose them after only a few years. It may be that new teachers view these rural areas as attractive places to begin their teaching careers, but soon move to higher paying positions in the nearby suburban schools. Some analysts (Collins, 1999; Harris, 2001) theorize that teachers who stay in rural areas are more likely to have grown up in small communities or to be committed to living in the region. A study that surveyed 86 special education teachers in rural states concluded that "staying seemed to be a matter of having roots in the community" (Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997).

Difficult working conditions. Other non-rural-specific studies have found that poor working conditions are frequently cited as primary reasons why teachers leave the field (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004; Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). Working conditions cited by teachers as contributing to their decisions to leave include lack of basic resources and materials, lack of a strong professional community, ineffective leadership, and discipline issues. Teachers report that large class sizes and the physical conditions of schools impair teaching. Teachers also report feeling overwhelmed by paperwork and the limited time to plan and prepare for instruction. A study that surveyed Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools demonstrated that principals play a role in whether teachers stay. Principals create stress for new teachers when they are ineffective managers, lack organization and planning skills, and provide little or no support (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004).

³An exception is Alaska, a rural state that has higher salary levels and higher costs of living.

While it is true that some of these issues are not as prevalent in rural schools as elsewhere (e.g., schools and class sizes are often smaller, and discipline is reported to be less of a problem), rural schools, and particularly small rural high schools, face a unique problem in terms of working conditions. Teachers in many schools must teach multiple disciplines due to low student enrollment, and teaching “out of field” is common in small rural high schools, which cannot afford to hire teachers to cover, for example, one class each of higher-level math and science courses (Jimerson, 2003; 2004). Having more classes to prepare for means greater workloads for rural teachers, often for less pay than their suburban and urban counterparts.

NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers must be highly qualified (some rural schools have until 2006-2007). A *highly qualified* teacher is one with full state certification, a bachelor’s degree, and demonstrated competence in all subjects they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Given the common practice of out-of-field teaching, rural schools and districts face a difficult challenge in meeting this requirement. Researchers and advocates for rural schools argue that this requirement increases the existing competitive disadvantage for rural hard-to-staff and low-resource schools (Jimerson, 2003; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004). Combined with the lower salaries, more stringent certification requirements add another disincentive for teachers to take positions in rural schools. Teachers will need to pass multiple tests, unlike teachers in urban or suburban schools, who may need to pass only one test (Jimerson, 2004; Reeves, 2003).

Further, it will be difficult for many rural teachers to obtain the required certifications for all subject areas they teach because they are often separated by long distances from colleges and training facilities. Rural district officials reported in a U.S. Government Accountability Office (2004) study that the limited availability of professional development opportunities posed challenges to recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Even when professional development opportunities are found, the limited availability of substitute teachers in small districts makes it difficult to release teachers to attend training.

Collectively, lower salaries, social and professional isolation, difficult working conditions, and NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers can place rural schools and districts at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers.

Promising Practices

The findings from this literature review indicate that an increasing number of teacher recruitment and retention programs are being implemented at state and local levels, but not much is known about their effectiveness. A search for research and other literature on model programs and practices that are *rural-specific* and *successful* turned up little information. Policy analyst Lorna Jimerson of the Rural School and Community Trust confirmed that rural-specific information is sparse and commented that a literature

review on successful recruitment and retention practices for rural districts is “sorely needed” (personal communication, March 22, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education published a literature review on teacher recruitment programs (Clewell, Darke, Davis-Googe, Forcier, & Manes, 2000) as part of a multiyear evaluation of the Higher Education Act’s Title II programs to recruit teachers. The authors offered four findings based on their review: (1) There are useful data at the national level on sources of teacher supply; (2) there is a need to determine the supply and demand of teachers at the state and local levels; (3) there is a lack of evaluation data on the effectiveness of existing models; and (4) there has been little effort to develop a coherent, holistic plan that connects state, local, and private initiatives in teacher recruitment.

At the national level, the merits of a variety of practices are being examined and debated, including a “national manpower policy” for education (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; NCTAF, 2003, p. 30), alternative certification programs (Feistritzer, 2004; Legler, 2002; Newman & Thomas, 1999; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2001), various incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff schools (Jimerson, 2003; Prince, 2002), mandatory induction and mentoring programs (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2003), and improvements in the culture and working conditions of schools (Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Peske, 2001).

Our survey of general and rural-specific literature, which focused on state and district recruitment and retention strategies, revealed five major strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers: (1) “grow-your-own” initiatives, including career-switchers programs, that nurture local talent through collaborations among public school systems and postsecondary institutions; (2) targeted incentives; (3) improved recruitment and hiring practices, especially those that use state and local data; (4) improved school-level support for teachers; and (5) use of interactive technologies to help alleviate the problems rural schools face in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Each of these strategies is discussed below.

Before we begin a discussion of strategies, however, it should be noted that the Rural School and Community Trust conducted a policy inventory on rural teacher shortages (Jimerson, 2002) and identified promising practices for rural districts. The author of the unpublished policy inventory noted that most of the strategies require additional financial investments, which can make them difficult for poorer districts to implement. According to Jimerson (2002), this points to the necessity of more equitable distribution of aid within states—a policy concern that underscores the importance of state-level cooperation and responsiveness to local needs.

Each of the practices listed below has been employed in various rural locations with some degree of success, although the evidence of this success is based more on anecdotal evidence than on research. Programs in Virginia, the focus of case studies later in this report, are not highlighted here.

“Grow-your-own” initiatives (including career-switchers programs) involving collaborations between schools and higher education. Citing programs in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2002b) identifies “developing local talent” as having merit in expanding the pool of

teachers. Debra Hare and James Heap (2001), in a survey of midwestern superintendents, also cite the high potential of “grow-your-own” strategies but report them as being “underused” in the rural Midwest. In designing initiatives, it is important to improve access to teacher education programs for individuals in a variety of situations: high school students, out-of-field teachers, school paraprofessionals, and second-career adults. In economically distressed areas, tuition assistance and other forms of financial support can be especially important.

Especially promising are programs that target paraprofessionals who already work in rural schools (Eubanks, 2001). A number of studies cite findings that indicate rural schools can and do reap significant benefits from programs tailored to help school paraprofessionals attain the education and credentials they need to become teachers (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Eubanks, 2001; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2002b). Beatriz Chu Clewell and Ana Maria Villegas (2001) point out that these candidates are more likely to continue teaching in high-need areas.

Many documents mention strategies that involve collaboration among the community and community colleges and/or universities in efforts to develop and nurture local talent (Churchill, Jensen, & Cepello, 2001; Collins, 1999; Davis, 2002; Harmon, 2001; Harris, 2001; Jensen, Churchill, & Davis, 2001; Proffit et al., 2002). Collaborations among school districts and universities can improve teacher preparation programs by making them responsive to local needs. Such collaborations are also a vital component of many “grow-your-own” programs. For example:

- Wyoming has established three Professional Development Schools in high-need areas of the state to prepare college and postgraduate students to teach in local K-12 schools. The Professional Development Schools involve a university, community college, and school district (Holloway, 2002).
- In Georgia, a paraprofessional program at Armstrong State University in Savannah has produced 65 credentialed teachers in hard-to-staff districts since 1993, with a 94 percent retention rate (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2002b).
- In North Dakota, special education teachers trained in various specialty areas were spending large portions of their days traveling from site to site. To address this situation, the University of North Dakota changed its teacher preparation program for special education teachers to include training in case management and serving students with various disabilities. As a result, a small school can retain one special education teacher who spends the entire day at the school, and students can be served in the least restrictive environments (Education Commission of the States, 2001).
- In Arizona, a rural district established partnerships with two out-of-state universities—Southern Utah University and Montana State University—whose teacher training programs were likely to include students already comfortable with living in rural areas. The Arizona district provided student teaching opportunities for prospective teachers and the possibility of subsequent employment. The district ended up hiring 6 of the first 10 student teachers who participated in the program (Crews, 2002).

- In a rural, economically depressed county in Virginia, the school district teamed with Wytheville Community College and Radford University to form the Appalachian Model Teaching Consortium, which created a structured curriculum path for high school students interested in teaching. Articulation agreements among the schools allow students to begin earning college credit in high school, continue for two years at the local community college, complete an undergraduate degree at the university, and return to student teach in the county school system. A scholarship to support students in the program has been established, and students who accept scholarship money are expected to teach in the school system for a minimum of three years (Proffit et al., 2002).

Available data indicate that grow-your-own strategies are often viewed as successful by those involved, but it appears that further research is needed to determine what types of programs (1) work best in particular settings or with particular populations, (2) are effective in relieving shortages in high-need subject areas, and (3) produce the most effective teachers. A caution about “grow-your-own” strategies—while many such programs produce new teachers, program evaluations show that unless the programs are targeted at producing teachers in high-need subject areas (math, science, special education), they are not likely to alleviate shortages in these critical areas (Clewell et al., 2000).

According to Watts Hull (2003), alternative certification and career-switchers programs are very popular at the state and district levels. Almost every state offers such programs, but researchers and policymakers debate their desirability and effectiveness (Voke, 2002). An Infobrief published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Voke, 2002) described one program that showed success in recruiting teachers to rural areas and keeping them there. The Pathways to Teaching Careers Program places qualified returning Peace Corps volunteers in urban and rural school districts and provides a two-year, graduate-level program that leads to a teaching certificate and a master’s degree. Evaluations show that these teachers are likely to teach in high-need schools and subject areas, are perceived to be more effective than typical beginning teachers, and are more likely to remain in teaching after three years. Another successful initiative of the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program focuses on identifying and recruiting paraprofessionals and noncertified teachers.

Targeted incentives. A number of researchers and national education organizations have recently argued that states should focus greater attention on developing programs that target persons who are willing to work in hard-to-staff schools and positions (Ingersoll, 2001; NASBE, 1998; Voke, 2002). To be effective, financial incentives must strategically target teachers willing to teach where the need is greatest: high-poverty schools, remote areas, or hard-to-fill subject areas. Even then, Holloway (2002) cautions, salary alone won’t guarantee that a teacher will stay in an isolated region. In Wyoming, despite enacting the highest teacher salary increase in the nation for the 2001-2002 school year, “overall teacher attrition continued to climb upward” as teachers transferred from the western part of the state and into schools located near larger towns (pp. 144-145). Incentives other than salary should target local challenges; a common one in rural areas is suitable housing. One state that is dealing with this challenge is Mississippi, where the Employer-Assisted Housing Teacher Program

provides interest-free loans to licensed teachers in areas of critical shortage (Education Commission of the States, 2001, p. 2). The state also offers loan repayment for students who teach in rural areas (Rural School and Community Trust, 1999).

Improved recruitment and hiring practices. “Few states have developed specific programs to address the problems of rural teacher recruitment and retention,” according to Timothy Collins, writing in 1999 (p. 2). Other observations about recruitment and hiring practices include the following:

- Rural schools are not effectively promoting the advantages of living and teaching in rural areas (Harmon, 2001).
- Only three states (North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina) have a common application form that can be used in any district in the state, reports the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2003, p. 11)
- Job seekers rarely have opportunities for two-way interactions that involve the principal and teachers, a practice that is especially important in rural areas with culturally distinct populations (Liu, 2003).

Examples of state programs include these:

- Alaska has established a statewide clearinghouse for job openings and for posting candidate résumés (Rural School and Community Trust, 1999).
- Many states are working to increase the pool of potential teachers by expanding recruitment activities to high schools and middle schools (Watts Hull, 2003).
- Some states are providing opportunities for nontraditional candidates to pursue alternative certification—teaching in classrooms while pursuing full certification (Watts Hull, 2003).

Improved school-level support for teachers. Some have argued that strategies aimed at increasing the supply of teachers are not likely to be effective if they ignore the high turnover rate of new teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Johnson et al., 2001). While all types of districts report problems retaining new teachers, this problem is pronounced in schools located in low-income areas (Hare & Heap, 2001; NASBE, 1998). A number of rural advocates and researchers have suggested that the greatest opportunity to ensure adequate numbers of qualified, competent teachers is the establishment of high-quality induction and mentoring programs. Unfortunately, a recent study by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2004) found that few high-need schools have moved beyond signing bonuses to more comprehensive approaches such as better working conditions and long-term support for teachers.

New teachers cite “lack of support” as their top concern, according to the National Education Association (n.d.). The first year of teaching can be especially critical for rural teachers who are new to a community (Lemke, 1994). Induction and mentoring programs are frequently cited as valuable supports for beginning teachers. When Richard Ingersoll and Jeffrey Kralik (2004) reviewed the research, they found empirical support for claims that such programs have a positive impact on teachers and their retention. Some researchers point to the importance of improving support for *all* teachers, not only those who are beginning their careers. “Clever incentives may attract new teachers, but only

improving the culture and working conditions of schools will keep them,” state Susan Johnson and associates (2001, p. 1). One effort toward improvement is the California New Teacher Project, which includes an induction component that tests alternative models of support for beginning teachers across the state. “Effective induction models reduced attrition among first- and second-year teachers by two-thirds,” and retention rates improved for teachers working in rural areas (Clewell et al., 2000, p. 41).

Technology. Technology can provide the tools to improve both the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas. It can be used to bridge the isolation gap in rural areas by providing support, information, and resources to educators. According to Hobbs (2004), barriers such as hard-to-staff classes or course scheduling problems caused by the need for multiple certifications can be overcome through distance learning. In addition, distance-learning technology can provide professional development and continuing education opportunities for teachers. Distance learning technologies may facilitate cross-district mentoring relationships between new and experienced teachers. Moreover, student services such as speech therapy, psychological testing, counseling, and individual assessment may be accessed through two-way interactive television technologies.

- The New Haven, California, school district uses its Web site as a primary recruiting tool (Davis, 2004). The comprehensive and informative Web site provides prospective teachers with the information they need to make an informed decision. The district’s Web site began as a way to recruit and retain teachers and evolved into a system of support for new teachers. New Haven has used technology to bridge the gaps between hiring and induction, between schools and the central office, and between university and school personnel.
- In Montana, the Education Development Center’s Center for Online Professional Development trains local teachers to develop and facilitate online workshops. Online courses provide opportunities for teachers to discuss difficult issues, solve problems, and develop their skills in a supportive environment (Davis, 2004).
- The New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, California, offers e-mentoring networks for beginning and experienced science teachers, scientists, and school administrators. The network includes online mentoring, online seminars focused on content and examination of student work, and leadership training for mentors and scientists (Davis, 2004).
- The Missouri Education Renewal Zone Initiative arranges partnerships between teacher education institutions, teacher and technology support organizations, and K-12 school districts with the goal of rearticulating, restructuring, and reinventing the policies and practices for recruiting, preparing, and retaining rural teachers (Hobbs, 2003).
- The Tennessee Department of Education includes online professional development as part of its Reading First program. Course offerings are designed to help K-3 teachers, K-12 special education teachers, and building-level administrators as they implement a reading program grounded in scientifically based reading research. The custom-developed courses have been delivered by the Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL (now Edvantia) to more than 1,800 teachers and administrators across the state. Participants receive 24 (of 90

required) continuing education units for each course. The state department sees this method of professional development delivery as one strategy for helping teachers meet the state's highly qualified teacher requirements (Ross, Thigpin, Cavalluzzo, Guzman, & Patterson, 2004).

While the practices identified above have shown promise for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas, authors such as Holloway (2002) stress the need for states to create a "package of solutions" to address "the multiple dimensions of teacher quality issues in rural states" (p. 151).

Characteristics of Successful Recruitment and Retention Practices

A look at rural-specific and general literature shows agreement that successful recruitment and retention practices share several characteristics, which can be categorized as *strategic*, *specific*, and *sustained*. A distinguishing characteristic of rural retention is the importance of community "rootedness" in countering isolation.

Strategic recruitment and retention practices. Being strategic involves employing local data to analyze needs, develop plans, and make decisions; having appropriate collaborators at the state, district, and local levels; and leveraging available resources to maximize results. When Patrick Murphy and Michael DeArmond (2003a) looked at district responses to teacher shortages between 1999 and 2002, they found that strategic approaches were rare. Their examination of data from the U.S. Department of Education's 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey showed that only 4 percent of districts reported using intradistrict incentives to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools, and only 10 percent of districts reported using targeted subject-area incentives. Interviews with 110 human resource directors revealed that nearly three fourths preferred across-the-board salary increases as a recruitment policy.

Murphy and DeArmond (2003a) recommend that districts remove organizational barriers to flexible and responsive recruitment policies and consider joining with other districts to create a regional human resource institution. Other literature shows that strategic alliances can yield creative solutions. In Colorado, for example, four rural school districts joined forces 10 years ago to establish a solution to the shortage (and expense) of foreign-language teachers for the districts' small schools. The districts created the state's first distance-learning network, which enabled the districts to hire a French teacher who used a "studio classroom" arrangement to instruct classes in all four districts simultaneously. Video monitors in the classrooms allowed the teacher to view all students in each classroom (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

Specific recruitment and retention practices. A broad, one-size-fits-all approach to recruitment and retention is not likely to produce the desired results (Murphy & DeArmond, 2003a). Efforts should be focused on specific schools or subjects that are particularly hard to staff. Building-level staff should be involved in the hiring process so a specific candidate can interact with potential future coworkers on a personal level (Liu, 2003).

Sustained recruitment and retention practices. Sustaining recruitment and retention efforts means regularly reevaluating targeted programs and adjusting them

accordingly. Induction programs and other initiatives should be formalized so they become part of the school culture. The literature implies (and occasionally states) that administrators may need training in how to support teachers and foster professional learning communities to aid retention (Ingersoll, 2001; Lemke, 1994). A strategic, specific, and sustained approach to retention may require reculturing—a “shift” in the way district and school professionals (1) view their jobs and (2) spend their time.

Ideally, responsibility for retaining high-quality teachers should be distributed among teachers, the principal, the superintendent, and state decision makers. Time should be set aside for professional collaboration and other important but not urgent matters that affect school climate and culture—including teacher retention, at least to some degree. The time challenge brings to light one of the ironies of rural school culture: In rural places, the pace of life is generally slower than in cities. But for rural educators, the pace of school life might seem speeded up due to multiple teaching assignments, heavy extracurricular responsibilities, and lack of support staff (extra hands).

Recruitment and retention practices rooted within the community. Recruiting and developing local talent is seen as a strategy with high potential for helping rural areas because it results in a pool of teaching candidates who are (1) already familiar with the rural lifestyle and (2) already rooted to the community by family or other connections. Comfort and connectedness within the rural community are especially important because these advantages can help beginning teachers overcome feelings of isolation. Collins (1999) pinpointed isolation as a major factor affecting rural teachers in his summary of rural-specific literature on the topic published between 1990 and 1999.

A national survey of rural superintendents in the United States (Schwartzbeck, 2003) confirms the necessity of addressing isolation as it relates to teacher recruitment and retention. Analysis of the survey’s 896 responses (in a self-selected sample) identified low salaries, social isolation, and geographic isolation as the top three factors responsible for difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers. Urban and suburban teachers do not cite isolation as a factor in their decisions to leave, according to an analysis of national data by Richard Ingersoll (NCTAF, 2003, pp. 27, 37).

A distinguishing characteristic of effective rural retention, it appears, is its ability to capitalize on the power of “rootedness” within the community. For example, one study of special education teachers in a rural state showed that “leavers” and “stayers” rated their job satisfaction about equally (none were greatly satisfied), but the determining factor in whether a teacher changed jobs was rootedness to the community (Bornfield et al., 1997, p. 31). “The leavers . . . considered ‘home’ to be someplace other than where they worked” (p. 36). A study of Montana’s smallest schools identified the personal/family sphere as having the greatest influence on teachers’ decisions to accept employment and the community sphere as having the greatest influence on their decisions to stay. “Within-classroom” and “whole-school” spheres were less influential (Davis, 2002). Findings such as these have prompted many rural communities to employ “grow-your-own” strategies to develop teachers from the local pool of potential candidates.

The authors of a review of state and local efforts to recruit teachers, published by the U.S. Department of Education (Clewell et al., 2000), reported that “there is far more experimentation going on . . . than is being reported in the literature” and expressed

concern that valuable information about successful strategies was being lost because “evaluation results of model programs are not being shared . . . with other researchers and practitioners” (p. 71). Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Department review is a point not frequently mentioned in the rural-specific literature—the potential advantages of connecting state and local efforts to (1) collect and analyze data and (2) use these data collaboratively to develop programs that are responsive to specific local needs. Clewell and colleagues point out that local programs have the discrete information necessary to determine what actions will best address local needs. States, however, have the authority to enact policy changes (e.g., provision of incentives and reciprocal agreements about credential portability) that can hinder or support local efforts. Current state strategies that address teacher recruitment and retention include scholarship programs, loan and loan-forgiveness programs, salary increases, bonuses, tax credit/mortgage assistance, relocation assistance, and stipends (Education Commission of the States, 2002). Collaboration and cooperation among state and local education agencies could magnify the results of these efforts at both levels.

Conclusions

In rural districts, as in districts everywhere, some aspects of teacher recruitment and retention are beyond the immediate influence of education leaders: a local factory closing forces the math teacher to resign after her husband finds another factory job elsewhere, the science teacher moves to another state to care for an ailing parent, the special education teacher decides to pursue a nursing degree, the French teacher retires early. There will always be vacancies created by teachers who leave for personal and family reasons such as these. Likewise, one wonders how much can be done to stem the out-migration of young people (including young teachers) from many rural areas to the cities and suburbs.

Other aspects of teacher recruitment and retention, however, can be influenced by rural education leaders. Edvantia’s review of the literature suggests that the following strategies hold the greatest promise for yielding the desired result—placing high-quality teachers in rural classrooms and keeping them there.

