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AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHER RETENTION IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
Jeremy Lucian Daniel Watts

Lexington, KY

Director: Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Professor of Educational Leadership Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHER RETENTION IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

Teacher retention rates are staggeringly low across the United States. Nearly 20% of public school teachers leave their position from one year to the next, a majority of schools have a turnover rate of 50% every three years, and over 50% of teachers leave the education field within the first five years of employment. This retention problem impacts all type of public school systems—urban, suburban, and rural school districts.

This study examined teacher retention in elementary and secondary schools in three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Review of district and school documents about teacher retention informed the selection of participants. School districts and specific schools in rural eastern Kentucky with higher retention rates than the average teacher retention of public schools in Kentucky were study sites. Data were collected through individual interviews with superintendents and principals and through focus-group interviews with teachers to gain their perspectives about what influenced the higher teacher retention.

Analysis of data identified themes for high teacher retention. The findings suggest that a strong familial school culture among teachers and with school administrators positively impacts teacher retention. High teacher retention is also influenced by Appalachian culture and teachers' desires to contribute to the local community beyond the school building and have a positive impact on the future of the local community's youth.

KEYWORDS: teacher retention, rural school districts, elementary schools, secondary schools, school culture

Jeremy Lucian Daniel Watts

Student's Signature

May 2, 2016

Date

AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHER RETENTION IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

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This dissertation is dedicated to the teachers in the eastern Kentucky school districts who were participants for this study. The passion you exhibited for your students, your community, and your calling changed my life and I am all the better for it. I wish you the best in the future as you continue educating and loving what matters most to our field—the students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Each year directors of personnel in school districts across the United States are tasked with ensuring all classrooms are staffed with highly qualified teachers. Nearly 20% of public school teachers leave their teaching positions from one year to the next, while many schools have a turnover rate of teaching faculty near 50% every three years (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). Almost 10% of teachers resign before completing their first year (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Nielson, 2001; Podsen, 2002).

This study examined teacher retention in three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Data were collected through document review, observation and field notes, individual interviews, and focus-group interviews in order to gain understanding about these phenomena.

Teacher Retention in the United States

It is no surprise district personnel directors are experiencing vast challenges of teacher retention. The challenges include the increases in elementary and secondary enrollments (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), a decrease in the number of qualified teachers, (Allen, 2000; Billingsley, 1993; Davis, 2002; Fox & Certo, 1999), teachers not entering or remaining in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Davis, 2002; Fox & Certo, 1999), attrition rates of beginning teachers (Davis, 2002; Ingersoll, 1999; Jorgenson, 2006; Marlow et al., 1997), insufficient teacher preparation (Collins, 1999; Davis, 2002; NCES, 1999), unbalanced distribution of teachers throughout the United

States (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), a more veteran group of teachers (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Podsen, 2002), and snowballing vocational options for women (Jorgenson, 2006). If one combines these staffing difficulties with the proposals to reduce the student to teacher ratio in order to raise student achievement, the need for more teachers seems overwhelming (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

When strategic plans are developed for personnel, school administrators must compete with other schools and school districts to attract the same potential teachers. Nearly 160,000 teachers leave the field every year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). This loss is worsened by the mobility of another 230,000 teachers who shift from school-to-school or district-to-district searching for better working conditions, which teachers often find in affluent, higher-performing schools. This migration of teachers justifies over half of the yearly teacher turnover rate and totals an estimated 12% of the total teaching workforce (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Schools and districts in low-income areas experience an unbalanced share of this teacher migration (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2005; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). A new pattern has also surfaced: As teachers become more effective in their teaching, they often move away from the more perplexing schools and toward schools with lower number of students being in poverty and higher performance levels (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Thus, schools and districts with underprivileged students are more prone to address teacher shortages and teacher

migration (Haycock, 2000; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003) on a consistent basis opposed to schools with lower number of students being in poverty.

Poverty in Schools

High poverty schools and districts find it very difficult to recruit highly qualified teachers. Districts desire to employ more minority teachers to work with at-risk students (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Fox & Certo, 1999; Podsen, 2002). As the non-Caucasian student population grows in a school (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Harmon, 2001; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), teachers retire (Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002), teachers leave the schools to pursue other careers (Allen, 2000; Billingsley, 1993; Davis, 2002; Fox & Certo, 1999), working conditions worsen (Hirsch, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland; 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2000), and as overall dissatisfaction with teaching increases (Betancourt-Smith, Inman & Marlow, 1994; Billingsley, 1993; Hirsch, 2001; Kim & Loadman, 1994; Shann, 1998), recruiting personnel is a major challenge for school districts (Langdon, 1999). Retaining those teachers already in the school district makes the work equally discouraging (Ingersoll, 2001; Merrow, 1999; NCES, 1998).

High-Need Rural School Districts

While students from low-income rural school districts continue to struggle to catch up to their more affluent peers (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008), these students still come to the classroom with vital culture systems and bodies of knowledge that are part and parcel of the everyday practices and habits of family (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Teachers are

required to teach 21st century skills to all students, yet the difficulties in low-income, minority-concentrated districts are vast when teachers do not properly understand the background of these low-income students. Teachers are not only expected to provide new knowledge and experiences for these students, but also to assume parental duties. Teachers would benefit by becoming the learner in order to better understand home routines and household dynamics for the sake of classroom instruction (Moll, et al., 1992). For many teachers, demands to meet student needs bring unwarranted pressure, and occasionally cause burnout (Ingersoll, 2012). For numerous teachers, the challenges of students in low-income minority districts in the 21st century are simply too much of a burden, and these teachers leave in search of school districts with a higher achieving student population.

21st Century Concerns

Teachers in the 21st century face new difficulties. In America's past, one-room schoolhouses focused on the basic skills of reading, computation, and writing (Wagner et al., 2006). Students memorized dates, events, and similar factual information without fully learning how to evaluate or analyze what they had read, nor did they have much experience communicating their ideas in writing or aloud. According to Wagner and colleagues, a rigorous curriculum consisted of students having extra vocabulary words to memorize or completing additional mathematics problems at night. Students learned how to compute numbers without knowing the meaning of those numbers or how those numbers related to other numbers. The lack of these logical skills obstructed students from deciphering graphs, charts, and the like (Farham, Luqman, Shaheen, & Shazad, 2012). In the 1950s and 1960s, a

majority of students were being primed for jobs in an industrial economy that would require them predominantly to use their hands. Only a small percentage of students would complete the college preparatory track in which they would learn to think at more advanced levels. The rest of the students would be prepared to join the workforce (Wagner et al., 2006).

As decades passed the United States moved away from a manufacturing economy; the past and current structure of P-12 schooling is not consistent with the 21st century skills that students need to compete in a global society (Wagner et al., 2006). All students, not just those on a college preparatory track, need to develop critical-thinking skills and operative written and oral communication in order to be competitive in a growing technological and international job market. Teachers are stuck in the middle of this change. They are often being trained to teach students using 20th century methods, but are expected to prepare students to function in the 21st century (Hirsch, 2001). This shift in focus does not pose as many challenges for urban and suburban districts because higher percentages of students from these districts have educated parents who teach them critical thinking skills at home. Wagner and colleagues note these students often come to school with the understanding, parental involvement, and experiences to move students forward.

Issues of Teacher Retention

Several issues deter individuals from entering and remaining in the teaching profession. According to Darling-Hammond (2003), the most common reasons teachers leave their positions include low salaries, lack of resources, poor working

conditions, and stress of working with families with an array of personal and professional needs. Nationally, teachers in the highest poverty schools at the top of their salary scale earn one-third less than those teachers in higher-income school districts. Many teachers also feel underprepared for the demands of the job, as well as unsupported by the organizations for which they work (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