- **Base recruitment efforts on state and local data on teacher supply and demand.** Stakeholder groups should analyze data to identify trends and disaggregate data to determine what subjects or geographic areas need the greatest attention. When Oregon examined statewide data, for example, it became clear that some rural areas were having trouble recruiting elementary school teachers even though there was not a statewide shortage (Oregon University System, 2004).
- **Invest in “grow-your-own” initiatives to develop teachers.** Community members who are interested in teaching in local schools are more likely to stay in the community. Another advantage is their familiarity with local culture and challenges. Retention rates are especially high for paraprofessionals who already have experience in local schools. There are two categories of candidates: those already certified to teach and those who have the interest and potential but lack education credentials and certification. Related to the former group, a strategy

pursued in some rural districts is to assist current teachers in retraining for high-need subject areas. Attracting members of the latter group—secondary school students, community college students, education paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, and professionals in other fields—will require states to develop career pathways that accommodate the particular needs of nontraditional students, including financial aid. Such grow-your-own initiatives are especially attractive in rural areas because the candidates are more likely to desire a teaching position within the community. A common mistake, however, is failure to target the subject areas where the need is greatest.

- **Include all vital partners in collaborative efforts.** States and districts should ensure that their efforts are complementary. University teacher preparation programs are vital partners in teacher recruitment; community colleges can play an important role in developing nontraditional teaching candidates.
- **Encourage universities to customize teacher education programs.** Especially needed are programs that prepare prospective teachers for success in rural schools. Oregon universities have successfully recruited students from “shortage” fields (e.g., math, science, foreign languages) into teaching careers. Offering evening, weekend, or online courses can play a vital role in preparing nontraditional teaching candidates.
- **Offer targeted incentives.** As competition increases for teachers in high-demand subject areas, rural schools, which research has shown pay less than their suburban and urban counterparts, will be at an additional disadvantage if they cannot offer differential pay and perhaps other incentives.
- **Institute formal induction programs.** Research shows high-quality induction programs to be one of the most effective ways to protect a district’s investment in a new teacher. The best programs start new teachers with a reduced teaching and extracurricular load and formally match them to an expert teacher-mentor. Expert teachers who mentor new teachers should be rewarded for their willingness to assume such responsibilities.
- **Offer incentives for staying.** States and/or school districts might consider tying bonuses, student-loan-forgiveness programs, and other incentives to staying on past the first year.
- **Improve the school culture and working conditions.** Improving the school’s culture and working conditions can make teachers want to stay. Additionally, research shows that improvements in school culture can lead to improved student achievement, which can, in turn, make the school a more attractive place to teach.
- **Involve the community.** The community can play an important role in welcoming new teachers. The community is also a potential source for teachers who are already rooted to the area and therefore more likely to stay.
- **Invest in school leadership development.** Principals’ training does not always prepare them to nurture school structures and cultures that support teachers in

important ways. Ongoing professional development for principals is just as important as it is for teachers.

Rural school leaders need access to the best available information and data on teacher recruitment and retention, and they need to approach the task in a manner that is strategic, specific, and sustained.

Survey of the National Landscape

Methodology

Participants. A total of 597 superintendents from a random selection of 1,565 rural school districts completed the survey with valid data and returned the questionnaire during the summer of 2005, yielding an overall response rate of 38%.⁴ The responses of these 597 superintendents reflect the recruiting and retention practices of approximately 1,900 schools serving more than 718,000 elementary, middle school, and high school students from rural areas not located near an urban area (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] locale code 7) and rural areas located near an urban area (locale code 8).

Measures. The Rural School Districts: Recruitment and Retention Practices questionnaire (see Appendix A) is a brief assessment tool used to obtain information about recruitment and retention strategies, including particular difficulties and challenges as well as successful practices used by rural districts for both recruitment and retention. Items on the questionnaire were developed based on the review of the literature.

Recruitment items focused on the extent to which the particular district had difficulty staffing particular grades (e.g., upper elementary, middle school, high school), specific challenges to teacher recruitment (e.g., geographic isolation, low/uncompetitive wages, and working conditions), and the district's reliance on particular methods for recruiting new teachers (e.g., targeted incentives, regular evaluation of recruitment strategies, offering competitive salaries). These items were rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 6 "A great deal". Specific strategies used to find recruits (e.g., job fairs, personal contacts, Internet advertising) were assessed using a 3-point scale, ranging from 1 "Never" to 3 "Frequently". A final question asked respondents to indicate the extent to which districts relied on each of a number of strategies (e.g., hire certified teachers, qualified teachers, retired teachers, and increase class sizes), using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 6 "Extremely".

Retention items were assessed using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 6 "Extremely" and measured the extent to which specific challenges to retaining teachers were found (e.g., isolation, school environment and culture) and about the district's dependence on retention strategies (e.g., instituting formal induction programs for new teachers, offering formal mentoring programs, providing best possible working conditions).

⁴A total of 603 surveys were received. Four school districts had undergone some type of change that no longer qualified them for participation in the project (e.g., merging with other districts, non-operating status) and one school district returned 2 copies of the questionnaire.

A number of open-ended questions asked respondents to (a) provide subject areas and specializations that represented the biggest challenges for recruitment in their district, (b) offer additional recruitment and retention strategies that were most beneficial and effective, and (c) offer reasons why teachers who are newly hired tend to leave their positions within 1-2 years or stay in the district.

School district information was also assessed. This included the type of locale (e.g., rural and not located near an urban area, rural and located near an urban area), the number of schools in the district, the number of children served by the district, and the percentages of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. District information was also collected on the number of full-time teaching positions, the number of current vacancies, and the percentages of teaching positions that need to be filled every year. Finally, the percentage of staff within the district who meet “highly qualified” requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were also assessed.

Procedure. A random selection of 1,565 school districts was chosen from the universe of locale code 7 (rural, not located near an urban area) and locale code 8 (rural, located near an urban area) and downloaded from the National Center for Education Statistics Web site using the Common Core of Data Build-a-Table tool. Superintendents from each district in the sample received a letter of introduction to the project, which stated the overall purpose of the study, and an invitation to participate in a project on teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts throughout the United States. Participants were also informed that their responses would be presented anonymously and in aggregate form and would be useful in discerning which tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts and what shortfalls in filling vacancies they continue to face. Approximately 1 to 2 weeks later, participants were sent the questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope. If the survey was not received within 1 to 2 weeks, staff sent a reminder postcard, an additional survey, and a final reminder postcard (Mangione, 1995).

Analyses. Descriptive statistics, which include the sample size (N), mean (M), and standard deviations (SD), were calculated for the total sample of respondents and according to the district locale (e.g., rural, located near an urban area or rural, not located near an urban area). Independent Samples t tests were also conducted to examine differential recruitment and retention strategies, as well as difficulties and challenges between those rural districts that are and are not located near an urban area. In the event that the two groups were not assumed to have equal variances (also known as homogeneity of variance and indicated by a significant Levene's Test), corrected values for the degrees of freedom are presented. Given the number of analyses presented, a more conservative p value of .01 was used to determine significance.

Results

Descriptive information from the 597 participating superintendents is presented in Table 1, which presents the total and average numbers of schools and students represented by each superintendent. Rural districts located near an urban area reported significantly more schools per district, $t(206)=2.63$, $p=.001$, and more students per

school, $t(182)=3.36, p=.001$, than those districts not located near an urban area. There were also significant differences in the percentages of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch by district. Districts not located near an urban center had significantly higher percentages of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunches, $t(260)=-5.09, p=.000$, than those districts located near urban areas. See Figure 1 for a depiction of these results.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for the Number of Schools and Students

	Schools Per District				Students Per District			
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Total	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Total
Total Sample	595	3.21	4.19	1,907	595	1207.05	2971.00	718,192
Rural, Located Near Urban Area	170	4.12	6.03	700	172	2128.41	4983.93	366,086
Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area	425	2.84	3.11	1,207	423	832.40	1368.38	352,106

Tables 2 through 4 present descriptive information on the full-time teaching force and vacancies for the total sample and by district. Significant differences were found for the number of full-time teaching positions by district. Those districts located near an urban area had significantly more teaching positions ($t(178)=3.25, p=.001$). There were no significant differences in the percentages of vacancies reported between the two types of rural districts ($t(587)=.108, p=.914$) and the percentages of positions that need to be filled each year ($t(549)=-1.30, p=.195$).

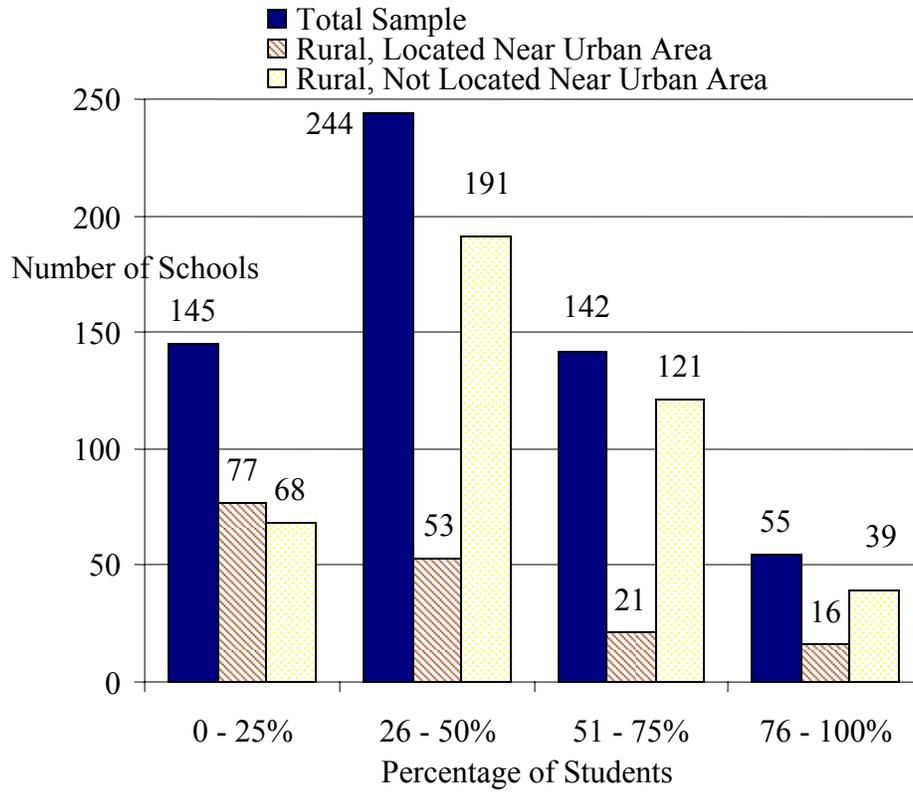


Figure 1. Percentages of Students Qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch.

Table 2.

Average Number of Full-time Positions and Vacancies

	Total			Rural, Located Near Urban Area			Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Full-time Teaching Positions in District	592	87.0	213.3	172	151.9	365.9	420	60.5	84.1
Vacancies in District Teaching Force	593	3.3	13.9	172	6.2	24.8	420	2.1	4.00

Table 3.

Computed Vacancies Overall and by District⁵

	Total Sample		Rural, Located Near Urban Area		Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
Less than 10%	529	89.8	151	87.8	378	90.6
10 - 20%	36	6.1	14	8.1	22	5.3
21 - 30%	15	2.5	4	2.3	11	2.6
31 - 40%	3	0.5	2	1.2	1	0.2
41 - 50%	2	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.5
51 - 60%	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2
71 - 80%	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2
Greater than 90%	2	0.3	1	0.6	1	0.2

⁵This was calculated by dividing the total number of vacancies in the district by the total number of teaching positions in the district.

Table 4.

Percentages of Teaching Positions Needing to be Filled Each Year Overall and by District Locale

	Total Sample		Rural, Located Near Urban Area		Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area	
	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent
Less than 6%	294	53.4	83	53.5	211	53.3
6 - 10%	178	32.3	47	30.3	131	33.1
11 - 15%	46	8.3	20	12.9	26	6.6
16 - 20%	15	2.7	3	1.9	12	3.0
21 - 25%	8	1.5	0	0.0	8	2.0
26 - 30%	2	0.4	1	0.6	1	0.3
31 - 35%	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
36 - 40%	2	0.4	1	0.6	1	0.3
41 - 45%	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
46 - 50%	0	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Greater than 50%	6	1.1	0	0.0	6	1.5

Descriptive information on the number of highly qualified teachers, according to the requirements of NCLB, is presented in Figure 2. However, there were no significant differences between the two groups on the percentages of staff on requirements related to having their certification ($t(569)=-.84, p=.400$), bachelor's degree or higher ($t(563)=.38, p=.702$), or proficiency in the subject area taught ($t(540)=.08, p=.938$). As shown in Table 5, districts reported having the most difficulty with resource professionals (24.6%), math, business, and economics (24.2%), and science (22.6%).

Table 5.

Subject Areas and Specializations Representing the Biggest Challenge to Rural Districts

Category	Number of Responses	Percent
Resource Professionals (Special education, ESL, counselors, vocation, disability specialists)	384	24.6
Math, Business, and Economics	377	24.2
Science	353	22.6
Language Arts (e.g., foreign language, English, journalism, reading)	152	9.7
Fine Arts (e.g., music, art)	137	8.8
Vocational Education (including agriculture, industrial arts, computer technology, shop, and home economics)	53	3.4
All Subjects	33	2.1
Social studies (e.g., history, government, psychology, diversity, communication)	26	1.7
Physical education (including coaching), Health, and Family/Consumer Science	25	1.6
Library/Library media	14	0.9
None or N/A	7	0.4

Note. A total of 1561 responses was recorded.

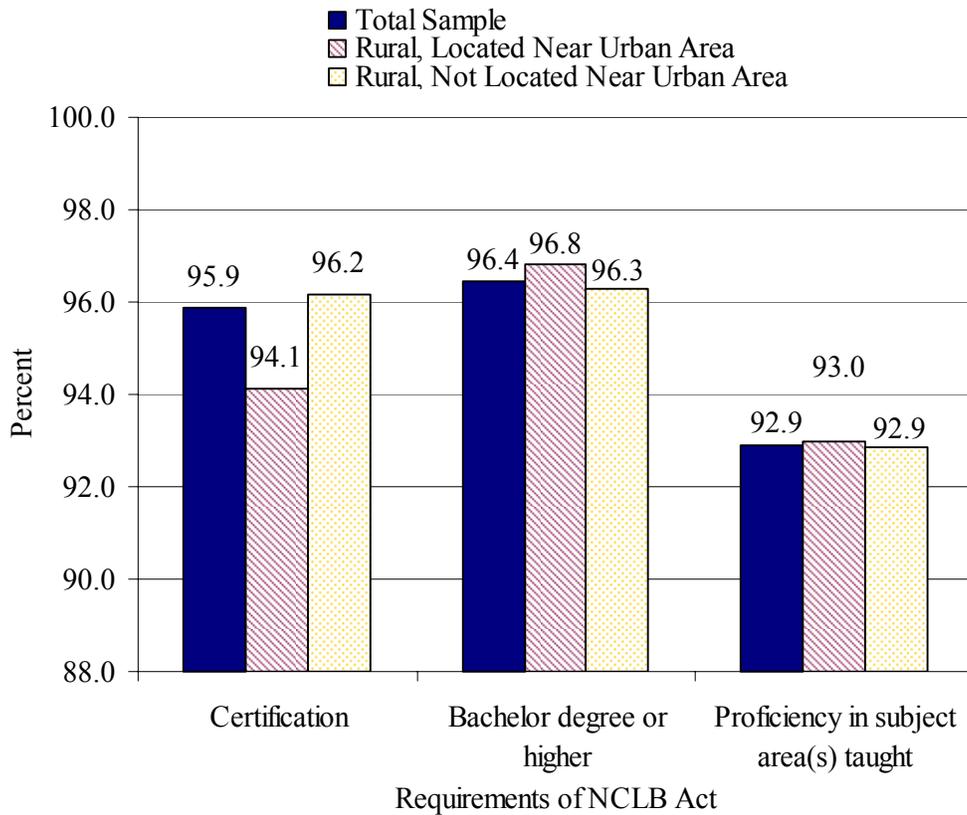


Figure 2. Percentages of Staff Meeting the “Highly Qualified” Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Recruitment difficulties and challenges. Figure 3 presents the percentages of districts who reported great difficulty in staffing the different grade levels. Rural schools reported much more difficulty in staffing high school positions (28.9%), followed by middle school positions (10.8%), and the least difficulty filling early (1.6%) and upper (.7%) elementary positions. This represents a common pattern across rural districts with no significant differences between rural districts near an urban area and those districts not located near an urban area for early childhood ($t(535)=-.21, p=.837$), early elementary ($t(581)=.24, p=.812$), upper elementary ($t(579)=1.02, p=.307$), middle school ($t(548)=1.09, p=.277$), and high school ($t(500)=-1.63, p=.104$).

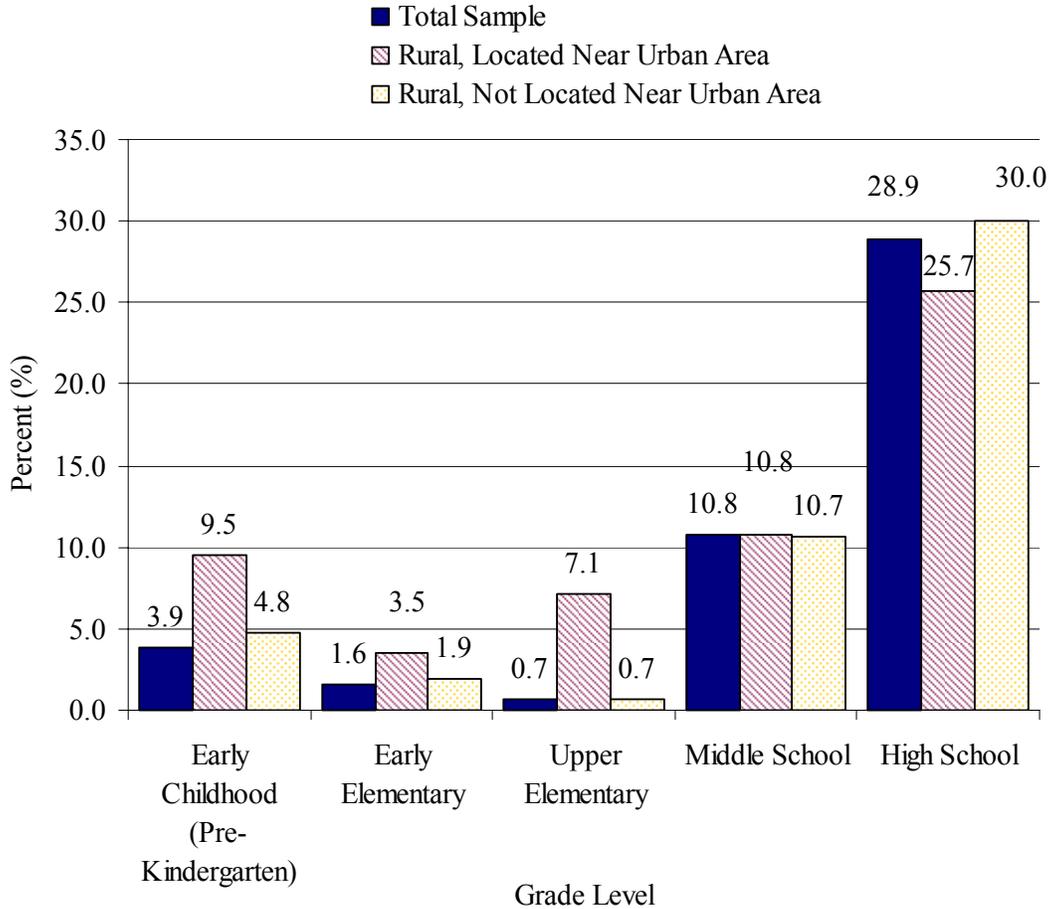


Figure 3. Percentages of Districts Having a Great Deal of Difficulty Staffing Specific Grade Levels.

As shown in Figure 4, superintendents reported on their districts' greatest challenges in recruiting new teachers. Overall, the most reported challenges included geographic isolation (32.1%), social isolation (27.6%), being close to higher paying districts (26.8%) and low/uncompetitive salaries (26.2%). Respondents were less likely to indicate NCLB certification requirements (12.9%), working conditions (5.2%), and school environment and culture (4.7%) as challenges to recruitment.

Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention

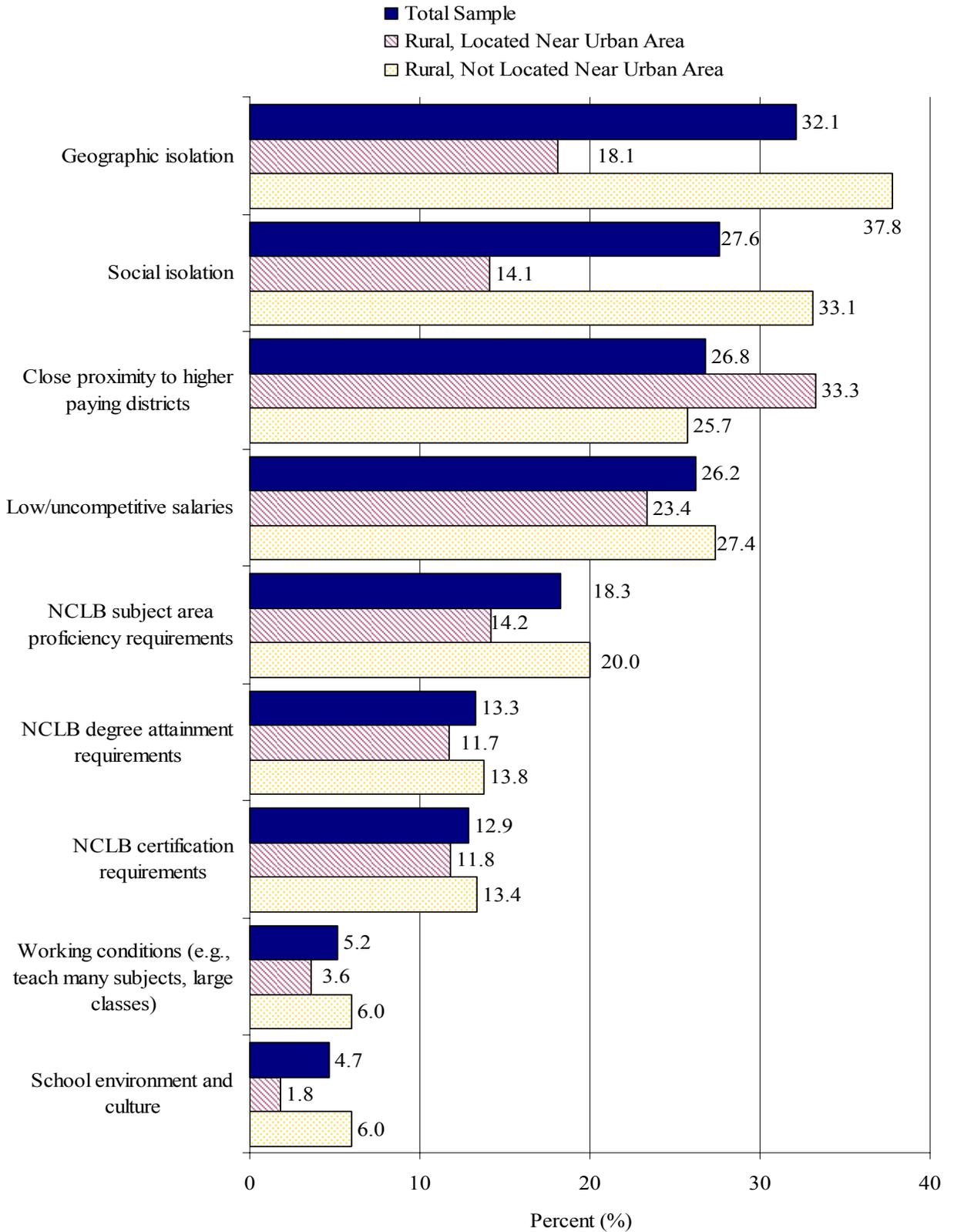


Figure 4. Percentages of Districts Reporting Specific Factors as being a Great Challenge to Teacher Recruitment.

Comparisons between school districts located near an urban area and those not located near an urban area indicate different challenges to recruitment. Districts not located near an urban area were more likely to report geographic isolation ($t(589)=-6.31$, $p=.000$), social isolation ($t(588)=-6.33$, $p=.000$), and school environment and culture ($t(588)=-3.59$, $p=.000$), with a trend indicating that the overall working conditions ($t(587)=-2.42$, $p=.016$) were also a challenge to recruitment. There were no significant differences between the two groups on the extent to which NCLB-related requirements (certification, $t(585)=-.60$, $p=.549$; degree attainment, $t(586)=-.91$, $p=.363$; subject area proficiency, $t(582)=-.43$, $p=.668$, proximity of higher paying districts $t(282)=.626$, $p=.532$), and uncompetitive salaries, $t(589)=-2.14$, $p=.030$) were a challenge to teacher recruitment.

Strategies

The most frequent methods of finding recruits for teaching positions included statewide advertising (61.1%), Web site or Internet advertising (58.0%), local advertising (57.6%), and personal contacts or networking (43.1%), as shown in Figure 5. The least used methods were job fairs (12.8%), out-of-state or national advertising (11.3%), and job banks (8.9%). Comparisons between district type indicate that districts not located near an urban area were significantly more likely to use statewide advertising ($t(589)=-3.55$, $p=.000$), and out-of-state advertising ($t(379)=-3.17$, $p=.002$) than those located near urban areas. Those districts located near an urban area were more likely to use unsolicited résumés or references ($t(304)=3.51$, $p=.001$) than those not located near an urban area. There were no differences in methods by district with regard to job fairs ($t(584)=1.77$, $p=.077$), local advertising ($t(587)=1.20$, $p=.231$), Web site or Internet advertising ($t(588)=-.582$, $p=.561$), job banks ($t(572)=-.31$, $p=.756$), personal contacts ($t(587)=1.84$, $p=.066$), references from other districts ($t(588)=.31$, $p=.756$), and recruitment through colleges and universities ($t(589)=.50$, $p=.615$).

Respondents were also asked to report the three most fruitful strategies for finding recruits, as presented in Figure 6. These included statewide advertising (18%), personal contacts or networking (18%), Web site or Internet advertising (17%), and local advertising (17%). The least fruitful strategies included unsolicited résumés or references (5%), out-of-state or national advertising (2%), and job banks (2%).

Additional questions addressed the reliance on different methods used to recruit teachers (see Figure 7). The most commonly used strategies were including building-level staff in the recruitment and hiring process (35.2%), promoting the advantage of teaching and living in the area (35.0%), and offering competitive salaries (22.4%). The least commonly used strategies for recruitment included offering targeted incentives for hard-to-staff schools or subject areas (4.4%), offering housing or relocation assistance (4.1%), and collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand (1.7%). Districts located near an urban area were more likely to offer competitive salaries ($t(592)=3.16$, $p=.002$) and include building-level staff in the recruitment and hiring process ($t(591)=2.92$, $p=.004$), with a trend indicating these districts also promoted benefits to a greater degree ($t(592)=2.43$, $p=.015$). Districts not located in urban areas were more likely to offer housing or relocation assistance ($t(427)=-3.05$, $p=.002$). There were no differences in other types of recruitment strategies used between the two groups.

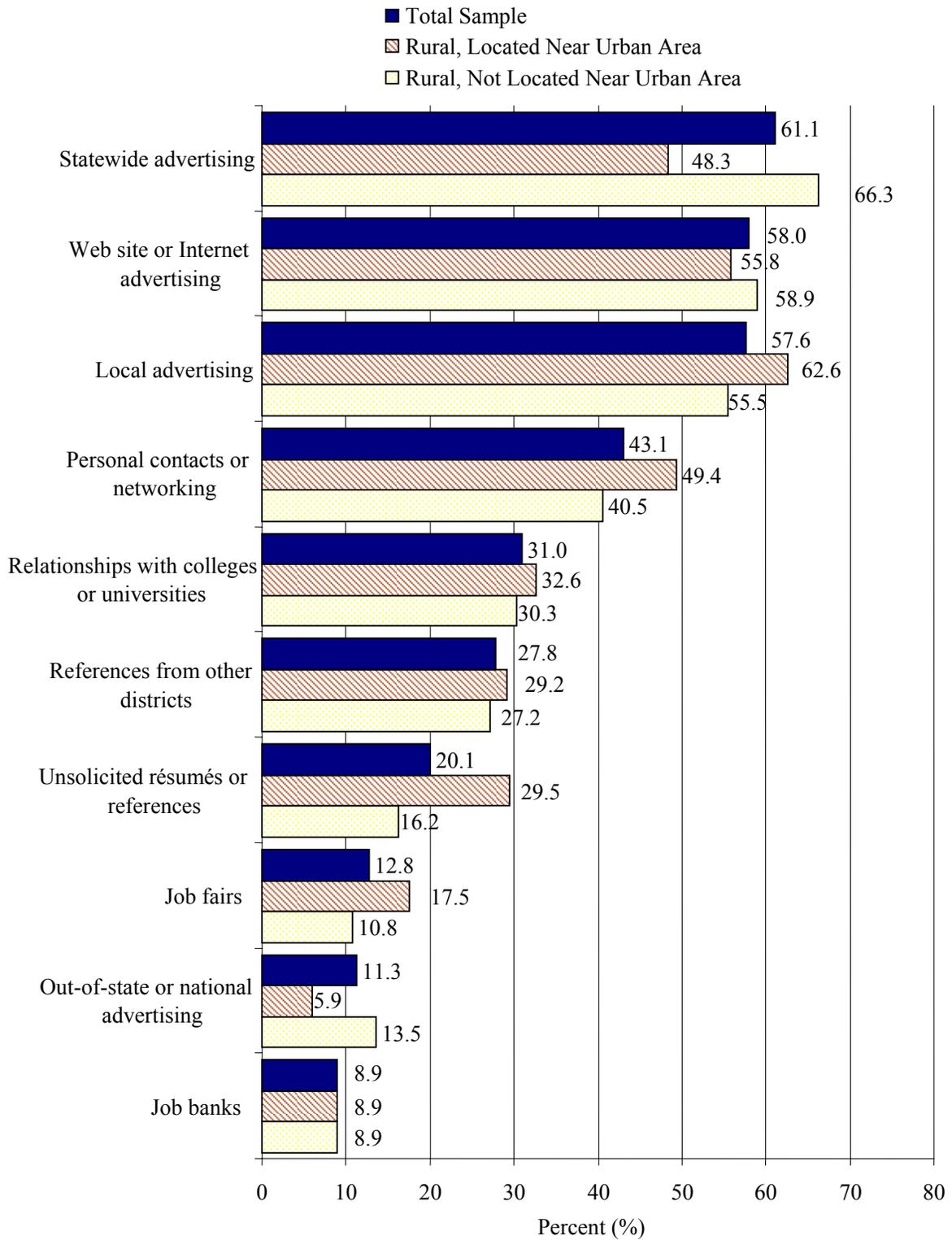


Figure 5. Percentages of Districts Using Most Frequent Methods of Finding Recruits.

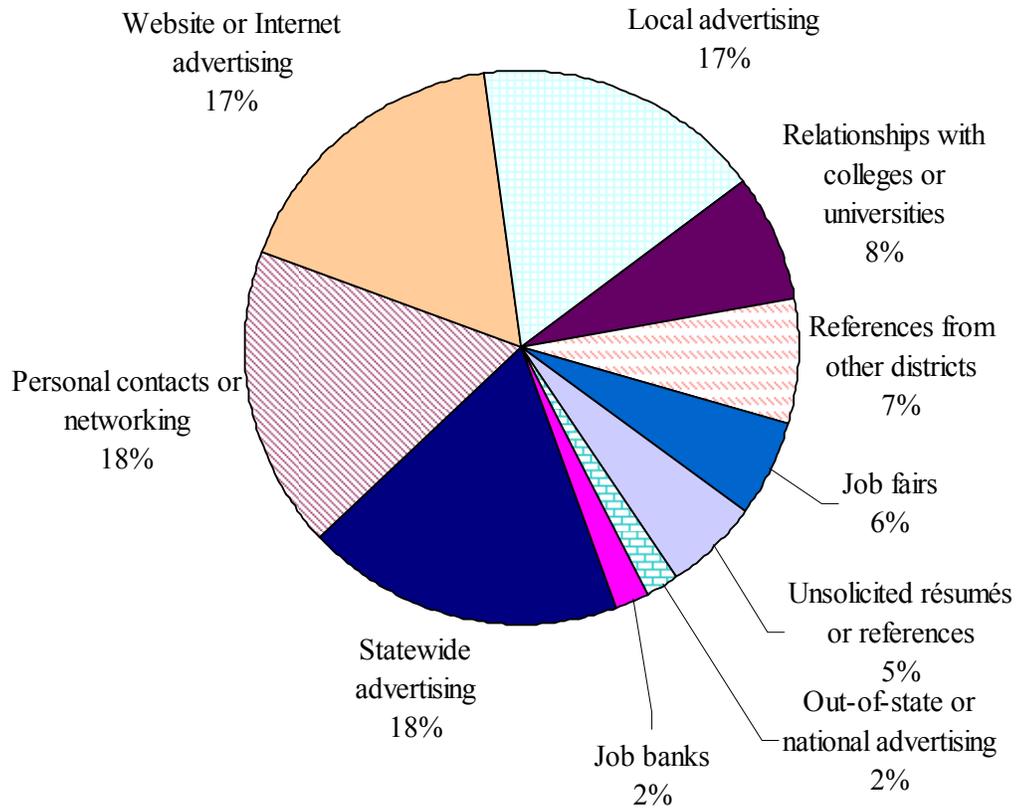


Figure 6. Percentages of Districts Reporting Most Fruitful Contact Strategies for Finding Recruits.

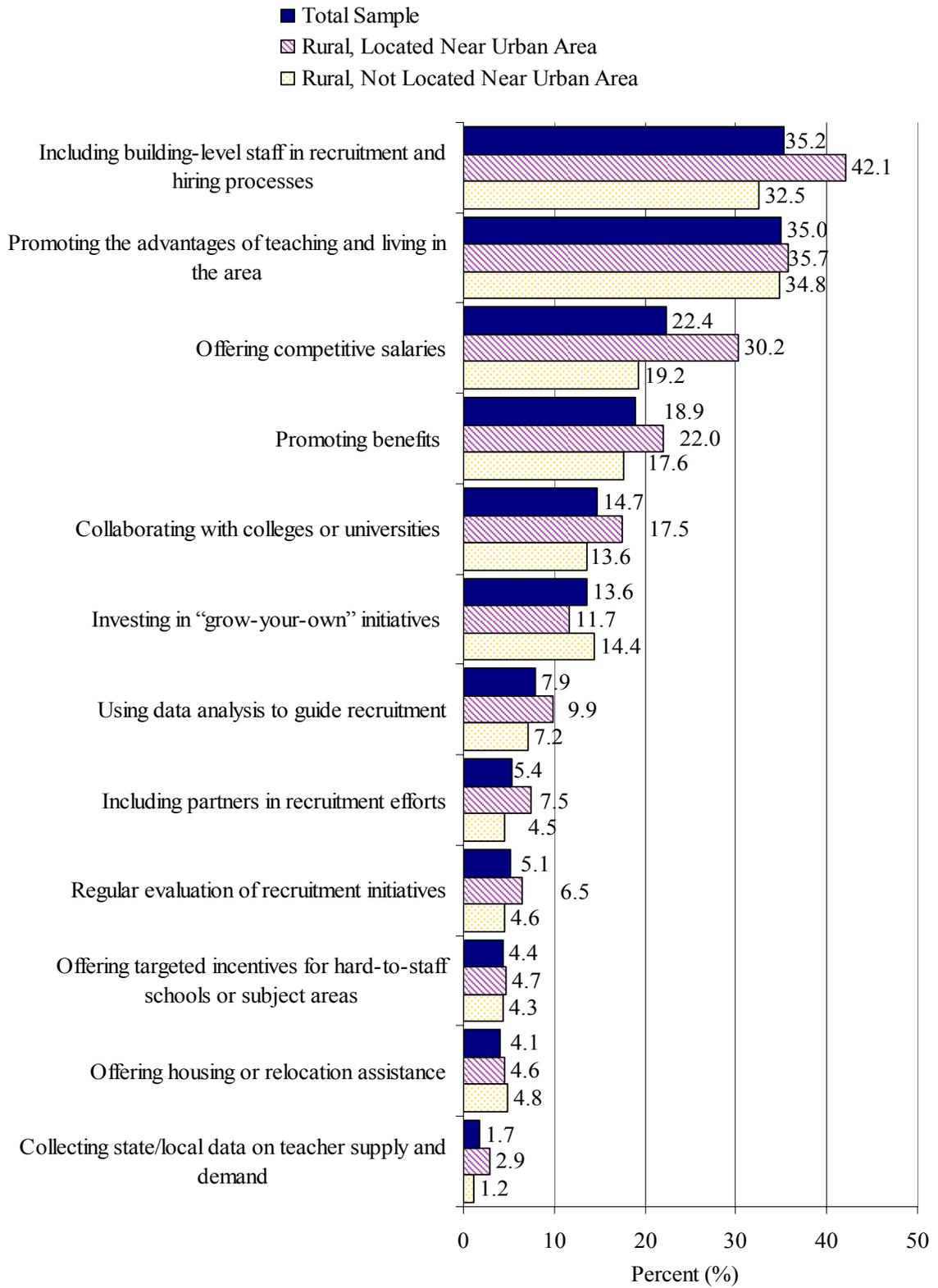


Figure 7. Percentages of Districts Relying on Particular Strategies for Teacher Recruitment.

Successful Practices

Superintendents were also asked to identify the three most successful recruitment strategies for their district, shown in Figure 8. These included including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes (18%), promoting the advantages of teaching and living in the area (17%), and offering competitive salaries (16%). The least successful recruitment strategies were offering housing or relocation assistance (2%), collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand (1%), and using data analysis to guide recruitment (1%).

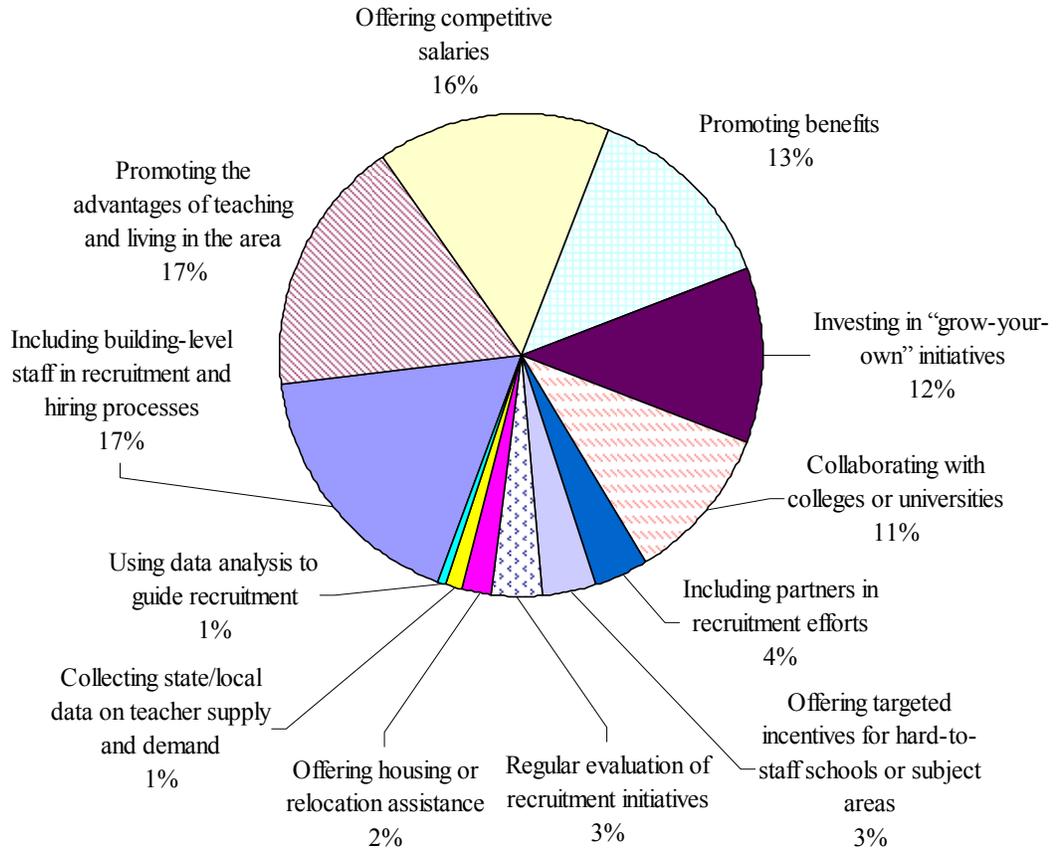


Figure 8. Percentages of Districts Reporting Strategies as Most Useful for Teacher Recruitment.

When asked about alternative recruitment strategies that might be beneficial to other districts (presented in Table 6), the strategies not mentioned above were promoting a positive community/school environment (31.4%), general advertising and collaboration (24.9%), and offering benefits (21.6%).

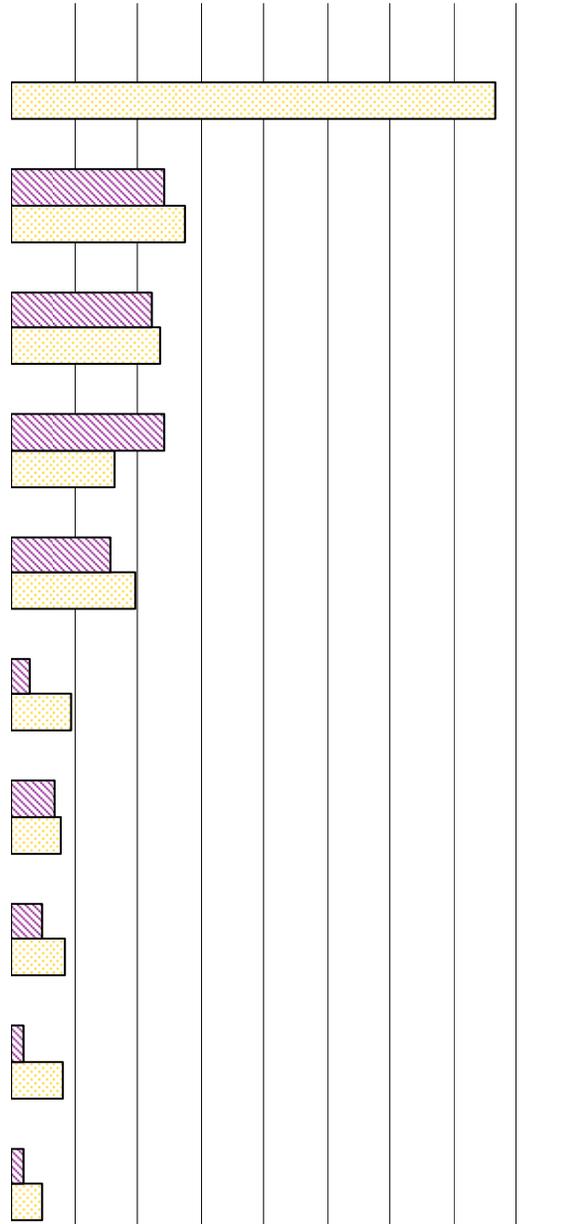
Table 6.