A majority of first-year teachers report feeling they were provided ineffective induction programs, outdated professional development, and minimal support from fellow colleagues and school administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lieberman, 1995; Podsen, 2002). Ineffective induction experiences have also been associated with higher levels of teacher attrition as well as lower levels of overall teacher effectiveness (National Commission on Teaching America's Future, 1996; Podsen, 2002). Due to the significant problem of teacher retention in rural school districts, many tactics are needed to solve the difficulty, including mentoring by high-performing teachers, effective teacher induction programs, and staff development programs. In addition to the necessary administrative support needed to be successful (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Haar, 2007; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2002; Nieto, 2003), these combined approaches should tackle the specific social, geographical, and economic issues that impact teaching in these school districts (Fletcher & Strong, 2009; Fletcher, Strong, & Villar, 2008; Greiman, 2007),

Challenges of Rural Teacher Retention

Research shows greater teacher retention issues in rural schools compared to inner city and suburban schools combined (Davis, 2002). Heightened teacher

migration was experienced in rural schools more often than in urban and suburban school districts. The retention rate for rural teachers has been very low (Davis, 2002; Williams & Cross, 1985) with teacher turnover rates in rural areas reaching 30% to 50% (Davis, 2002; Helge & Marrs, 1982; Jorgenson, 2006; Stone, 1990) when compared to the annual national average of 15% (Allensworth, Ponsiciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). Ingersoll and Rossi (1995) found small schools (i.e., schools with less than 300 students) experienced higher turnover rates than those with higher student enrollment (i.e., schools with more than 1,000 students) (Davis, 2002; Jorgenson, 2006).

The issue of teacher retention is particularly troublesome in small, rural high schools because teachers in small high schools are required to teach numerous disciplines due to low student enrollment. These teachers frequently teach outside of their certification area and are not highly qualified as defined by federal policy. Because of low student enrollment, rural school districts often cannot afford to employ certification-specific teachers to cover individual subject areas, which results in these schools and districts employing a larger numbers of teachers with temporary or emergency teaching certification (Johnson, 2005). This practice also creates the problem of a low number of advanced-level courses being taught. For example, only one section of an advanced science or mathematics course may be offered in smaller schools (Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado; 2005; Rural School & Community Trust, 2003). Students that cannot fit the course into their schedule may be forced to register and complete a non-advanced class in that discipline. Preparing for

advanced courses also increases the workload for teachers in rural schools (Hammer et al., 2005).

With fewer postsecondary students entering teacher-education programs, increasing numbers of students enrolling in P-12 schools, and new teachers exiting the profession during their first year, school districts must address the problem of attracting and keeping teachers in their school districts. With high teacher turnover rates in rural areas, it is all the more important that rural school districts actively produce and implement programs to successfully attract and retain new school teachers, particularly school teachers who are gifted in generating maximum student achievement. Current school accountability and reform measures require highly qualified teachers who can enable all students to achieve at high levels. With this in mind, it is more important than ever for school and district administrators to address the challenge of teacher retention.

Special Case of Rural Schools

Public school districts in the United States are comprised of urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Nearly half of public school districts in the United States are designated as rural school districts (Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005). One-quarter of children in the United States attend schools in rural areas with nearly 2,500 people in the community while “14% attend schools in even smaller places with fewer than 2,500 people” (Beeson & Strange, 2000, p. 1). Many researchers deem the issue of teacher retention in rural school districts to be even more serious than teacher retention in urban school districts (Davis, 2002; Hammer et al., 2005; Monk, 2007). Paradoxically, departments of education at the state and national level push to

increase teacher accountability, and student achievement has increased the problem of teacher retention in rural school districts, especially when one teacher is required to teach in multiple subject areas.

District administrators note major problems for novice teachers in rural school districts including a sparse population, geographic remoteness, and difficulty fitting into the community lifestyle (Lambert, 2013). Rural communities also have a small number of prospective teachers within the community, below-par facilities, and provide lower salaries. Teachers are leaving the field in which they were trained with over 30% of all new teachers leaving the field during the first three years, and more than 10% leaving the field before the end of their first year (Huysman, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Huysman argues that this percentage is thought to be even higher in rural school districts.