Alternative Recruitment Strategies Proposed by District Respondents

Strategy Category	Number of Responses	Percent
Promoting positive community/school environment	58	31.4
General advertising and collaboration	46	24.9
Benefits (e.g., stipends, opportunities for advancement, and creative benefit packages)	40	21.6
Retention within the school (e.g., mentoring programs, the use of exit interviews) and within the community (e.g., encouraging high school graduates to return after college)	22	11.9
Alternative recruitment approaches (e.g., personal contact/investment, making application process easier, using aggressive recruitment)	19	10.3

Note. A total of 185 responses were recorded.

Respondents were asked about the most common methods used to fill vacancies present in the district at the beginning of the school year (shown in Figure 9). Overall, superintendents reported vacancies would be filled by hiring qualified teachers (79.5%), hiring teachers with certification in progress (26.5%), and hiring teachers with temporary licenses (23.3%). Teachers who acted as substitutes (18.8%) or were retired (18.3%) were the least of ten mentioned ways to fill vacancies. Districts also reported increasing class sizes (7.3%), reducing the number of classes offered (6.5%), or assigning administrators to teach classes (4.1%) as ways to deal with teacher shortages. Districts located near an urban area were significantly more likely than districts not located near an urban area to hire retired teachers ($t(493)=-3.43, p=.001$), with trends suggesting these districts also tended to reduce the number of courses offered ($t(306)=-2.59, p=.010$) and/or increase the number of classes assigned to current teachers ($t(318)=-2.58, p=.010$) to fill vacancies at the beginning of the year.



Retention difficulties. The most challenging factors related to retaining teachers once hired (shown in Figure 10) included being in close proximity to a higher paying district (29.1%), geographic isolation (25.5%), low/uncompetitive salaries (24.8%), and social isolation (20.8%). Less challenging factors related to retaining teachers were connected to working conditions (6.7%) and school environment and culture (6.5%). Problems with retention differed between those districts located near an urban environment and those districts not located near an urban area. Those not located near an urban area were significantly more likely to report geographic ($t(589)=-5.31, p=.000$) and social ($t(588)=-5.37, p=.000$) isolation as major challenges to retaining teachers at their schools.

The most cited reasons for teachers leaving the district are presented in Table 7. General relocation (31.4%), concerns related to financial compensation or benefits (23.5%), and dissatisfaction with the area and/or school environment (20.3%) were the most commonly endorsed.

Table 7.

Reasons Teachers Leave the District

Category	Number of Responses	Percent
General Relocation (e.g., closer to home, spouse relocation, closer to family/friends) and Other Personal Reasons (e.g., marriage, pregnancy)	357	31.4
Poor money and benefits, poor job security, better money elsewhere	267	23.5
Dissatisfaction with small school and rural environment (e.g., social isolation)	231	20.3
Dissatisfaction with administration, requirements, workload, or leaving teaching in general	137	12.0
Opportunity (e.g., lack of current opportunity, new career opportunity, opportunity to obtain advanced degree)	79	6.9
Contract not renewed (e.g., not a good fit to school), laid off, temporary or part-time placement	67	5.9

Note. A total of 1,138 responses were recorded.

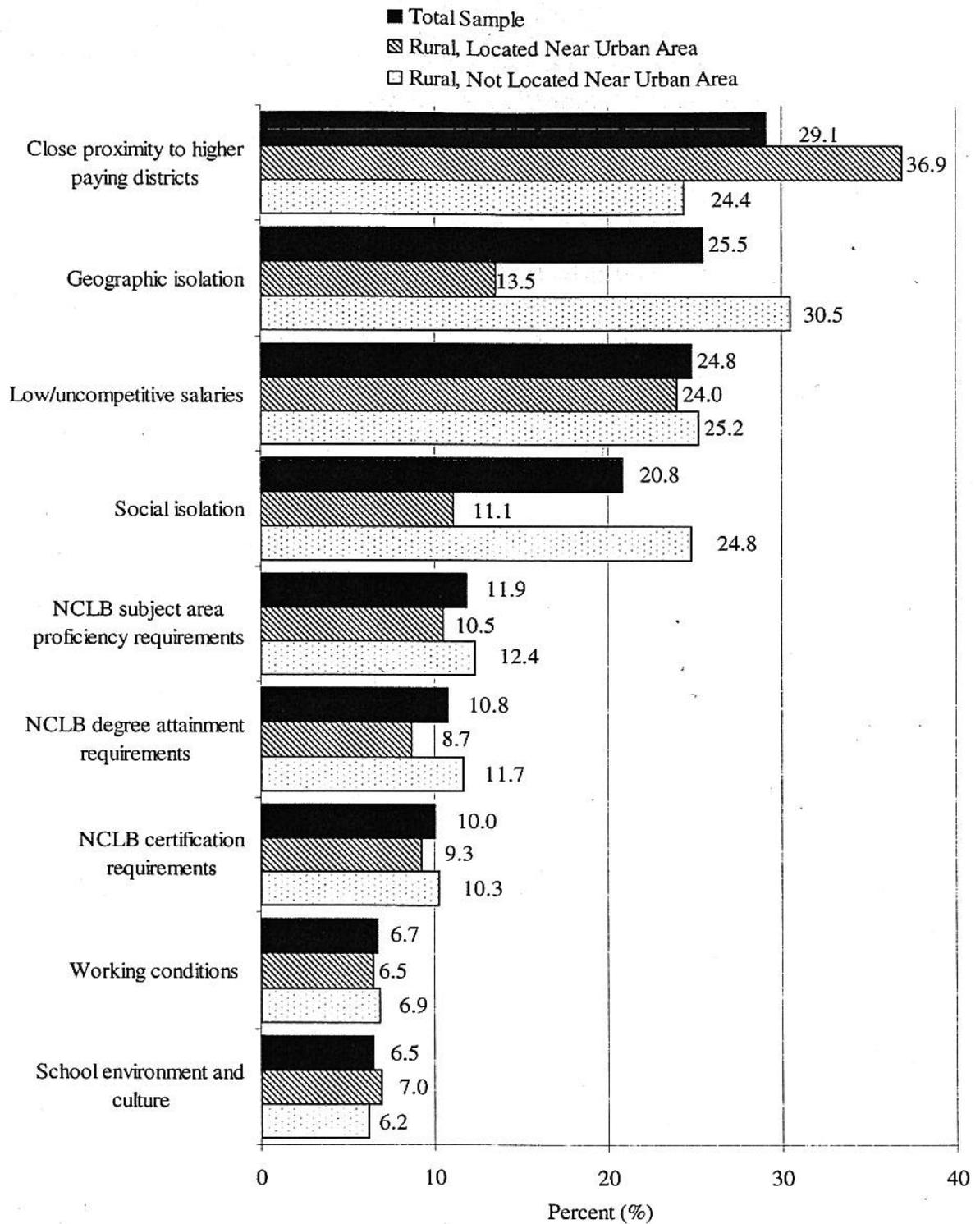


Figure 10. Percentages of Districts Reporting Specific Factors as being a Great Challenge to Teacher Retention Strategies.

Presented in Figure 11, the most-relied-on strategies used to retain teachers included providing teachers with the best possible work conditions (73.9%), creating a positive school culture (69.2%), and providing professional development opportunities (64.6%) to teachers. The least relied on strategies included offering increased salaries (13.5%), improved benefits (13.0%), and incentives for staying past the first year (4.6%). Comparisons between the two types of districts indicate that districts located near an urban area are more likely than districts not located near an urban area to institute formal induction programs ($t(588)=2.67, p=.008$) and formal mentoring programs for new teachers ($t(592)=3.45, p=.001$), and to provide the best possible working conditions ($t(588)=2.79, p=.005$) in order to keep recently hired teachers.

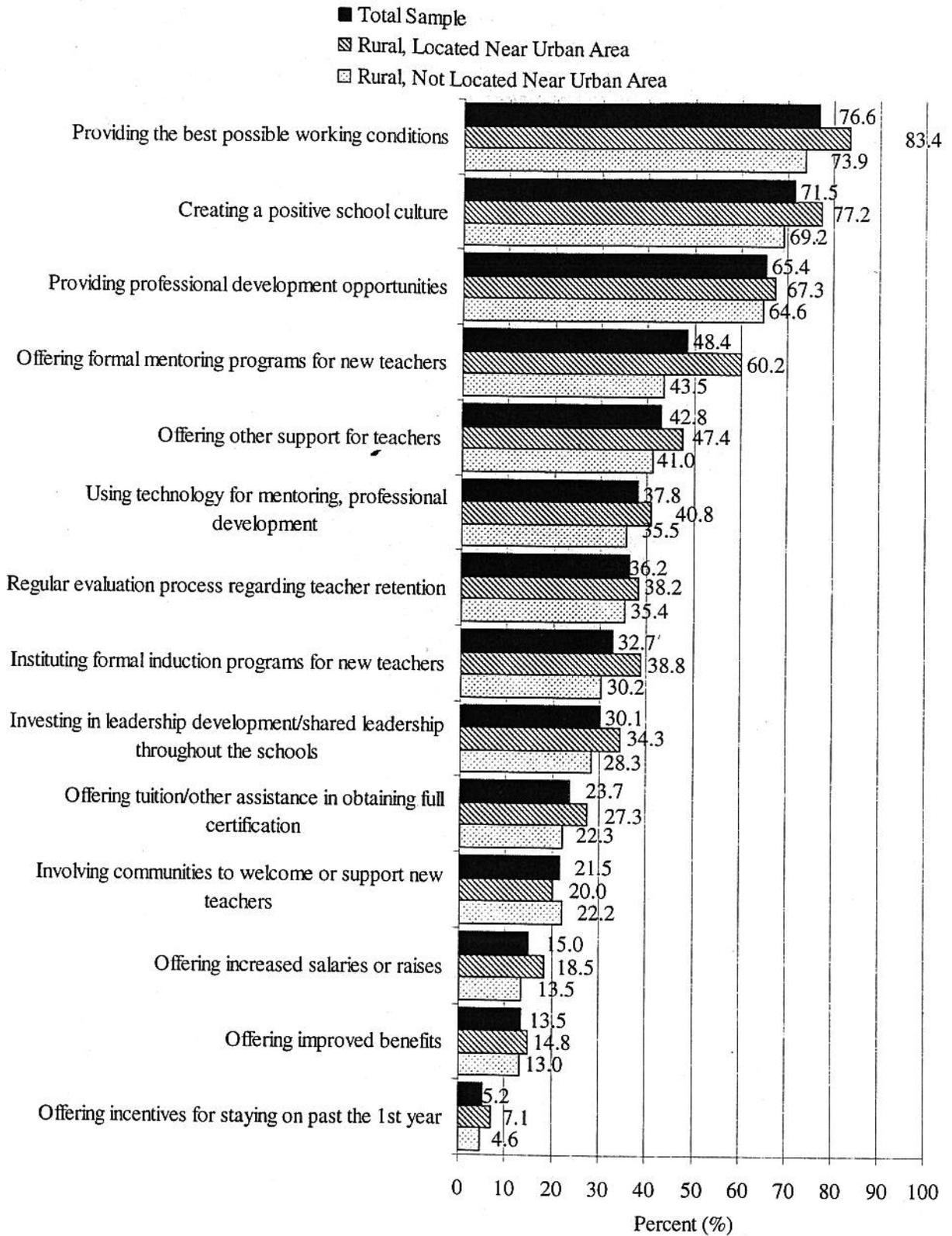


Figure 11. Percentages of Districts Relying on Particular Strategies for Teacher Retention.

Successful Practices

Respondents were asked to identify the three most successful retention efforts used by the district. As shown in Figure 12, creating a positive school culture (20%) and the best possible work conditions (18%) were the most cited retention strategies. The least cited included involving communities to welcome and support new teachers (3%), regular evaluation process for teacher retention (2%), and offering incentive for staying past the first year (2%).

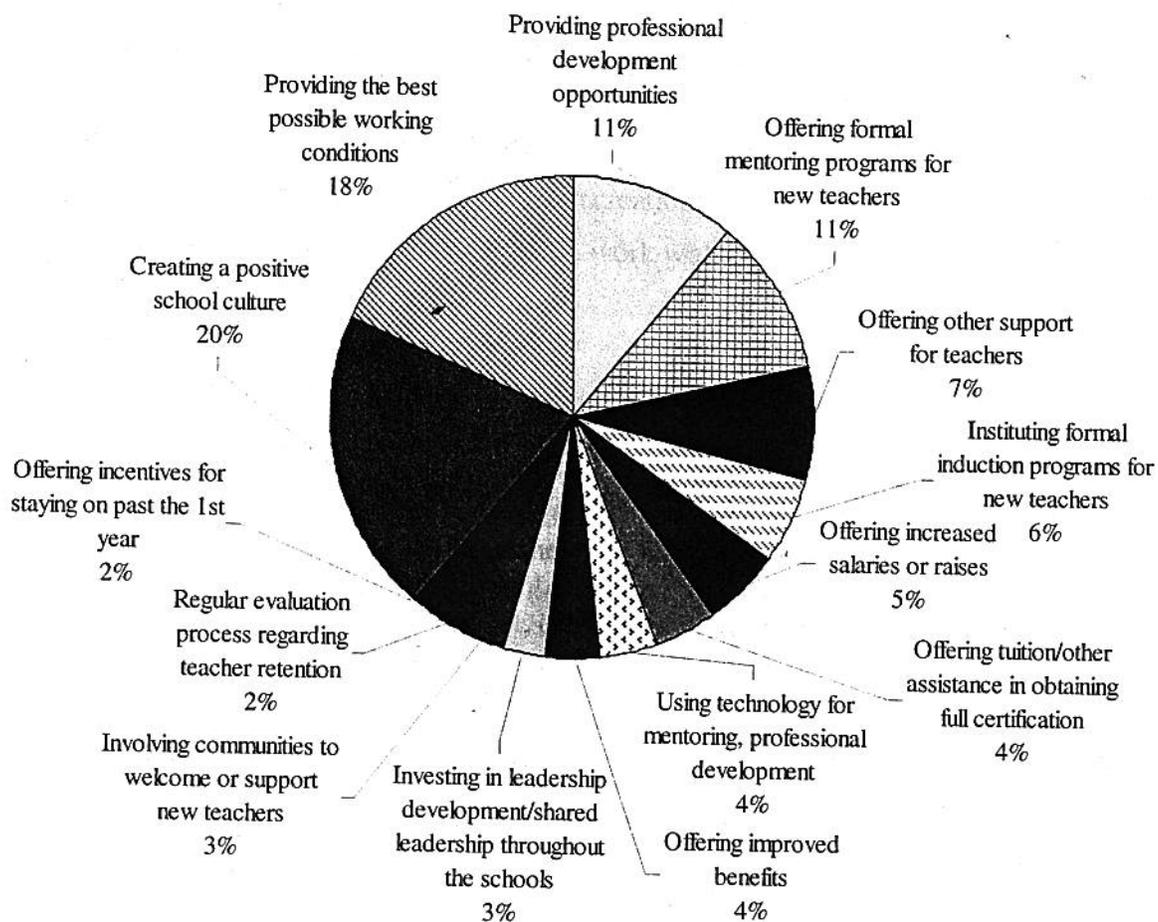


Figure 12. Percentages of Districts Reporting Most Successful Retention Efforts.

Additional retention strategies were also documented (shown in Table 8), indicating that offering more competitive salaries and benefits (40.1%), creating better working conditions (25.9%), and having more support for teachers and their families (14.2%) would be helpful strategies for retaining teachers.

Table 8.

Other Retention Strategies Proposed by District Respondents

Strategy Category	Number of Responses	Percent
Offer competitive salaries/benefits (e.g., opportunities for professional development, extracurricular activities), incentive programs, and recognition of excellence	65	40.1
Working conditions (e.g. positive environment, strong reputation, small class sizes)	42	25.9
School/District support for teachers and their families	23	14.2
Advantages of rural environment (e.g. close to recreational activities)	17	10.4
Collaborate (make it part of a community effort, work with other agencies, use federal funds)	9	5.6
Evaluate the program	3	1.9
Hire locals or those who are a "good fit"	3	1.9

Note. A total of 162 responses were recorded.

Respondents were also asked to report the three major reasons that teachers remain in the district. The most frequent responses, shown in Table 9, include the teacher's level of enjoyment of the job, district, or school environment (49.6%), and the community environment or location (35.9%).

Table 9.

Reasons Teachers Stay in the District According to District Respondents

Category	Number of Responses	Percent
Enjoyment of job or school/district environment	732	49.6
Community environment or location	530	35.9
Salary/benefits	139	9.4
Stability or general convenience (e.g. both partners have jobs in the area, within a few years of retirement)	75	5.1

Note. A total of 1,476 responses were recorded.

Discussion

While there are a number of commonalities in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers among rural districts, there are also a number of important differences. These

suggest that rural districts located near urban areas may face a variety of advantages when compared to districts not located near an urban area.

Common trends among rural districts. Rural districts use similar strategies to recruit and retain their teachers and also experience similar challenges. Rural districts report a high percentage of professional staff who currently meet the “highly qualified” requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act. Despite this finding, results also indicate common difficulties in filling positions for resource professionals (e.g., special education, disability specialists), math, business, and economics, and science. In addition, rural districts also report common difficulties in filling positions in high schools and middle schools but less difficulty in elementary school positions.

Rural districts reported that the most challenging issues related to teacher recruitment are geographic and social isolation, as well as being in close proximity to higher paying districts while paying low or uncompetitive salaries. NCLB requirements, working conditions, and school environment and culture were among the least likely factors to be rated as a challenge to recruitment. The most frequent methods for recruiting new teachers in rural districts were the use of advertising, including statewide and local attempts, and advertising over the Web site or Internet and through personal contacts and networking.

Rural districts in remote locations and near an urban area rely on similar strategies to locate potential teachers, including having building-level staff participate in the recruitment and hiring process, promoting the advantages of living and teaching in a rural area, and offering more competitive salaries. Given the resources present in rural districts, the limited reliance on the use of targeted incentives, housing and relocation assistance, and collecting relevant data on teacher supply and demand is not surprising. Finally, alternative strategies not included in the questionnaire were addressed, with results indicating the importance of promoting a positive school environment and community environment, increased collaborative efforts, better benefits, increased retention programs, and alternative recruitment approaches.

When vacancies are present at the beginning of the school year, rural districts most commonly report attempting to hire qualified staff, followed by hiring teachers in the process of becoming certified and those individuals with temporary licenses. Districts are less likely to increase class sizes, reduce the number of classes, or assign administration to teach courses.

Teacher retention represents an important challenge to rural districts and this is reflected in the reasons why teachers leave their positions. While some superintendents indicate that teachers leave for personal reasons or to relocate, other reasons include poor salary and benefits, dissatisfaction with working in a small school and living in a rural environment, and reduced opportunities. As a result, the most often reported challenges to keeping teachers include having the district in close proximity to higher paying districts, receiving low and uncompetitive salaries, and the geographic and social isolation associated with living in a rural area.

Of those strategies used to retain teachers, rural districts rely on providing the best possible work conditions, a positive school culture, and professional development opportunities. District superintendents also indicate that other strategies to increase

retention should include offering more competitive salaries and benefits and better working conditions. Increased support for teachers and their families is used to a lesser extent. Teachers who stay in rural districts are thought to do so because they enjoy their position, the overall school and community environment, and the salary and benefits or the stability and convenience of being in one area.

Comparisons between districts. Districts located near an urban area have more schools and serve more students than those districts not located near an urban area. These same urban schools also report having fewer students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, indicating that those schools not located near urban areas have substantially more students living in poverty.

Challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers in districts not located near an urban area center around the isolation of the environment. Given these challenges, more rural districts without access to urban areas depend on statewide and out-of-state advertising but are also less likely to offer competitive salaries and are less likely to have an inclusive hiring process than those located near urban areas. More rural districts are less likely to institute formal induction policies and offer formal mentoring programs for newly hired teachers, while also reporting less concern over creating the best possible working conditions for those teachers.

Recommendations

While comparisons between rural districts illustrate different recruitment and retention challenges and strategies, it must also be noted that many of these differences might reflect fewer available resources. Without the means to implement some strategies, rural districts not located near an urban area may be more disadvantaged than those districts located near urban areas.

While some teachers in rural areas may enjoy the stability and convenience of their work and the areas in which they live, results consistently indicated that the geographic and social isolation associated with living in a rural area presents a barrier to recruitment and retention. Interventions in more rural districts should focus on building an increased sense of community within the school as well as the community as a whole. Other initiatives for districts not located near an urban area should focus on offering more competitive salaries for recruits, formal induction programs, and mentoring programs for new teachers.

Virginia Programs Supporting Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Virginia

In 2002, Virginia received a 3-year, \$13.5 million federal Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant to develop and implement strategies to train and retain high-quality teachers. The grant was used to fund five recruitment and retention efforts: the development of a data collection system on teacher and teaching quality indicators, the development of a three-tiered licensure system, the development of an incentive-based funding system that rewards colleges and universities with teacher preparation programs responsive to the needs of schools, the retention of new and experienced teachers through mentoring programs, and the creation of programs to reduce teacher shortages in high-poverty urban and rural areas. The grant allowed the state to build on already-existing efforts, including the Career Switcher Program and the Mentor Teacher/Clinical Faculty Program, aimed particularly at hard-to-staff schools.

This report describes three of the programs supported by the grant and the experiences of seven rural Virginia school divisions participating in at least one of these programs (see Appendix for methodology). The programs include the Teachers for Tomorrow Program, a precollege recruitment effort; the Career Switcher program, aimed at attracting mid-career teacher candidates; and the Teacher Mentoring Pilot Program, supporting a variety of new teacher induction programs.

Each of the programs is in the early stages of implementation; and, therefore, scant data exist to indicate their overall effect on teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas of the state. However, the experiences of these schools and divisions can shed some light on the potential of these programs for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers to rural areas, as well as some of the continuing challenges. The experiences of these schools and divisions provide valuable information for state departments of education, state legislators, and other policymakers working to ensure that hard-to-staff rural schools have the resources and tools they need to attract and retain high-quality teachers.

Teachers for Tomorrow

Modeled after the South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program, the Teachers for Tomorrow program is a precollege recruitment initiative targeted at academically talented rural high school students to introduce them to and support a career path into teaching. According to the Virginia Department of Education Web site (n.d.), the purpose of the program is

- To identify, train, and nurture high school students interested in a teaching career
- To support the efforts of Virginia's school divisions to meet hiring targets by cultivating an effective "grow your own" recruitment program
- To create a high school curricular experience designed to foster student interest, understanding, and appreciation of the teaching profession

- To attract students to teaching in critical shortage and high needs areas of the state

The primary goal of the Teachers for Tomorrow is to encourage academically able students who possess exemplary interpersonal and leadership skills to consider teaching as a career. The program is offered to high school juniors and seniors interested in pursuing a career in education. However, it is not open to all students. To enroll in the program, students must complete the following eligibility requirements:

- Have and maintain a minimum 2.7 grade point average or its equivalent
- Submit three satisfactory teacher recommendations
- Submit a brief essay and application

In addition, some programs have partnerships with colleges or universities and grant college credit for completion of the course.

The Teachers for Tomorrow Program is a long-term “grow your own” recruitment strategy to increase the pool of teacher candidates to fill critical vacancies, increase the diversity of applicants, and promote the hiring of local candidates who are more likely to remain in the area. The rationale underlying the program is that it is easier to retain teachers who have deep roots in the community. The majority of students interviewed for this study expressed a desire to return to their community to teach.

I would like to teach in this county because it's so close to home. I know the teachers, I have had the teachers. I could ask questions and not worry about it. (student)

I guess I could go anywhere, but I really want to live here and raise my kids here. (student)

I'm invested in the community because I'm from here. (student)

You know all the teachers. It's like a family. You get a one-on-one with the kids. In a big city, they don't have that. (student)

You can tell a difference in small towns. I see my students out in public. They always remember you. They always come running. (student)

The program engages students in a year-long (or the equivalent) course focused on teaching and the teaching profession. Currently, Virginia uses the South Carolina curriculum, but has been exploring the development of a Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow curriculum. The Teacher Cadet curriculum includes sections devoted to child development, cognitive learning, pedagogy, and education history. Students engage in seminars, group projects, and discussions with educators. They observe classrooms, teach practice lessons, and tutor other students.

For many students, the course provided a way to explore a potential career. Some students were already thinking about education as a career, while others had not considered that career path prior to taking the course. Yet, all of the students interviewed explained that they now have a deeper understanding of what it is to be teacher. For most of the students, this resulted in a desire to pursue education as a career. Others were glad to have the opportunity to learn about the field and now know for certain that they do not want to be teachers.

Just in general, if you are going into a career, it's a good idea to know about it rather than blindly going into it. It's definitely a good thing for people who want to be teachers. (student)

I am going to be an elementary school teacher now. I was going to be a broadcast journalist. (student)

I never thought about teaching. Not once. I didn't think I would teach. I just fell in love with it. I substitute at the primary school. I'm trying to get where that is what I am doing. (graduate)

I was undecided on what I wanted to do for college. I thought this class would help me decide. I thought I could be a teacher. And now I am going to be a teacher. (student)

We got to work with the special needs-classes downstairs. We tutored them [high school special-needs students]. It made me think that I kinda wouldn't mind doing that. (student)

I was thinking about being a kindergarten teacher. Now, I don't think I would have the patience for it. (student)

Students reported that they learned a great deal about the work of teaching. Many explained that they saw the teaching profession as difficult and challenging, yet appealing.

Before, I never would've considered being a teacher because, high school students don't give their teachers respect. I want to be a teacher now, not high school, just elementary. I see how high school teachers are treated. It's one of the most respectable jobs you could have. That child's education is in your hands. (student)

It's hard...trying to fit with SOLs. I found out it's a lot harder than you can imagine...trying to find lesson plans. I think it will be a very exciting, enjoyable experience. (student)

My view of kindergarten teacher has changed. I thought they had it easy and all they did was color. I've learned that it's not as easy as people make it out to be. (student)

I think a lot of people think it's easy...summers off, work until 3. I understand that it's a lot more than that...with my practicum and other things. You have to grade papers and do lesson plans. I know I want to be a teacher, I don't mind putting in the time. (graduate)

People don't understand all that teachers do. Without it, I would never have decided what I wanted to do. (student)

I thought teaching was laid-back occupation. I saw that you have to be very physical to be kindergarten teacher. There's a lot of work outside of classroom. (student)

For me, it was an introduction, sort of an orientation to education. It was nice because she didn't spend a lot of time on one thing. We talked about

the logistics, the paperwork. It was good to know what I had to expect. I had to evaluate myself if I wanted to do this. Finally being able to say yes, I want to be a teacher. (graduate)

It's a good class. I'm more into the math and that stuff. It was interesting and made me think about things... that not every student is the same. You have to do things different. You can't just stick with one way of teaching. (student)

The students particularly enjoyed the hands-on experience they gained by being in the classroom as part of their field experience.

Learning how to deal with problems in the classroom. I never thought about how to resolve problems. Doing the field experience I saw how teachers do it. (student)

The best part is when we get to go to the elementary schools. You get so much hands-on experience. (student)

I loved it. It was the best class. It was so much fun. There was never a dull day. You don't just sit down and listen to lectures. You get to have hands-on experience. (student)

The teachers explained how the curriculum helps the students learn about teaching and the teaching profession.

We teach them about the school system, the hierarchy, the state department, different things about the state department. We have an activity, "who decides." They have to figure out who decides who orders textbooks or new uniforms or to call off school because of snow....Then we teach them about students, how students come from different backgrounds, face different challenges, have different challenges. We show them what it is like to be handicapped. (teacher)

We use different activities to show them different instructional strategies....We play a game called the "label game." I put a label on each of their heads. They say "scold me", "ignore me," "I'm a genius." They don't know what their label says...to give them a sense of how expectations affect students....We tell them what it takes to become a teacher—education, testing, colleges that have teacher programs, mock job interviews. We try to have some of the supervisors come and talk to them about teaching and administration. They come to understand the requirements the teachers have to fulfill. (teacher)

They teach a lesson to their peers. That's their first experience with teaching. It's a 10-minute lesson. Then they go to the primary school, to a specific class. The teachers put them to work. They will tutor students, read to them. They get to teach the class one day. They spend about 20-22 days in the primary school. (teacher)

The last few days of the semester, I spend teaching them about classroom management and discipline, different learning styles, multiple intelligences. (teacher)

Although teachers felt that the class provided them with a deeper understanding of the teaching profession, when asked to identify the most valuable thing they gained from the course, many students cited an increase in self-confidence and an ability to work with others. According to their teachers, helping students develop those qualities and skills is an important part of the course.

The main objective is to first teach them of their self-worth, introduce some of the aspects of teaching, then to encourage them...to show them how important it is to make a difference, to use resources to encourage others to do their best. We spend almost an entire 6 weeks teaching them their self-worth.... It's so hard for them when they first come into class to stand up and speak in front of a group of people. We do a lot of pair work and group work. They draw names so they are not with the same students all the time. (teacher)

We try to do all those extra things. It goes back to the [idea of being in a] club, being in this group. The South Carolina program really emphasizes that—that bonding, relying on each other.... Once they go through this program, whether they go into teaching or not, they are going to be a lot more confident. At the beginning, they are apprehensive about stepping up and taking charge, speaking in front of groups. They start in our class, and then they move out to strangers. It's those leadership qualities that are not only with teaching, that can benefit them.... It's a group thing. The first part of the class is getting them to work as a group. I had one girl cry when she had to go in front of the class, for two weeks. She couldn't do it. Finally, I said we won't watch you; we will stare in the opposite direction. The reason she couldn't do the assignment was that she didn't believe that she had a friend. There's lots of emotion in this. It's more like a club than a class. It's totally unlike any traditional thing. (teacher)

When I do their open-ended exam at the end, they say, 'this changed my life.' It does have a big impact on many of them. (teacher)

The students explained the impact the course had on them:

It's the best class I ever took. It had more of an impact than any other class. You learn things about yourself. (student)

...knowing that everything is not always the same, not always a straight line. You have to learn how to accept things that are different. (student)

Big time, self-confidence, and a greater speaking ability. There was a lot of teamwork, a lot of cooperation.... When we finished the big book, we helped the ones who hadn't finished theirs. (student)

The activities to boost our self-esteem. We made a pocket for self-esteem. Everybody in the class would write notes to each other about what we thought was good about them. That was good. (student)

It was one of the better classes that I've had in this school. We had a lot more freedom. A lot of other classes, the classes that we have to take, there's so much learning diversity. We have to go slower for students who were slower. In this class, a lot of kids were on my level. We could work together. We were always caught up and always wanting to learn more. I took an orientation class [in college], a one-credit class. The Teacher Cadet class was definitely better. It [college course] was busy work. We never did anything meaningful. I got a lot more out of teacher cadet. I could use the information a lot easier. It helped me decide that I wanted to be a teacher and helped me with my classes now. (graduate)

It's a positive experience. For people considering going into the field, it might help them decide. Also, for people who aren't considering being teachers. Helps you deal with children and people in general, develop social skills and patience. (student)

I learned to stop and think about what I am saying before I say it, especially with children, but with people in general. (student)

An important secondary goal of the South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program is to provide talented future community leaders with insights about teachers and schools so that they will be civic advocates of education. The comments of the students interviewed suggest that they have developed an understanding as well as a respect for teachers and the teaching profession that they are likely to carry with them into whatever careers they choose.

The students explained the difficulties of high school students being present in middle school or high school classrooms as part of their field experience, but they wanted exposure to the upper grades. They also expressed concern that students interested in teaching at the high school level do not take the class because of its emphasis on elementary grades.

There was a boy in our class on the first day of class. He took acting instead. (student)

Boys don't want to do it because of the reputation. That's sissy work mentality....Elementary schools don't have many male teachers. (student)

I have a friend who wants to be a high school teacher and she didn't take it because of that. (student)

It's positive for our age. I could never see myself helping out in a high school where I knew people. You'd be seen as the teacher's pet. (student)

We have heard from some of the boys...they would like something more on the middle school level....I would like to branch out into middle school. But I don't know how that would happen. It would be a different class. (teacher)

When asked what they did not like about the class or what could be done to improve the course, students' expressed a desire for a year-long course, more field

experience, and less emphasis on the elementary level. The (SC program) class is taught one period per day for a year, or the equivalent of that amount of time. All of the schools in this study operated on block scheduling, so the course was taught in one semester.

It was a basically an introduction class and tried to cover everything. It's hard to do in a one-semester class. We had to do portfolios. We had to create lesson plans. (student)

It wasn't 'til the last part of the semester we were put in the elementary school. (student)

It would have been hard for us to be in classrooms with kids our age. (student)

I would have liked to have stayed at the schools a little longer, maybe teach a little longer. It should be a full-year class. (student)

It should have been a year-long thing. We had so much stuff to do and cover. You didn't have enough time. (student)

Have more field experience. If we could start from day one and learn while you are there instead of having the last 3 weeks. If possible to have a semester of learning and a semester of field experience. (student)

A two-block class...then you have more time for field experience and have more time with the kids.... We didn't get to see all the different things the kids do during the day. I would like opportunity to have more full days. I would enjoy having more experience. (student)

I wish we would've had more lessons to teach than just two. The first step to getting over nervousness is to do it more. (student)

More time in the classroom. You are supposed to have 20 or 25 days in there. I think it should be more than that. I learned more by being in the classroom. Someone can describe it to you, but hands-on really lets you know how it is. (student)

The teachers explained that the primary challenges they face are funding and, in some more remote areas, lack of coordination with colleges and universities, and the distance between the high school and the elementary schools where the students gain their field experience. Training and other program costs are currently supported (through September 2006) with funding from the Governor's Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant, and, at this time, it is unclear how the program will be funded after 2006.

The county doesn't fund it [Teachers for Tomorrow program] much. The principals have been very generous in providing some of the material, art type materials, things for making the preschool models. We make those big books. The school provides all that. As far as transportation, the kids share. The county doesn't provide funding for that kind of thing. Anything like notebooks or folders, we don't charge them for any of that. They do a lot of observations in all areas before they stay to work. I let them go alone. Once they start teaching, I go. I just stop by and look in. I

stay in contact with the teacher that's there. I want them to feel that it is their responsibility, their job. That's three schools. They have to teach one class by themselves. I go and evaluate them. I go when I can because I have classes here. I don't get reimbursed. (teacher)

The county gives us money to buy supplies. We also have to have a supply of children's books and games. We put a notice in the paper for books, games, and craft materials. The biggest problem is that I don't have a room that is well equipped. I have to teach the class in a computer room with no table space, no work space. (teacher)

They spend their own money in this class. The school provides quite a bit as far as material. They do a model of a school, a preschool, they make it. We buy part of the stuff, but they want more. They compete against each other. They are pretty elaborate. I do feel bad that they [students] have to spend some of their own money. Some students can't afford it. (teacher)

The biggest problem here is the distance and driving. They [students] have to provide their own transportation. In consolidated schools where the middle and elementary school is right there, it's not a problem. But, if you have to drive 15-20 minutes there and back, not much time to do anything while you are there. (teacher)

Our students don't get college credit....In South Carolina, they have a course at a local college that corresponds with their course. We talked to both the community college and [local college], but they didn't have a course to equate it with. (teacher)

Although there are limited data on the Virginia program, studies of the South Carolina program are promising. In a study using a random sample of students, approximately 60 % claimed that they were more likely to become teachers as a direct result of the program. In addition, surveys with students who completed the Teacher Cadet Program indicate an average of 35 percent with plans to pursue teaching as a career. The South Carolina Center for Teacher Recruitment estimates that fewer than 10 % of these students would otherwise have considered teaching as an option (Berry, et al., 1999). In 2004-2005, 53 Teachers for Tomorrow programs across Virginia enrolled approximately 10-12 students each semester.

Career Switcher Program

A 1999 Virginia General Assembly (Senate Joint Resolution 384) resolution requested that the Board of Education study alternative licensure programs in other states and develop an alternative pathway to teaching for individuals who have not completed a teacher preparation program but have considerable life experiences, career achievements, and academic backgrounds. In 2000, funds were appropriated to develop and pilot the first Career Switcher Program. The pilot program was aimed at military personnel who were interested in becoming teachers. In 2001, the program was expanded to include other professions. In November 2001, the Board of Education amended the *Licensure Regulations for School Personnel* to establish the Career Switcher Program, effective

February 2002. By 2005, there were nine programs in the state, including programs at five universities, the community college system, two school divisions, and one consortium. Rural areas are served primarily through the community college and consortium programs.

The Career Switcher programs are designed to attract candidates for critical shortage areas. To that end, the General Assembly enacted legislation in 2004 directing local school boards to survey their divisions annually to identify critical shortages of teachers, by subject matter, and to report that information to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Career Switcher Programs may offer endorsements only in identified critical shortage areas. In 2004-2005, the shortage areas were science, special education, career and technical education, mathematics, English as a second language, middle school, foreign language, computer science, history and social sciences, and reading specialist.

Career Switcher programs do not provide college credit programs. Candidates must have obtained a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution prior to their enrollment in the program. In addition, applicants must have:

- Five years of professional work experience
- Coursework required for the desired teaching area
- Qualifying scores on the professional teachers examinations: Praxis I (or SAT) and Praxis II. (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.b)

Individuals apply directly to the program provider, and the provider is responsible for recruiting, screening, and selecting applicants.

The Career Switcher Programs course of studies includes two levels. During Level I, participants study curriculum and instruction methods, course content relating to the Standards of Learning, differentiation of instruction, classroom/behavior management, and human growth and development. This level involves a minimum of 180 hours of instruction, including field experience. After completing Level I, participants are awarded an Eligibility License and are expected to seek and obtain employment in a school.

The participant is responsible for setting up the field experience. This requirement involves at least 20 hours of classroom observation. Participants arrange with a school division to acquire these hours. Students are required to be actively involved with the classroom in which they are placed. Recommended activities include

- Observation of teaching methods, classroom environment, student behavior, teacher-student relationships, and instructional activities.
- Focused discussion with the supervising teacher about the observations.
- Active involvement with an individual or small group of students.
- Teaching or assisting in teaching a lesson with guidance from the supervising teacher.
- Becoming acquainted with the regulations, procedures, and routines of the public school setting.

Level II begins during the first year of employment. A minimum of five seminars are provided that include a minimum of 20 cumulative instructional hours, expanding the preparation requirements associated with instructional categories and topics. During Level II, a trained mentor is assigned to assist the participant through his or her first year of teaching.

After successful completion of Levels I and II, and submission of a recommendation from the Virginia educational employing agency, the candidate is eligible to apply for a professional license. All Career Switcher programs must adhere to the guidelines established by the General Assembly pertaining to course of study and endorsement areas.

Western Virginia Public Education Consortium. The Western Virginia Public Education Consortium (WVPEC) consists of 19 school divisions in the area from Roanoke west. WVPEC coordinates a number of initiatives promoting collaborative responses to educational challenges in its 19 member school divisions, including a Career Switcher Program.

Because Career Switcher programs are aimed at mid-career professionals likely to be employed, classes are held on Saturday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm at a high school in Salem, VA, and during an intensive 2-week session (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). two cohorts occur each year, one beginning in February and the other in September. The intensive session is held during the last two weeks of June for both cohorts.

The WVPEC supplies some teachers to rural school divisions, but it is not the majority of their graduates. Because the courses are taught near Roanoke, the participants are drawn from the surrounding area, and the majority of them remain in the area to teach. In addition, some candidates are drawn from surrounding rural counties and have obtained teaching positions in those counties.

Virginia Community College System Career Switchers Program. In 2003, the community college system was approached by the Virginia Department of Education about developing a Career Switcher Program. The community college system was an obvious choice to provide a program for rural areas because of its experience with distance education technology and access to rural areas. At that time, the community colleges were also receiving requests from high schools for dual credit courses. These factors provided an opportunity to develop a number of programs based on the same technology. The community college program is designed for the working person who has access to a computer and the Internet. Classes take place online and through compressed video sessions held on five Saturdays during the semester at one of five community college campuses.

In the mid-1990s, community colleges established commonwealth classrooms. These were technology-enhanced classrooms equipped for electronic delivery of instruction, professional development, and meetings. The Career Switcher Program was to build on the existing technology. However, the condition of technology varied by campus. Community colleges had updated their equipment, or not, according to their need. Therefore, some campuses had up-to-date equipment, while others did not. To remedy this problem, the community college system has provided funds, in addition to

those provided through the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant, to hire technicians and upgrade equipment.

VCCS currently has regional advisors based at nine campuses across the state. Only five of these currently operate as sites for instructional delivery. The others are within an hour and a half drive of a site. The regional coordinators act as the students' primary contact for the program, providing assistance during the application process and throughout the course.

Each of these programs provides an opportunity for people living and working in rural parts of Virginia to gain their teaching license without leaving their communities. Those people who are looking to change careers are likely to want to teach where they live. They want to change their careers, but are happy where they are living and would like to remain there. Only one of the six career switchers interviewed for this study wanted to move from where they were living when they started the program.

The majority of Career Switchers interviewed had some relationship to schools and working with youth prior to entering the program. They were attracted to the program because of its condensed time frame and the fact that it was located near where they were living. Therefore, they had a fairly good understanding of what teaching would be like.

I actually have been working with kids for the past few years. I was a crisis counselor at a youth intervention center, after-school programs working on substance abuse prevention, gang violence prevention, etc. I was teaching, just not in the classroom and I wanted to do more with kids. (WVPEC candidate)

When I got out of high school, I wanted to be a teacher. I was an education major in college and planned to teach high school English. Plans don't always work out. I ended up dropping out of school for awhile and bounced around from school to school. I worked for a while, 10 years went by, I was married, and still didn't have a degree. So, I got my degree in business at night. (VCCS candidate)

I did that really just because I wanted to have some kind of degree, wanted to improve my income. I went to work for my dad's company and worked there for 5 years. But I always intended to teach. (WVPEC candidate)

Having taught before, although at the college level, I knew very well that teaching required a lot of work outside of the classroom. I hesitated and agonized a long time the summer before. (WVPEC candidate)

I had subbed 2 years before. Had been in the trenches before I became a teacher. That was one of the reasons I started to sub, if I enjoyed subbing, teaching is easier. (VCCS candidate)

The Career Switcher Program provided candidates an opportunity to complete the coursework necessary for their licenses while continuing to work.