Content areas of bilingual education, mathematics education, science education, and special education are experiencing teacher shortages, especially in rural school districts found in certain regions of the West, Southwest, and Southeast (Hammer et al., 2005; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1998). There are gaps in the research regarding rural education, including limited research on critical issues in education (Stephens, 1985). Much rural education research dates back to the 1980s and is primarily focused on international education, or the reasons that teachers leave rural school districts. There is little to no research that addresses why teachers are interested in rural education or remain in teaching in rural school districts (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Davis, 2002).

A primary issue in rural education is poverty of the students and parents being served. Diversity in rural communities also differs among areas of the country and is difficult to universally define *rural education* (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Kannapel & Young, 1999; Lowery & Pace, 2001). Helge (1983) notes that rural school districts serve students with a greater percentage of special needs due to the lack of prenatal and postnatal care, fewer social services, and higher poverty rates. While rural areas are developing more rapidly each year, the revenue in these areas for education is not. Rural services cost more due to the lack of professional resources and transportation. Ethnicities combined with socioeconomic statuses in rural areas are also very consistent, and rural poverty is often ignored since the issue of poverty is typically noted as a minority and inner city urban issue (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Lowery & Pace, 2001).

Teachers in rural school districts do note advantages for working in such an environment. These include fewer behavioral issues, greater opportunities for one-on-one instruction, more teacher autonomy, and smaller class size (Gibbs, 2000; Monk, 2007). Students in rural school districts often have the privilege to be part of extracurricular activities, while there is greater competition to join such groups in more urban areas (Curwin, 2010). Teachers are embedded in the community and note a larger amount of support from school administrators (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Davis, 2002). Davis also describes teachers choosing a rural lifestyle as a main influence for accepting a position in a rural school district. Other influences from the teachers' perspective include a safe school environment and family living near their place of work. A study from Nebraska noted that teachers remained in their teaching positions

because of the opportunity to invest in student and parent relationships, enjoy rural living, and experience safety in home and school (Zost, 2010). Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) assert rural communities set high morals and standards, which are prevalent through the entire community. Teachers also believe “staying close to family and friends is more important than high-paying jobs” (p. 69).

Overall, these positive aspects of rural education are well supported. Smaller classes allow teachers to better understand their students and their families and to provide individualized education. This also develops a sense of community starting in the school and extending outside of its walls. Because of this, the school becomes the central location for cultural, social, and leisure activities for the entire community.

Why Teachers in Rural School Districts Remain

Teachers in rural school districts face problems, which are varied, and occur regardless of the rural school district’s location. Classroom funding, teacher pay, and professional development all are below that of urban school districts (Beeson & Strange, 2000; Billingsley, 2005; Davis, 2002; Hammer et al., 2005; Rural School & Community Trust, 2003). Throughout the United States, district and school administrators voice concerns with their teachers’ abilities to match that of the community (Lambert, 2013; New York State Boards Association, 1988). Many teachers in rural areas migrate from other locations and have not previously lived in the rural community. Because of this, teachers are not aware of the social culture, customs, and expectancies of the school and community-at-large and may not be a good match for the rural school.

Undercurrents that entice and retain teachers in rural school districts include small class sizes, fewer discipline problems as compared to urban areas, and more motivated students (Collins, 1999; Harmon, 2001; Storey, 1993; Zost, 2010). Other reasons impacting a teacher's decision to remain in a rural school district include establishing closer relationships with students, having good support from school administrators, and perceiving an appreciation of professionalism and respect from the community at large (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Davis, 2002; Harmon, 2001; Murphy & Angeleski, 1996; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008).