To be honest, I didn't know much about these programs. I found it on the VDE Web site. I spoke to [director] and she helped me. I worked and needed a program so that I could continue to work. (WVPEC candidate)

I heard about the Career Switcher program. I still wanted to teach high school, but it was difficult to pick up the licensure requirements during the day. (WVPEC candidate)

I don't think I could have done it, coming right out of college. I'm 40 years old. I have worked with the building trades program at Pulaski County. So, I had a little bit of a feel for it. I would not have been as prepared coming right out of school. I didn't have the patience. I didn't know what to expect when I got into it, but it's been better than I expected. (VCCS candidate)

Overall, I'll have to say that the program does very well in what it is supposed to do. It's definitely fulfilling a niche. It's difficult to pick up the various classes in the traditional way. (VCCS candidate)

Participants in the program described it as intense. It was most difficult for those who were working. Three career switchers interviewed were teaching on provisional licenses while completing the course. They described the process as extremely difficult. However, they also explained that they would not be teaching if they could not have participated in a condensed program.

The purpose is to do all that you need to do for certification in a limited period of time. For that reason, it is very intense in terms of workload. When I started it, I was already teaching. Most are not. It's too much to do when you are teaching. Many are unemployed and looking for work and have more time on their hands. If you're already a teacher, it's a hard way to hoe. It's structured as a combination of online—thinking and writing assignments, and analyzing what you have thought about—Saturday sessions done through streaming video. There's teaching experience for those who are not already teaching. Overall, the structure is pretty good. (VCCS candidate)

I came here to retire and I know how demanding it is going to be. I was still surprised at how demanding it turned out to be. Besides teaching, there are administrative duties and teacher duties like taking tickets at ballgames. The biggest thing that I have been set back by, it is totally dominating my life. If I were young, I would be saying, I don't want to spend my life like this. Given that I planned to fully retire in another three years, I will do it for that amount of time. (VCCS candidate)

Just the fact that I was working all week and going up on the weekends, and I had homework. It was difficult because of time, how compressed it was. It's compressing a 2-year program into one semester—ran from January until June and then 2 straight weeks, every day—80 or so hours of instructional time. (WVPEC candidate)

We had to do a lot of observing. So you have to fit that in. We had to do at least 20 hours, and had to write up the observations. (WVPEC candidate)

I had looked at other options and was told it was 2 to 3 years before I could get certified. I thought there had to be a better way. I already had a 4-year degree. I had all the math. Once Career Switcher came to be here, I talked with them and was interested. A year and a half sure beats three. It was a lot simpler. (VCCS candidate)

We met every Saturday with some Fridays thrown in and met for 2 straight weeks in the spring. It was very intense. I'm still not through. I'm in level II. The expectations of the instructors are very high. If anything, it is not an easier way to go as far as licensure. I have taken traditional education classes. The Career Switcher program is more intense because the time frame is more compressed. (WVPEC candidate)

While participants in the program had varying degrees of exposure to teaching, all agreed that the instructors in the Career Switcher Program exposed them to the reality of teaching as best they could through their courses.

They would say, 'this is not going to be easy.' You will have these difficulties. They prepared us by telling us these things. A lot of our work was very reflective in handling things, in dealing with classroom management. We had to write how we would set up our room, how we would have things organized. That was a huge undertaking in thinking about it. Once I went in, I had already thought about it and gotten feedback from instructors. (WVPEC candidate)

The instructors, they are so knowledgeable. They've been in the trenches. They've been teachers in the classroom. It was a valuable experience, feedback from them, and encouragement. Her feedback has always been encouraging and good advice. (WVPEC candidate)

Some of the real-life stories...we got such a good perspective of all levels of the school system—working with parents, dealing with administration. (VCCS candidate)

I think that the practical...our instructors were very much into trying as much as they possibly could to teach us the practical things to take from the classroom into our future classroom as teachers. They tried to go from theory to what was practical. But there is no preparing you until you start teaching. They did as well as they could, using strategies like wait time with students when asking questions, how to handle paperwork, how to handle an interview, how to prepare portfolios, discipline strategies, classroom management strategies. What I use with kids in discipline is what I learned from my instructors. (VCCS candidate)

Classroom management skills. Not only do we talk about them, post things online, we are being taught by people who have the experience. All

of them have taught and some have administrative experience. The instruction, delivery was excellent. (VCCS candidate)

As a program administrator explained,

Everything they do in a teacher education program, you are going to find it in a well-run career switcher program. Have mature, experienced adults, have raised their own children. It's about getting them the information they need and getting them out there. That is what adult education is all about. (program administrator)

Teacher candidates also cited the required hours of observation and the interaction with coursemates who were teaching as contributing to their preparation.

Classroom management, the observation. Forty hours of observation. I chose to observe sixth-grade middle school class. We had a teacher who was like a supervisor and had to grade us on what we did. I helped with tutoring and helped with a remediation class for the SOLs. I graded papers. I put grades into the computer. I helped her plan lessons. I handled some discipline problems. (VCCS candidate)

To me one of the really strong points is the opportunity for interaction. Talking with other people who are struggling with how to teach at the middle or secondary level. When I went into high school to do it last year, there was not an opportunity to talk with other teachers. I don't have the time to interact with other teachers. This provides the opportunity. It would be great if everyone were out there teaching and then come back and say, okay, this is how it has worked. (WVPEC candidate)

It's helpful to hear other people's perspectives. What has worked, what has not worked. (VCCS candidate)

A few teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by their first year of teaching:

Thus far, all of my expectations have crashed. I expected the students to be much farther along than they are. The middle of the road student is lagging far behind what I expected. The workload is absolutely tremendous. Our instructors told us, but there is no way you can know until you get in there. I'm drowning in paperwork. I had no idea it would be this busy. There is never a let up. (WVPEC candidate)

I have a whole new appreciation of teachers now. A lot of times people don't realize...they think they work 9-3 and get summers off....people don't understand exactly what teachers do until you are in the classroom. This year will be easier. (VCCS candidate)

Yet, overall, career switchers who are currently teaching reported that they felt well prepared for their first year of teaching.

It's [Career Switcher Program] awesome. The encounters this year, the problems, the expectations from the school, administration, and the students, they prepared us well. A lot of teachers at my school have said,

'I can't believe you are a new teacher.' We wrote lots of papers and did lots of studies, did lots of research. (VCCS candidate)

I have felt more prepared for this than for anything else I have ever done. I have made mistakes. But you can't prepare for every situation. (WVPEC candidate)

It was a wonderful experience and I felt that I could not have been more prepared. (WVPEC candidate)

The differentiation and reading strategies across the curriculum, lesson planning, different learning styles. The program gave you, in addition to the classroom, gave you a sense of working with real kids in a real classroom. The instructors were so knowledgeable. They gave us real-life scenarios that helped. (VCCS candidate)

As part of their Level II program, candidates are provided with a mentor at their school. The mentor is recruited and trained through the Career Switcher Program. While most of the candidates felt well prepared, they reported that their mentor was a great support, helping them get acclimated to the school and their first year of teaching. Some of the Level II candidates were provided with two mentors, one through the Career Switcher program and another through the school division mentoring program.

I have two mentors. My school system requires us to have a mentor for 2 years. She's an art teacher. I have a career switcher mentor and he's the head of our English department. My career switcher mentor is going to be more valuable. My other mentor teaches in the art department. A lot of the questions that I have have to do directly with my curriculum, and his office is right across the hall. (new teacher)

The WVPEC and Community College programs are the only Career Switcher programs currently operating in Virginia that supply any significant number of teachers to rural school divisions. As one candidate explained, he heard about the program from the principal of the local high school:

In terms of recruiting teachers in rural areas, it is very valuable. Principal told me [about] the new program, Career Switchers, so that you can get your license at the same time that you are teaching. I think in concept it's a wonderful program and because it's new and the method of delivery is innovative and high tech. However, there are some problems with that and I think the people involved with it would be very willing to admit it. But, I would not be teaching if I could not do this. (VCCS candidate)

Mentoring Programs

The first few years of teaching can be a very difficult time. New teachers often are assigned to some of the most challenging courses and classrooms while, at the same time, they are isolated from their colleagues. In addition, some feel they have not received enough training to handle certain aspects of their job.

All teachers say the first year is bootcamp plus two. (first-year teacher)

Every administrator or experienced teacher has horror stories about their first year teaching. It's just survival. My first year was overwhelming....There is so much to do whether its classroom management, organization, becoming familiar with the curriculum. Some of our new teachers are teaching SOL classes and the pressure is on from day one....As a person feels overwhelmed, there is a need to find someone to vent with, or give them some answer, or to guide you along. That is the primary purpose of the mentor. Instead of going home and trying to stay away from sharp objects, you can call your mentor and talk about it.
(principal)

The challenges faced during the first years of teaching drive many new teachers from the profession. One response to this situation has been the adoption of programs at the local level to support new teachers. Induction programs provide support to new teachers to help them deal with the many challenges they face and to decrease the likelihood that they will leave the school and/or the profession.

In 1999, the Virginia General Assembly enacted the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act, aimed at supporting educator productivity and accountability. That legislation included mentoring of new teachers, as part of the training continuum for all teachers, and required the Board to issue guidelines for mentor programs and establish criteria for beginning and experienced teacher participation.

Following the adoption of the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act, the Superintendent of Public Instruction appointed a Mentor Teacher Task Force to develop guidelines for the implementation of mentor programs statewide. A 2004 report of the Task Force on the Establishment of a Statewide Mentor Program, *Virginia Requirements of Quality Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Mentor Programs in Hard-to-Staff Schools*, outlined essential components of a mentor program and recommended increased funding for statewide implementation. The General Assembly allocated \$2.75 million to support mentor teacher and clinical faculty programs for the 2000-2002 biennium.

A 2002 report from the Committee to Enhance the K-12 Teaching Profession in Virginia, *Stepping up to the Plate...Virginia's Commitment to a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*, called for the development of standards for training mentor teachers, guidelines for implementing mentoring programs, and plans for the effective evaluation and monitoring of programs. Following up on that report, and with funding through the Governor's Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary, appointed a task force to assist the Department of Education in developing requirements for mentoring in hard-to-staff schools. The result was the *Virginia Requirements of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Mentor Programs in Hard-to-Staff Schools* (2004). Building on the work begun with the *Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs for Beginning and Experienced Teachers*, adopted by the State Board in 2000, the aim of these requirements was to ensure that new and beginning teachers in hard-to-staff schools had the maximum opportunities, support, and professional development to be successful in their first years of teaching. As the task force points out in its report, their work focused on the needs of hard-to-staff schools, but the mentoring requirements are appropriate for developing mentor programs in all

schools. The requirements addressed program design, collaboration and communication, mentor selection and assignment, professional development, responsibilities of school organizations, formative assessment, and program evaluation.

In June 2003, the Virginia Department of Education hosted a mentor teacher institute featuring presentations about proven mentoring models grounded in scientifically based research. In addition, several school divisions shared details of effective models they developed to fit the needs of their localities. All models presented were in accordance with Virginia's guidelines. Following the institute, school divisions were able to submit proposals for funding to develop and/or adopt a mentor model.

The requirements are used by school divisions that qualified for funding under the Teacher Mentoring Pilot Program to adopt proven, research-based mentoring and/or induction programs. Three successful teacher mentoring models and induction programs were piloted in eight divisions and two consortia representing 26 additional school systems: The ETS Pathwise Framework Induction Program, the University of California at Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, and the Fairfax County Public Schools Great Beginnings: Beginning Teacher Induction Program. The Mentor Teacher Pilot Grants totaled \$1,037,188 and were part of the \$13.5 million dollar Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant.

Only the Pathwise and the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project were included in this study. Of the 32 school divisions participating in the pilot program, 26 are categorized as rural or small town. Twenty four of those school divisions adopted the Pathwise or Santa Cruz model. These school divisions participated primarily through the two consortia. As one district administrator explained:

One of the things that happens with rural school divisions is the region becomes important, operating through a consortium. That's the only way we can get grant money.

The department of education monitors progress, provides technical assistance, and coordinates a summer mentor institute to bring people together to examine best practices.

ETS Pathwise. The ETS Pathwise mentoring and support program trains mentors to use structured activities to help new teachers analyze their practice, reflect on results, and make effective decisions. According to the program description, Pathwise combines three elements for supporting teachers:

- a common language for talking about and assessing teaching
- clear and concrete levels of performance to aid self-assessment
- structured events through which beginning teachers, with the assistance of a mentor, can develop and hone their skills.

The program may be implemented in 1 or 2 years, and the training can be delivered as part of a 1 or 2-year implementation model. The training consists of workshops for mentors and administrators, with supplementary course materials provided.

As part of the training, mentors receive materials for conducting seven structured professional development tasks or events with a beginning teacher. These events include a teaching environment profile, establishing a learning environment, assessment of current teaching practice (2 events), individual growth plan (2 events), exploration of instructional tasks, analyzing student work, assessment of professional growth, and sharing ideas and insights. The program is designed to follow a continuous improvement cycle of planning, teaching, reflecting, and applying.

Santa Cruz New Teacher Project. The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project was developed to assist and support new teachers as they enter the profession to improve their skills and knowledge in relation to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession. The program is designed to promote teacher autonomy through the processes of self-assessment, inquiry into practice, reflection, and planning.

Together with their mentors, beginning teachers develop a portfolio that maps out and documents the teacher's professional growth while encouraging reflection, goal-setting, dialogue, and assessment. The portfolio process is meant to help beginning teachers connect teaching, learning, and assessment.

Training is provided through the Mentor Academy over a 2-year period consisting of eight 3-day sessions. Each session has a specific focus. These include foundations in mentoring and formative assessment, coaching and observation strategies, analysis of student work, planning and designing professional development for new teachers, coaching in complex situations, mentoring for equity, artifacts of practice, and teachers of teachers.

According to the description found on the New Teacher Center Web site (n.d.), the program is designed with the intention that mentors meet weekly with each new teacher for approximately 2 hours before, during, or after school. Mentors are also expected to teach demonstration lessons, observe, coach, co-teach, videotape lessons, respond to interactive journals, or assist with problems as they arise. Through these activities, the mentor develops familiarity with the students in the class, the overall curriculum plan, and the organizational environment, to help provide a new teacher with context-specific support. Time outside the classroom is spent planning, gathering resources, providing emotional support and safe structures for feedback, and facilitating communication with principals. This description suggests an assumption of a full-time mentor. In fact, during a training observed for this study, the trainer discussed a program in New York City where teachers served as full-time mentors.

Both the Pathwise and Santa Cruz models follow the process of planning, practice, reflection, and assessment through structured activities with beginning teachers. New teachers participating in both programs describe their experiences in similar ways.

The challenges cited most by first year teachers, whether they followed a traditional or nontraditional path to teaching, were classroom management and discipline. First-year teachers explained that they felt least prepared to deal with these issues and that their mentors provided valuable assistance in helping them learn strategies and gain confidence in classroom management. Moreover, mentors also cited classroom management as the greatest challenge faced by first-year teachers.

The one thing that I was less prepared for was classroom management. But, I don't think any amount of preparation could have prepared me for classroom management. That is something you learn in practice. (new teacher)

The thing that I didn't know I would be unprepared for was the flow of the classroom, to control what happens and keep students engaged. I guess classroom management. (new teacher)

Classroom management is the biggest issue. It's trial and error for them. (mentor teacher)

Classroom management, definitely. The material content was no problem. That's what I went to school for. Trying to figure out how to maintain discipline and classroom management was the big deal for me. (new teacher)

Determining how much discipline I need to be applying, how much discipline the administration expects me to handle, when to get them involved. They have been great. (new teacher)

The main thing I have fought with this year, the battle with discipline. I have all general ed classes. I have students who are anti-academic. I have had problems with parents. I am learning how to be organized enough so that I can wrestle with students with a free hand. The school programs did not prepare me for that. (new teacher)

I would say the biggest one is the classroom management. What seems to be my issue is the discipline. It's not the delivering or what I teach. It's dealing with disruptions when they arise. We have had a few students who have been pretty bent on making disruption. Because I'm a first year teacher, I can't tell whether I'm being too hard or not hard enough because it's my first year. There is nothing for me to gauge. I haven't had any other students. My mentor has given me different ideas on how to check the situation, how to counter the situation, instead of sending a student to the office, send them to the hall to cool down. Something really simple that I didn't think about was to isolate the disturbance. How to hook the kids. That's equally important. To keep them interested; if they are interested, they are probably not going to be causing problems. (new teacher)

Probably one of the biggest challenges is establishing themselves in the classroom. Student teaching is not realistic. New teachers have to set the tone. And they are adapting to different classes. Each class has its different personality. That presents some of the biggest challenges. If they have trouble there, they are going to encounter discipline problems. They usually come out [of college] knowing their material. They are not always prepared to deal with lower-ability students or sometimes average ability. Sometimes they teach to the group that always gets it. (mentor teacher)

One of the biggest issues with mentees is discipline. I only have one mentee this year. Discipline was an issue for her....Just getting the feel of how it is to be on your own. You have been a student teacher and you have had that supervision. Now it's my room. (mentor teacher)

First-year teachers also cited their lack of knowledge about district and school procedures as one of their greatest challenges.

Just learning all of the stuff that you are responsible for that has nothing to do with teaching. Just realizing how much there is to do other than teaching. Not that I couldn't handle it, I didn't know about it until I got here. (new teacher)

Some things I had no clue about. When we go to lunch, the seniors go five minutes early. How do report cards come out? I was a first-block teacher, and report cards come to first-block teachers; I didn't know that. Another thing is tardies. Other than first block, you have to do your own tardies. The office does first block. People don't think to mention these things. (new teacher)

One thing that I can think of that really sticks out as glaring example. I really don't feel that I was prepared for the IEP paperwork, various procedures and expectations, connected with any paperwork that relates to Special Education. I don't feel that I was adequately prepared, but I have a good mentor and she brought me up to speed. She is a consistent source of help. (new teacher)

Politics. There are lots of ins and outs you have to learn. With a lot of it is to learn how to cross your Ts and dot your Is. You have to learn the little things like purchase orders. I try to do newsletters to let the parents know where we are and what our needs are. It has to go through the principal. I had to revise it about three times. He didn't want any indication that we were lacking anything. But we are. I wanted to say what we need and ask for donations. It went from 'here are the things that I need' to 'we have a photography program because of five years of fundraising and donations and we would like to do the same with the art program.' (new teacher)

As one mentor teacher explained, these procedural issues are not emphasized in the formal mentoring program.

Learning their school system and how it operates, learning their students, the pressures of SOLs. Some of the Pathwise program talks a lot about content. A lot of the content is already given to them. They need an understanding of how our school works. (mentor teacher)

The first-year teachers and mentors described the mentoring experience as positive and helpful. First-year teachers described the mentoring experience as supporting them in two primary ways: assistance with specific problems or tasks and emotional support. First-year teachers often spoke of the importance of their mentor in making them feel at home and comfortable in the school. Mentors provided a sounding

board for a wide variety of problems and, in doing that, provided emotional support to the first-year teacher.

The best part was that [mentor] was there when I had a problem. Both of us teach U.S. history. When I struggled, I was able to go up there, and he has been very cooperative in sitting down and guiding. Just having a good teacher there to guide you is what the mentoring program should be about. That has been as great a help as anything. [mentor] has been absolutely great in getting me used to [school division] and how this county operates—every aspect of a faculty member's life. As a first year, I have taken on a lot of responsibility. He has been there to help me with that load. (new teacher)

It's great. It helps me out a huge bit. A lot of people, especially first-year teachers, try to find a group of people to attach onto as a role model. We have the general idea about teaching. We want to be the best we can. Having a mentor program has made that much easier. I haven't had to search that person out and haven't had to deal with someone who has a lack of willingness to do that. I've asked her to observe and she has always complied. She can give me the feedback that I need to improve myself without having the pressure of an administrator doing that. (new teacher)

I would not have been here now if not for the mentoring program. I know I can do other things. If I don't feel that I can make myself good, there is no way I would stay with it. (new teacher)

Mentoring was very effective. I don't know what I would have done without a person to guide me. It was nice knowing there was one person...everyone has been so nice. It has been very helpful. (new teacher)

One of the things that I really benefit from is it is nice to have an ear to bend, to release some of that pressure. You have a bad day; it's nice to be able to blow off some steam instead of taking it home. It's good to show those good moments...hey, I really got through to them today. (new teacher)

It's nice knowing that you have someone to go to. I like that she is not on my team. Knowing there is someone there to listen to you and to be truthful with you. I don't see her unless I need something. It was very comforting at beginning of the year, instead of feeling like you have to bug the principal. (new teacher)

I think it's a great program because you have someone looking out for you. The administration is on our side. From my experience with [mentor], there is nothing I would change. She has done a great job. It has made me feel at home, which is very important. If I didn't feel at home here, that would make my chances of leaving even more so. (new teacher)

When first-year teachers spoke about specific problems or tasks their mentors helped with, these were most often the issues they identified as their greatest challenges: classroom management, discipline, and school and district procedures.

Acclimation is where the use of mentoring program is most beneficial.
(new teacher)

It improves me. I know how to deal with students better, when to put my foot down and when to give them some slack. (new teacher)

[mentor] helped me with a lot of the logistics. A lot of adjustment is with how the school is run. She introduced me to teachers. When you are a teacher, you are stuck in your room and don't see a lot of the school. [mentor] notified me of events not only in the school, but in the community. She kept me well fed. (new teacher)

We meet over lunch, before lunch. She would flag me on things coming up—she has been good at throwing ideas and helping me to become familiar with the schedules. It's somebody that I can [bounce] stuff off of to see if I am doing things correctly. I use her as a disciplinary advisor. I would sit in her class and watch how she handles her seventh-grade class. I could see that it was not just me. [mentor] has been delightful to work with. She has been very helpful in observing and providing feedback, and as a go-between. She can neutrally ask about contacts and that kind of stuff. (new teacher)

Having a strong mentor who knows how things work, knows the administration, knows the ins and outs of the school and the county is so helpful. We had to put together an advisory committee. I didn't know what that was. I didn't know people in [school division]. She was able to help me with that. (new teacher)

My mentor is located down the hall. I was lucky there. We have similar personalities. We kind of mesh in that respect. I probably talk to my mentor about three or four times a week. Those talks vary in length. It depends on what the subject is. I consult her on things like classroom management, testing practices, teaching practices, different theories, and activities. I also consult her on things like the culture of the school, and how to deal with administrative practices. Basically if I have any questions, whether it be someone in the office or how to accomplish something, I ask her. (new teacher)

For the past 2 years, I have had a mentee in the same subject. That is helpful. New teachers don't have resources. I can give him resources and that is helpful to him. I help to keep him on track with the pacing guide. I taught all my mentees how to do Integrated Pro, the computer grade book. My job is to fill in the gaps that new teachers may not know.
(Santa Cruz mentor)

Mentor teachers reported that they benefited from participation in the program as well. The process allowed veteran teachers a way to examine and reflect on their own practice.

It's a very thorough program—it makes teachers look at themselves. I've benefited as a mentor. You look at things, self reflection—how you do things—in a positive manner, not negative—if this didn't work, what's a better way to do things. (mentor teacher)

One of the side effects of all this that I was not expecting is the impact it has had on mentors. I went to the first training session. Some were blown away by the training and said it was some of the best training they have had. They are doing differentiation. We have built in some extra sessions on that. We have experienced teachers getting more excited about their teaching and new teachers seeing some things. (principal—Santa Cruz)

The mentors tend to be more supportive as they go through the program. They gain as much as new teachers. They feel valued, feel that they have been stretched to a new level. It's not a buddy system and they like the professional discussion. Also, it [mentoring program] models the school improvement process. It's congruent with what we are trying to do in our school system. (district administrator)

First-year teachers and mentors participating in both programs cited the more informal aspects of mentoring as the most helpful. First-year teachers, in particular, explained that they often felt that the more structured components of the mentoring programs were not helpful and took time away from other more important tasks.

The informal part of the program was the greatest help to me. The discussions on several sides of an issue and coming to an understanding. That real interaction does the best. (new teacher)

[mentor] was introduced as our mentor. She wasn't an art person, but was very sweet. She has been around for a long time so she knows a lot about computer programs and little things like that. She's like a second mom for me. She looks out for me, stops by to see how I'm doing. She does have an interest in art. She observed my class when I did the Renaissance, and I observed her class when she did the Renaissance. (new teacher)

We have a set curriculum. Pathwise has about eleven modules. It is set up to be a 2-year program; we are trying to do it in 1 year because my mentor is retiring. I find the Pathwise program to be a waste of time. It doesn't address issues that it should. We look at lesson plans, how to do a lesson plan. They [first-year teachers] should have got that in college. A lot of what's in there, they got in college. A lot of times, you take the lesson and put it into the module. It's just making what you got fit their form. (new teacher)

Get rid of the structured curriculum. The benefit is that it does force you to meet. We haven't met here lately....When meeting, they are doing this paper shuffle. I would like more meetings on practical applications. Let's

talk about grading, how to put the grade book together. What's expected from the administration? What's the paperwork that needs to be turned in? Getting a grip on that is much more useful. (new teacher)

Basically, it's a lot of informal meetings. We would talk about things, issues I had in the classroom, what was not working. At certain points throughout the year, she would observe, make suggestions to help me out. Throughout the year, we have met many, many times; if there are issues I wanted to discuss, she would discuss them with me. We worked on different areas—presentation, classroom management and some content. I don't know what I would have done without it. She gave me examples what to do in different situations and how to take care of things before they arose. (new teacher)

I like it. I was impressed by it. Most all of it had really good ideas that I have found helpful, but I have never put on paper. It summarized it to help you present it to a first-year teacher. The only thing I don't care for is sometimes I felt it repeated itself. There's paperwork that's not necessary. A first-year teacher, a thing they don't have is a lot of time. (mentor)

I haven't been happy with the meetings. The first one, they talked about classroom management. This last meeting, they talked about conferencing with parents and handling problems in your class. It has been mandatory. Two hours four more times seems like a lot. I meet with my mentor during planning. We set it up so that our planning times are the same. She makes herself available if I have a question....She's always helpful. In the meetings, the content is not helpful. It's rehashing what we did already through the Career Switchers Program or through new teacher stuff at beginning of the year. I can honestly say that I have not learned anything. I wouldn't mind going if it was something that would help me in my area of concentration, math, help me plan better lessons, help me to find easier ways to teach, that sort of stuff, rather than telling me that there are different learning styles. I know that. I know that if I have an LD student that I need to take that to guidance. I know that I have to differentiate instruction, but help me to do that. Don't just tell me about it. Tell me how to put it into a lesson plan. My mentor helps with that. (new teacher)

A number of first-year teachers cited the classroom observations and the discussions that followed as the most beneficial part of the process. However, for some mentors, opportunities for observation are limited.

She [mentor] has observed my class. That has been very helpful. That is the most beneficial part that comes out of it. We don't need to spend the money to get that. She can introduce me to the resources that are here, the people that are here who can help me with problems. We had lengthy discussions on testing, completers, and follow-up. (new teacher)

All of the schools in this study faced challenges in recruiting enough mentors to match one-to-one with new teachers. Oftentimes, mentors were assigned two or more first year teachers. In many instances the mentor teachers were not in the same subject area as the new teachers, and in some cases not even in the same school. These factors forced the schools to be more informal in their implementation of the program. Meetings between mentor teachers and new teachers did not occur on a regular basis, and often take place over lunch, before or after school, or whenever they have a few spare minutes.

I have three mentees. I drop by the art guy every couple days. Formal meetings...it's usually if they have a specific question. [teacher], I see almost daily because we teach the same subject. The Ceramics teacher, he's in the basement and our plannings don't match. (Santa Cruz mentor)

My mentee is not in this school. We do not have enough mentors in the schools for those schools. There were more mentors here at the high school and none at the intermediate school. Other mentors in the county—[school] did not have any mentors and some of the teachers are having to drive thirty minutes. Our county needs to work on getting mentors in the individual schools. You could do some of that during planning time. We meet after school. Last year our planning times were the same. This semester it's harder. We have not been able to spend enough time. Observation time would have to take half a day and that's added cost to our county. Through the mentoring grant, they will pay for our substitutes. (Pathwise mentor)

The bigger problem with rural areas is the money situation. (Pathwise mentor)

They try to assign mentees by department. Unfortunately, that doesn't always work out. This time I had to mentor a couple of Spanish teachers because we had no one in foreign languages. We have been taught by the Santa Cruz folks that we can mentor anyone. You work with not only first-year teachers, but teachers who are new to the building. We are supposed to do two complete observation cycles each semester. We are supposed to touch base on a regular basis—every week or every couple of weeks. But, by the second semester you won't see them having as many needs or questions. During the second year, you're supposed to be a resource person—not so much in a direct way. (Santa Cruz mentor)

It's hard to dismiss the fact that the nature of our schools, it's a much more difficult thing to pull off in matching a mentor and mentee that doesn't require people to spend less time together. If it's a large school system...we will always have mentors and mentees at the high school because it's a large school. That's a special issue. It's a matter of getting more and more people trained. A lot of people don't want to be trained and wouldn't be good mentors. We do have special issues. (principal)

The only thing that might be helpful would be to be paired up with someone in the same field. Everyone in my department has been really helpful. So, it hasn't been a problem for me in this school. (new teacher)

The mentor teachers had mixed reactions to the mentor training. For the most part, the information provided through the training sessions was seen as helpful in supporting beginning teachers. However, some mentors felt that the Santa Cruz training was disjointed and fragmented.

We had training [Pathwise] that was very good. We talked about lots of problems that may come up. It's very good and very organized. When you do classroom management, there is an exact format you go by when observing, you write things down that students are doing. Teachers may not see those things. That is really good for the mentee; they may not see these things. Lots of phases and programs are worthwhile for the mentee...Takes a lot of time and paperwork. (mentor)

The [Pathwise] training showed how to approach things and make suggestions so that teacher didn't feel as if you were giving them a grade. Stressed that nobody sees this paperwork, it's not an evaluation. (mentor)

It [Santa Cruz training] seems a bit fragmented. We learned last summer how to use these forms and we are still waiting for them. I don't work that way. Two of my mentees don't even have notebooks because not enough came in. They are still waiting on those. I think [school division] was doing fine when they were running their own with [local college]—focusing on differentiation. I like the idea of more formal program—the mentees know what is expected....I like the way they did the evaluation of student work. It would have been nice to have it in September. I like the forms. I like the scripting. I like the idea of doing a seating chart to mark what the students were doing so the teacher could see what was going on their room. (mentor)

They give us pieces of a puzzle [Santa Cruz training]. It's really big on documentation and you are to help the new teacher, not be the person who goes back and forth between the teacher and the administration. Those are good points. We spent six days learning the pieces of the padfolio, the pieces of the puzzle. We actually started with new teachers in the fall. We made some mistakes. They are big on not telling the new teacher what to do, but use questioning words so that the teacher comes up with ideas. He feels more confident and I feel good because I didn't have to give him the information. Some of our mentors are better at playing off the fly than others. There have been grumblings about when they will get things...they don't know who to blame. They still don't have all the forms. (mentor)

Other criticisms of the Santa Cruz training included the length of the trainings and the trainers themselves. The Santa Cruz model used out-of-state trainers. Many of the mentor teachers felt that the trainers did not understand their circumstances and therefore did not address many of their needs.

I can understand the need to space things out. It might be monetary or they might think we can't put all this on you at one time. It has been

spaced out too much that we hurt our new teachers. One of the pieces we got at the last training about student work would have been so helpful at the beginning of the year. That's why we are looking forward to next year so that we can implement these pieces from the start. Three days is a long time. I hate role playing. It's not going to teach me a thing. I don't know where the happy medium is. Three full days is not good. Waiting all that time is not good either. I have issues with [trainer]. She is a northerner, grating, and she doesn't deal with southerners well. I don't want to hear about New York. I want to hear about some place in the South that is doing it. It's great that they are going about this—out there there are areas that can put mentors in full time positions, but that won't ever happen in VA. Why spend so much time talking about how things are CA and NY? The people at my table were saying, "What is she talking about?" The other girl was from CA and told stories about CA. People can't relate to that. If you can't relate to it, you have lost your audience. They started losing them in June. (mentor)

I was very satisfied with the first training. The training [Santa Cruz] itself has been good stuff. I have heard and seen some issues with the trainers themselves. I don't think they were as flexible. They were just kind of short with people. It could have been done better. There aren't any issues at all with the material. A better trainer would have made more improvements. (principal)

On the other hand, the Pathwise program uses a trainer of trainers model. Therefore, the trainers were local or regional people who understand the conditions of rural schools.

When we went to the school training we were trained by the [local school division] training. They understood the whole program and understood how intense it was. They watered it down. Instead of using two hours on something, we talked about it for twenty minutes and moved on. They used lots of technology and interactive videos. It wasn't just lecture. The facilitators would switch off. When we did the intense training [training of trainers] it was like they were beating you down. It wasn't that way on the lower level of training. (mentor)

We went to several sessions—based in [local school division]. [school division's] teachers did the training. We did role playing. We watched video examples of proper ways to ask questions and handle information. Used a variety of ways to show us the best way to handle dealing with mentees. (mentor)

All the training is done by the district. It was in-depth. [district administrator] directed the training. She had two teachers who had previously been trained. We were broken down into small groups and did some role play. It was really well received by everyone. An excellent program. (mentor)

The biggest criticism of both mentoring programs was the amount of paperwork involved. Each module included some paperwork. Both first year teachers and mentors explained that new teachers are already overwhelmed by their circumstances. Adding additional paperwork seems to create an unnecessary burden. The new teachers cited the interaction with the mentor as the most valuable part of the mentoring process.

All those hours infilling out papers didn't do a thing for me. It actually added more strain. (new teacher)

Pathwise had some things that were very helpful. It helped give some direction. It's a lot of paperwork. That is not a plus for beginning teachers. It's another thing. The visits and things helped give some direction. (mentor)

They [first year-teachers] are overwhelmed, especially with paper work, things that teachers take for granted, things that we know and have laid out. With new teachers, it gets laid off and then they are overwhelmed. It's something that you have to learn on your own. Actually the program adds paperwork. The program allows you to ask questions. It's very positive for all teachers. (mentor)

My biggest recommendation—could go for several aspects for first-year teachers—often tends to be the case where the young guy is seen as having a lot of energy—get weighted down and stressed as all can be. Lower the paperwork. Work toward establishing informal communications that could be monitored by other school officials to ensure that is happening. Not working through long series of worksheets. Not have to sit down and work on worksheets. I would like to see more informal meetings about problems you are having. The things on the sheets were not the problems I was having at the time. (new teacher)

Paperwork has helped not one tiny percentage. It covers things that my mentor teacher was doing to begin with. If you have a good mentor, the paperwork creates a strain on both the mentor and mentee. It's hard to find meeting times to sit down and do this. (new teacher)

They give us these forms. We are supposed to sit down and take things down. It's rude to write while some one is talking. When I sit down I need to be talking to you and listening to you and then need to get back to my class. A lot of this won't be implemented, the paperwork aspect. I thought the stems were the dumbest things I had heard, but now I use them. I do use some of it, yes they taught me something. (mentor)

Both mentors and first-year teachers expressed a desire that all parties involved (first-year teachers, mentors, and administrators) be well informed about the program, its purpose and participants' specific roles, prior to the start of the school year.

I think at the beginning, it would be nice for everyone to meet together, mentors and beginning teachers, to explain the program and the ways it could help you. I didn't know about it until I got it in my mailbox. It would have been nice to have an opener. Have all the new people to a

meeting—meet all the new people and mentors—explain the program, what is expected of mentors and mentees. (new teacher)

Mentees need to know what is expected when they come in. It would be nice if they had an idea about what I was supposed to be doing so I didn't have to break that to them. It would be nice if they were told ahead of time. In an ideal situation, you would have someone from the same subject, just because of the resources. Our two geography guys get their stuff from the veteran geography teacher, not from their mentor. (mentor)

I would rather see a first year teacher team-teach for a year. Let them see how a classroom works. Instead of doing student teaching your last semester, just make that first year, not a student teacher, but working with a veteran teacher, visiting other classrooms. One of my mentees did a warm up and it didn't work. I did the same warm up in my class and invited him to see it. The more they can see things like that. (mentor)

The majority of first-year teachers interviewed indicated that they plan to remain in teaching, and most have no plans to leave their current school. As one mentor stated,

If you are in a place where you feel accepted and included you would think twice about leaving. We have a supportive faculty. In other places the faculty is not as supportive. Here people share materials and help you out. It can be a big selling point.

Potential Benefits for Rural Schools

Teacher recruitment. Both the Teachers for Tomorrow and Career Switcher program hold promise for improving teacher recruitment in rural schools. The Teachers for Tomorrow program provides a school division with the opportunity to select the best and brightest students and support their development into future teachers for their division. Once these teachers complete their education, they are likely to return to or near their hometown to teach.

The Career Switcher Program, particularly the Virginia Community College System program, provides an opportunity for mid-career professionals in rural areas to earn their teaching license while continuing to live and work in their home county. The VCCS program's use of technology to provide access in nine counties is a cost effective way to provide opportunities to individuals living in rural areas across the state. Community colleges are accessible to people living in rural areas, whereas many four year institutions are not.

Retention. Recruiting teachers from rural areas to teach in rural schools will likely increase the odds that they will stay in those schools. However, strategies aimed at increasing the supply of teachers are not likely to be effective if they are not supported by retention programs. Recent research indicates that the primary reasons teachers leave the profession are connected to working conditions and professional isolation (Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004; Public Education Network, 2003). This study suggests that the mentor programs currently being implemented in Virginia school provide the kinds of support new teachers need to enhance their job satisfaction. In addition, these

programs can improve teacher practice by helping new teachers apply the knowledge acquired in their teacher preparation programs to the complexities of real-life teaching.

Continuing Challenges for Rural Schools

One of the greatest challenges facing rural schools in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers continues to be funding. The Teacher Quality Enhancement grant has provided funds for the programs described in this report. However, those funds will soon run out. Without continued state or federal support, it is unlikely that rural school divisions will be able to support the programs over time.

The state director of mentoring programs explained that the state department of education is conducting a study on the costs associated with teacher turnover. The intention is that the study will demonstrate to the General Assembly and to school divisions the expense of teacher turnover. "We are hoping that between the general assembly and making the divisions understand what mentoring means for retention [they will put money into those programs]."

Principals and division administrators understand that retention is important. Yet, they feel limited in their ability to implement programs effectively with the amount of funding available to them.

We need to provide mentors time to work with mentees. We need to provide time to get in the classroom with them. All of my teachers have an administrative period....I would like to give them more time...if we could possibly get some help from the state or division to free up mentors....In New York, they hired 400 mentors to do nothing else. If you can retain them 3 years, you have a chance. We need to keep good young people in teaching. (principal)

Rural school divisions do not have access to the kinds of resources available to larger urban and suburban divisions. According to division administrators, the money just is not there. One administrator explained,

The biggest problem is funding. The funding for the school division comes from the Board of Supervisors, our local governing body. They've cut back on funding. We've had a loss of about 50 positions. It has cut us to the bone. There is no money for professional development. But, the superintendent is very supportive of the mentoring program and he has set aside some local money for mentoring, but it's not near enough what we need....The kits are expensive, \$150 per teacher. The mentor kits are reusable, but the new teacher kits are not....Here we have one person that deals with personnel. The mentoring program comes out of the instructional part. It falls under that umbrella. Other divisions have large personnel departments. When I look at what other divisions are doing, I wish we had the money.

For the mentoring programs, the greatest need for funds is in the area of compensation and release time for mentor teachers. As one mentor said,

You have to give teachers time to work with mentees and mentors. You have to have time to go to someone's room to observe them. If it's only before or after school, they are not going to get the benefit.

The Career Switcher Program has the ability to become self-sustaining through a combination of higher tuition costs and grant funding. The VCCS director explained that their greatest need is for more time and resources for the regional advisors and the program coordinator. Regional advisors have incorporated Career Switchers as part of their already existing positions with a community college. The program director also has another position and does the Career Switcher work for release time. The instructors also have other positions and teach Career Switcher courses on top of their other responsibilities.

We need to commit to [the Career Switcher Program] so that people have the time, energy, and focus to do what needs to be done, to have the program stay at the quality it needs to be. That includes faculty. These people are full-time faculty. This is on top of a full load. (program director)

Moreover, the limited resources that are available need to be used in the most effective way. Currently, first year teachers coming out of a Career Switcher program are likely to have two mentors. Both mentors are paid through state funds—one through the school division's mentoring program and the other through Career Switchers. A greater degree of coordination across recruitment and retention programs could eliminate this redundancy and ensure more efficient and effective use of resources.

Both the state and school divisions agree that funding is a critical issue in the continuation of these programs. However, expecting the state to continue to fund these programs or expecting school divisions to find the funds for these programs is not likely to lead to a positive result. The state and school divisions should work together to find funding solutions. By studying successful funding strategies in rural school districts and providing this information, along with support to help implement those strategies, the state could help develop locally sustaining programs.

In addition to funding, it is important that any program include some flexibility allowing rural school divisions to adapt the program to meet their needs. Because rural school districts tend to be smaller and have fewer resources, adopting program models developed in urban school districts can pose problems to effective implementation. It is essential that rural school districts have the flexibility to modify or adapt programs to fit their circumstances. The trainer of trainers model used by the Pathwise mentoring program is a good example of the importance of flexibility. Pathwise mentors expressed a higher degree of satisfaction with their training than the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project mentors. Pathwise mentors were trained by local people who understood the circumstances and conditions within the school divisions as well as how teachers would respond to the various aspects of the training. They modified the training they received to suit the purposes of their schools. The result was greater satisfaction with the training.

The recruitment and retention programs described in this report have the potential to provide a larger pool of teacher candidates to rural schools and to ensure that more of

them stay in the profession and in those schools. Ensuring adequate funding, along with program flexibility, is critical for the continued success of these programs.

Conclusions

This final section revisits the findings of the literature review and compares them to what was learned about the actual practice of rural school districts from the national survey and the Virginia case studies.

The Teacher Shortage in Rural School Districts

According to the 597 responding rural district superintendents, representing a 38% response rate from a randomly selected sample of 1,565 superintendents located in rural districts across the United States,

- About 90% of rural districts had fewer than 10% of their faculty positions vacant each year. About half had fewer than 5% of their faculty positions to fill, indicating relative stability.
- True to other research findings, rural districts had the greatest difficulty hiring and keeping resource professionals (e.g., those working in special education, ESL, counselors, vocational education); mathematics-related subjects (including business and economics); and science.
- These districts also have more difficulty staffing middle schools and high schools than elementary schools; about 11% report great difficulty staffing middle schools and 29% report great difficulty staffing high schools.
- The rural teaching force is generally meeting the requirements of NCLB related to qualifications; 96% are certified and hold at least a bachelor's degree, and 93% have demonstrated proficiency in the subject areas they teach.

Challenges to Rural District Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

As outlined in the first section of this study, the rural-specific literature identified four primary teacher recruitment and retention challenges: lower pay, geographic and social isolation, difficult working conditions, and NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers. Each of these challenges was examined in the national survey of rural superintendents, with the following findings:

- **Lower pay**—Slightly more than a fourth (26.2%) of rural superintendents reported low, uncompetitive pay as a great challenge in their recruitment efforts and slightly less than a fourth (24.8) cited this factor as a great challenge in retaining teachers. Further, a third (33.3%) of rural districts located near an urban area reported close proximity to higher paying districts as posing a great challenge, and even higher numbers—36.9%—of these districts cited it as a great challenge in keeping their teachers. Proximity to higher paying districts was less of a challenge for rural and remote communities; 25.7% cited it as a great challenge in recruiting teachers, 24.4% in retaining their teachers.
- **Geographic and social isolation**—There were major differences between the two groups of rural superintendents related to the challenge of isolation in hiring and keeping their teachers. About 38% of superintendents in rural and remote districts

reported geographic isolation as a great challenge in recruiting compared with only 18% of rural districts located near urban areas; similar disparities existed in the social isolation factor, with a third (33.1%) of rural and remote districts reporting it as a great challenge compared with only 14% of rural districts located near urban areas. Geographic and social isolation showed even lower levels of challenge for teacher retention (compared with recruitment) in rural districts located near urban areas (13.5% and 11.1% respectively). These factors were still strong factors in rural remote districts efforts to retain teachers, though less so (30.5% for geographic isolation and 24.8% for social isolation). This may indicate that it is a larger hurdle for rural and remote communities to persuade people to come into these communities than it is to assimilate them once they are there. Nevertheless, it remains a significant difficulty.

Of these first two factors, low pay is considered by superintendents to be the greatest challenge facing rural districts located near urban areas in both recruiting and keeping teachers, while geographic and social isolation are viewed as the greatest challenges for superintendents in rural and remote districts.

Of far less significance, according to the superintendents, are the other two factors noted in the rural research literature, i.e., NCLB-related issues and working conditions.

- **NCLB-related issues.** The national survey requested responses to three separate NCLB teacher quality requirements insofar as they posed challenges to teacher hiring and retention: subject area proficiency, certification, and degree attainment. Of these, the first requirement is most often identified as a great challenge in hiring teachers: 20% of superintendents in rural and remote districts indicated subject area proficiency requirements as a great concern compared with only 14.2% of superintendents in rural districts located near an urban area. This challenge for rural and remote districts may be higher due to the need for secondary school teachers in small schools to teach multiple subjects. There is little difference between the two groups related to degree attainment and certifications, with about 13% indicating these two factors as a great challenge. Related to challenges in retaining their teachers, NCLB requirements were an even lower-level concern. Rural superintendents identified as great challenges the following NCLB requirements at the following rates: subject area proficiency, 11.9%; degree attainment, 10.8%; and certification requirements, 10%.
- **Working conditions/school environment and culture.** Slightly more than 5% of respondents identified working conditions as a challenge to hiring and 6.7% as a problem for keeping their teachers. Slightly fewer than 5% identified school environment and culture as problematic in hiring, and 6.5% in keeping their teachers. It is well to keep in mind that these were the perceptions of superintendents, not teachers, so there may be some difference in how teachers and district administrators view working conditions.

When asked in an open-ended question what the most cited reasons were for leaving among teachers who stay only a year or two, the top three reasons cited by the superintendents were

- general relocation (e.g., closer to home, spouse relocation, closer to family/friends) and other personal reasons (e.g., marriage, pregnancy), 31.4%
- poor money and benefits, poor job security, better money elsewhere, 23.5%
- dissatisfaction with small school and rural environment (e.g., social isolation), 20.3%

While the first set of reasons could be considered normal attrition, the second and third sets of reasons seem to mirror the findings in the literature and in other parts of the survey about challenges to rural retention.

Strategies for Locating Candidates and Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

The review of the literature on rural teacher recruitment pointed to a wide range of promising practices:

- investing in grow-your-own initiatives
- offering targeted incentives for hard-to-staff schools or subject areas
- offering competitive salaries
- promoting benefits package
- offering housing or relocation assistance
- collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand
- using data analysis to guide recruitment
- including partners in recruitment efforts
- regular evaluation of recruitment initiatives
- collaborating with colleges or universities
- including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes
- promoting the advantages of teaching and living in the area

Respondents to the survey indicated their primary means for locating potential candidates were through statewide advertising, Web site or Internet advertising, local advertising, and personal contacts. There were differences between the two groups of superintendents however, with rural and remote superintendents indicating a much stronger reliance on statewide advertising and rural-near-urban superintendents indicating more reliance on local advertising.

As for how they actually recruit, or persuade desirable candidates to teach in their districts, the three top strategies were

- including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes (35.2%)
- promoting the advantages of teaching and living in the area (35%)
- offering competitive salaries (22.4%)

Regarding the last category, rural districts located near an urban area were much more likely to offer competitive salaries (30.2%) than rural and remote districts (19.2%). A middle tier of strategies included

- promoting benefits package (18.19%)
- collaborating with colleges or universities (14.7%)
- investing in grow-your-own initiatives (including career switchers) (13.6%)

The rest of the strategies cited in the literature review were seldom used.

Related to rural teacher retention, the literature indicated that the following strategies hold promise:

- instituting formal induction programs for new teachers
- offering formal mentoring programs for new teachers
- offering other support for teachers (e.g., administrative support, appreciation programs)
- offering incentives for staying past the first year
- creating a positive school culture
- providing the best possible working conditions
- using technology for mentoring, professional development
- involving communities to welcome or support new teachers
- investing in leadership development/shared leadership throughout the schools
- offering increased salaries or raises
- offering improved benefits
- offering tuition/other assistance in obtaining full certification
- providing professional development opportunities
- regular evaluation process regarding teacher retention

As reported earlier, the most relied on strategies used to retain teachers included providing teachers with the best possible work conditions (73.9%), creating a positive school culture (69.2%), providing professional development opportunities (64.6%), and offering formal mentoring programs for new teachers (48.4%). The least relied on strategies included offering increased salaries, improved benefits, and offering incentives for staying past the first year. Superintendents of districts located near an urban area are more likely to institute formal induction and mentoring programs for new teachers and to indicate they provide the best possible working conditions in order to keep recently hired teachers than districts not located near an urban area. In summary, most superintendents thought their best option for retaining teachers was to attend to the professional experience of the ones they had hired—not in offering financial incentives. This is likely due, in part, to the fiscal realities within which many of these administrators operate.

In considering what was learned from the Virginia case studies, it is notable, first of all, that Virginia focused on three strategies (high school programs to nurture future teachers, career switcher programs, and new teacher mentoring) that seem to have

received only limited attention among current rural superintendents, yet may hold considerable promise. However, if teacher turnover is as low as the results of the survey indicate, rural superintendents likely are making pragmatic cost-benefit decisions about which strategies to employ, and none of these strategies come without a price. Further, some of the programs may need to be fine-tuned to target specific teacher shortages. For example, in the case of the Teachers for Tomorrow program—at least as it was being implemented in the study sites—there was a question about its efficacy in developing future middle and high school teachers. Some students reportedly did not participate in the program, considering it relevant only to students interested in becoming elementary school teachers. Nonetheless, rural superintendents indicated much more difficulty recruiting secondary school teachers than elementary teachers.

Currently the Virginia teacher recruitment and retention programs are supported by a federal Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant, which will run out in 2006. Participating Virginia school divisions will then be faced with a choice about whether or not to allocate their local funds to continuing to support those programs locally. A useful follow-up to this study would be to check back with the school divisions now participating to learn how many continue with the programs after the support runs out, and the reasons for their decisions.

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AEL & NASBE

Rural School Districts: Recruitment & Retention Practices

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about recruitment and retention challenges and best practices in rural school districts throughout the United States. Your responses will contribute valuable information to the national search for effective practices in rural education.

Please read each question carefully and give honest responses. For questions that ask you to give a rating, please circle the number that most closely corresponds with the response for your district.

1. How many full time teaching positions are there currently in your district?
2. How many vacancies are there currently in your district's teaching force?
3. What percentage of teaching positions in your district needs to be filled each year? . _____%
4. What percentage of your district's professional staff currently meets the "highly qualified" requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act? Please give your best estimate of the approximate percentage for each.
 - a. Certification? %
 - b. Bachelor's degree or higher? %
 - c. Proficiency in subject area(s) taught? %
5. Which three (3) subject areas or specializations represent the biggest challenges for your district when it comes to hiring highly qualified teachers? (Please list up to three.)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

RECRUITMENT

6. How much difficulty (if any) does your district have in staffing the following grade levels:

	Not at all		Some		A great deal	
a. Early childhood (pre-kindergarten)	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Early elementary	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Upper elementary.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Middle school.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. High school.....	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors is a challenge for recruiting teachers in your district:

	Not at all		Some		A great deal	
a. Low/uncompetitive salaries	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Geographic isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Social isolation.....	1	2	3	4	5	6

d. School environment and culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Working conditions (e.g., teach many subjects, large classes).....	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. NCLB certification requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. NCLB degree attainment requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. NCLB subject area proficiency requirements.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Close proximity to higher paying districts	1	2	3	4	5	6

CONTINUED

8. How do you find recruits for teaching positions in your district?

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently
a. Job fairs.....	1	2	3
b. Local advertising.....	1	2	3
c. Statewide advertising	1	2	3
d. Out-of-state or national advertising	1	2	3
e. Website or Internet advertising.....	1	2	3
f. Job banks.....	1	2	3
g. Personal contacts or networking	1	2	3
h. References from other districts	1	2	3
i. Relationships with colleges or universities.....	1	2	3
j. Unsolicited résumés or references	1	2	3
k. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3

9. Which of these contact strategies have been most fruitful? (Please indicate choices by letter.)

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (Other) _____

10. Please rate the extent to which your district relies on each of the following strategies in teacher recruitment efforts:

	Not at all		Some		A great deal	
a. Investing in "grow-your-own" initiatives (e.g., helping paraprofessionals earn certification)	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Offering targeted incentives for hard-to-staff schools or subject areas	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Offering competitive salaries.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Promoting benefits (including insurance, daycare assistance, and/or tuition assistance)	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Offering housing or relocation assistance	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Using data analysis to guide recruitment	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Including partners in recruitment efforts.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Regular evaluation of recruitment initiatives	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Collaborating with colleges or universities (e.g., to customize teacher education programs)	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. Promoting the advantages of teaching and living in the area	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

11. Which of these recruitment strategies have been most successful? (Please indicate choices by letter.)

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (Other) _____

12. What other recruitment strategies (other than those listed above) has your district tried that you think might be beneficial for other rural school districts in the United States?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

(Please include additional sheets or descriptions if necessary)

13. When there are vacancies in your district at the beginning of a school year, how likely is your district (or schools within the district) will rely upon each of the following actions to fill vacancies? **CONTINUED**

N/A This item is not applicable for my district. (Please skip to the next question.)

	Not at all		Somewhat		Extremely	
a. Hire certified, qualified teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Hire substitute teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Hire teachers with temporary licenses.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Hire teachers with certification in progress.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Hire retired teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Increase class sizes.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Reduce the number of courses offered.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Increase the number of classes assigned to current teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Increase the number of teachers' aides.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Assign administrators to teach classes.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

RETENTION

14. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors is a challenge in retaining teachers in your district:

	Not at all		Some		A great deal
a. Low/uncompetitive salaries.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
b. Geographic isolation.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
c. Social isolation.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
d. School environment and culture.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
e. Working conditions (e.g., teach many subjects, large classes).....	1	2	3	4	5 6
f. NCLB certification requirements.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
g. NCLB degree attainment requirements.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
h. NCLB subject area proficiency requirements.....	1	2	3	4	5 6
i. Close proximity to higher paying districts.....	1	2	3	4	5 6

15. Please rate the extent to which your district relies on each of the following strategies for retaining teachers:

	Not at all		Some			A great deal
a. Instituting formal induction programs for new teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Offering formal mentoring programs for new teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Offering other support for teachers (e.g., administrative support, appreciation programs)	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Offering incentives for staying on past the 1 st year	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Creating a positive school culture.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Providing the best possible working conditions.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Using technology for mentoring, professional development.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Involving communities to welcome or support new teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Investing in leadership development/shared leadership throughout the schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Offering increased salaries or raises	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Offering improved benefits.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. Offering tuition/other assistance in obtaining full certification.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. Providing professional development opportunities.....	1	2	3	4	5	6
n. Regular evaluation process regarding teacher retention ..	1	2	3	4	5	6
o. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

16. Which of these retention efforts (listed in the previous items) have been most successful? (Please indicate choices by letter.)

CONTINUED

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (Other) _____

17. What other retention strategies has your district tried that you think might be beneficial for other rural school districts in the United States?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

(Please include additional sheets or descriptions if necessary)

18. Thinking about teachers who leave the district shortly after they are hired (within a year or two), what are the typical reasons they do not stay? List up to three reasons, if applicable.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

19. Thinking about teachers who stay in the district, what are their typical reasons for doing so? List up to three reasons, if applicable.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

Which code best describes the locale of your district (please select only one):

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| (1) Large City | (5) Large Town |
| (2) Mid-size City | (6) Small Town |
| (3) Urban Fringe of Large City | (7) Rural, not located near an urban area |
| (4) Urban Fringe of Mid-size City | (8) Rural, located near an urban area |

How many schools are included in your district?

Approximately how many children do the schools in your district serve?

Approximately what percentage of children in your district qualify for free and reduced-price lunch?
.....%

Thank you for your time and insights!

Please use the included reply envelope to return your completed questionnaire,
or send your completed questionnaire to AEL at:

P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
Attn: Georgia Hughes

All information and data gathered in this survey will be analyzed and reported at the aggregate level. We will not associate your responses with you or your district. Neither you nor your district will be identified by name in any reports resulting from this survey.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact Dr. Merrill Meehan, Chair of the AEL IRB (800-624-9120, ext. 5432 or meehanm@ael.org). Other questions may be directed to Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413).

Thank you for responding to this survey about teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts throughout the nation!

We might like to contact some respondents to this survey to get other information and insights about how rural school districts are meeting teacher recruitment and retention challenges and other efforts related to the NCLB legislation.

May we contact you about your experiences and opinions? If so, please tell us how we can best contact you:

District: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Address

1: _____

Address

2: _____

City, _____

State: _____

Zip: _____

Signature _____

My signature on this form indicates that I have read and understand the information provided to me on the included information sheet concerning the follow up telephone interviews. By signing, I further indicate that I am willing to have AEL researchers contact me. I realize that I may decline to participate in the interview when AEL staff members contact me or that I may cease participation at any time during the interview.

This sheet will be separated from your questionnaire when it arrives in our office. We will take every reasonable precaution to protect the confidentiality of your questionnaire responses by keeping your name and contact information separate.

Thank you!

National Survey of Approaches to Rural Teacher Recruitment & Retention

If you are agree to participate in a follow-up telephone interview, you need to know:

AEL staff members, partners, and consultants are examining teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts. Research partners include Michael Hill, senior director for the Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education at the National Association of State Boards of Education; Patricia Hammer, AEL director of communications and policy services; and Georgia Hughes, AEL Research and Evaluation Specialist.

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about what tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts and what shortfalls in filling vacancies they continue to face. We are seeking your input and additional feedback because, as a rural district leader, we believe you have valuable information that will contribute to a more detailed understanding of the topic.

If you agree to participate in a follow up telephone interview, you will be asked to respond to interview questions related to teacher recruitment and retention. The interview should last for approximately 20minutes. There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

You will not receive direct compensation for participating in this research. However, the knowledge developed through this research study – including information and insight you provide – is expected to help state, federal, and district policy makers and decision makers to better understand challenges and solutions rural district administrators are facing and finding.

All information gathered through this study will be reported at the aggregate level; at no time and in no way will your name or the name of your school or district be reported or associated with the data. AEL will take all reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality of your responses, including the following procedures: coding your identity and keeping your name and all identifying information in a locked filing cabinet separate from your responses; storing electronic data in restricted access files or on disks in a locked cabinet; storing all paper copies of interview(s) in a locked filing cabinet. Raw data will be stored for three years, after which time electronic files will be erased and paper files will be shredded and disposed of appropriately. The only persons who will have access to your verbatim comments and notes from the interview(s) will be Georgia Hughes and Patricia Hammer.

These procedures, designed to protect your rights, will be monitored by AEL's Institutional Review Board, which has the authority to inspect consent records and data files only to assure compliance with approved procedures.

If you choose to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview, you may change your mind and decline to participate at a later time. You are under absolutely no obligation to complete an interview and may decline or stop participation at any time before or during the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Patricia Hammer at 800-624-9120 ext. 5437 or hammerp@ael.org. For information about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact Dr. Merrill Meehan, AEL IRB Chair, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348 or call 1-800-624-9120 ext. 5432.

Pre-Notice Letter:

May 20, 2005

<Superintendent>
<School District>
<Address>
<City, State Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>,

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) has partnered with the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) in Charleston, WV to take a look at teacher recruitment and retention strategies in rural school districts throughout the United States. Pat Hammer, AEL Director of Communications and Policy Services, and Georgia Hughes, AEL Research and Evaluation Specialist, will be collaborating with me to survey rural districts like yours. Your school district has been randomly selected to participate in this important project.

In about a week, you will receive in the mail a brief questionnaire. The questionnaire, which should take only a few moments to complete, asks for information about recruitment and retention strategies used in your school district, any difficulties your district contends with, and successful practices that you would like to share with rural educators around the country. A postage-paid return envelope will be provided to send your responses directly to AEL.

We hope you will invest a few moments to complete and return the questionnaire. Although we are unable to compensate you directly for your participation, your experiences and insights about recruitment and retention practices and needs in rural districts will contribute important and valuable information to the national search for effective practices in rural education.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you do not receive a questionnaire within two weeks, please contact Georgia Hughes, a Research and Evaluation Specialist at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413 or hughesg@ael.org). Georgia will be happy to respond to any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and commitment to education.

Sincerely,

Michael Hill
NASBE Senior Director, Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education

1st Survey Mailing (include questionnaire & AEL-addressed, postage-paid envelope):

May 25, 2005

<Superintendent>

<School District>

<Address>

<City, State Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>,

About a week ago, I alerted you that your district has been randomly selected to participate in an important study regarding teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts throughout the United States. The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) and NASBE are collaborating on this important project to discern what tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts and what shortfalls in filling vacancies they continue to face. The findings of this project will be shared with policy makers and administrators throughout the nation.

Enclosed with this mailing, you will find a brief questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope. Please take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and return it to AEL in the enclosed envelope. As a rural school district administrator, your insights and experiences are crucial to helping us gain a better understanding of teacher recruitment and retention strategies, successes, and needs in rural America.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and should involve no risks to you that are greater than those you encounter every day. All information gathered through this survey will be reported at the aggregate level; at no time and in no way will your name or the name of your school district be reported or associated with the data. The data will be stored in secure locations at AEL's Charleston, WV office until the results of the research have been fully reported; only authorized AEL researchers and NASBE staff will have access to the data (which will not include your identifying information)*. AEL and NASBE will take all reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality of your survey responses.

Again, I hope you will invest a few moments to complete and return the enclosed questionnaire. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please call Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413). Georgia will be happy to respond to any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and participation in this important project!

Sincerely,

Michael Hill

NASBE Senior Director, Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education

** AEL's Institutional Review Board has the authority to inspect consent records and data files only to assure compliance with approved procedures for the protection of research participants.*

1st Reminder Postcard (4 x 6''):

June 3, 2005

A couple of weeks ago, you should have received a questionnaire from AEL and NASBE asking for information about your experiences recruiting and retaining educators in your rural school district. If you have already completed and returned your questionnaire, please accept our thanks! Your responses will give us useful information to share with policy makers across the United States.

If you have not yet had an opportunity to complete and return the questionnaire, please take a few moments to do so. Your experiences and insights are important in helping document the successes and needs of rural educators throughout the nation.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to request additional questionnaires, please call Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413).

2nd Survey Mailing (include questionnaire & AEL-addressed, postage-paid envelope):

June 10, 2005

<Superintendent>

<School District>

<Address>

<City, State Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>,

Near the beginning of this month, I sent you a brief questionnaire asking you about teacher recruitment and retention strategies and successes in your rural school district. If you have already completed and returned your questionnaire, please accept our thanks! Your responses will help us discern what tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts. You may disregard or recycle this mailing.

Enclosed with this mailing, you will find a replacement questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope, which you can use if you have not yet had an opportunity to respond. Please take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and return it to AEL in the enclosed envelope. As a rural school district administrator, your insights and experiences are crucial to helping us gain a better understanding of teacher recruitment and retention strategies, successes, and needs in rural America.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. All information gathered through this survey will be reported at the aggregate level, and neither you nor your school district will be identified in any reporting of the findings. AEL and NASBE will take all reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality of your responses.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please call Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413).

Thank you for your time and participation in this important project!

Sincerely,

Michael Hill

NASBE Senior Director, Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education

Final Reminder Postcard (4 x 6”):

June 20, 2005

AEL and NASBE wish you the best of luck as you conclude this school year!

Thank you for being willing to participate in our important project about teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural areas. If you have not yet completed the questionnaire sent to you in April, please take a moment to do so.

Again, thank you for your time and invaluable insight into the successes and needs of rural school districts. If AEL or NASBE can be of assistance to you in the future, please feel free to call on us!

AEL www.ael.org 800-624-9120
NASBE www.nasbe.org 703-684-4000