Research suggests that school administration is a critical influence on teacher retention (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Boe, Barkanic, & Leow, 1999; George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Schnorr, 1995; Shen, 1997; Westling & Whitten, 1996). The amount of support that school administrators provide to teachers influences regular and special education teachers' decisions to remain in, or leave rural school districts (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). Murphy and Angeleski (1996) studied 94 teachers who experienced attrition or retention in a rural school district. The teachers who remained stated they did so because of three primary reasons: satisfaction with rural lifestyle, spousal employment in the same community, and their school administrator. Jorgensen (2002) interviewed 37 principals of rural school districts in North Dakota. These principals noted the teachers' abilities to contribute in school decision-making and a positive school culture influenced teachers' opportunities to remain in rural school districts. Davis (2002) noted that a teacher's

commitment to a rural community, and support from the school administrator in the rural school district made the difference in teachers remaining in their school district.

Researchers assert that teachers' commitments to an organization and job satisfaction are the two most important influences on school effectiveness (Burrows & Munday, 1996; Chissom, Buttery, Chukabarah, & Henson, 2001; Huysman, 2007). Research also supports the idea that commitment is vital to teacher job satisfaction, and that there are three main aspects of teacher job satisfaction: organizational culture, administrative power, and teacher efficacy (Ma & McMillan, 1999; Manikandan & Raveendran, 2012; Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary, & Clark, 2010; Protheroe, 2008). These three aspects of any school are the areas in which administrators can transform the lives of teachers, including rural school districts. School administrators set the mood in their respective buildings and are influential in creating a school environment of failure or success. Administrators are responsible for introducing teachers to the school and community, as well as providing mentoring opportunities and professional development for teachers.

Why Teachers in Rural School Districts Leave

Working in rural school districts brings pressure to the classroom, which drives more teachers out of the profession in rural school districts during their first three years. Research shows the most common pressures include rural teachers are expected to perform more work outside of the classroom compared to urban teachers, including the supervision of extra-curricular events (Davis, 2002). Davis continues to note rural teachers are often asked to live in cultures very different from their own, often while living extended distances from family and friends. Teachers who do not find joy and

satisfaction with the personal and professional aspects of the rural community will become dissatisfied and choose to leave the community. Horn (1985) argues rural teachers are often asked to teach students with a range of abilities in a single classroom with very little to no support from other adults, which is especially true in high-poverty schools. These rural communities are often far distances from higher education institutions where teachers may learn more about current best practices and accommodation techniques. Likewise, Nielson (2001) notes rural teachers are often tasked to teach a different content area from year to year or teach content outside of their certification area. Similarly, rural teachers are also often asked to adapt to the culture of the community that may be contrary from their upbringing in terms of lifestyle and opportunities.

The responsibility to recruit and retain quality teachers who will fit the community of a rural school district is left to the school district itself. (Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council, 2001; Zost, 2010). Rural school districts should market their positive qualities to find the teachers that will be a good fit for the district and local community. These qualities of the school district include strong teacher support, fewer disciplinary issues, nicer quality of life, lower cost of living, and strong local community support.

Critique of Rural Teacher Retention

There is not necessarily an overall teacher shortage, but shortages exist in geographic and subject areas while rural districts typically experience the largest teacher shortages (Ingersoll, 2003; McClure & Reeves, 2004). In rural school districts there is little literature regarding great success of mentoring or induction programs, yet many

school districts participate in such events (Vierstraete, 2005). In the last decade, Arkansas implemented monetary incentives to attract and retain teachers. New teachers in rural school districts received a \$20,000 signing bonus with \$8,000 being paid at the end of the first year and \$4,000 being paid at the end of each subsequent three years. Less than 40% of interviewed teachers remained in rural school districts in Arkansas for the four-year period (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). The same incentives were implemented in rural school districts in Massachusetts (Liu, Johnson, & Peske 2004) and California (Steele, Murnane, & Willet, 2009), and those receiving the incentives were no more likely to remain in the school district than those who did not receive the incentives. Even though incentive programs have been incorporated and induction programs are still being analyzed, rural school districts are still grappling to hire and retain qualified teachers.

The rural teacher is often certified to teach more than one grade level or subject area, is prepared to oversee extracurricular activities, has the ability to teach students with a range of abilities in one classroom, and can adjust to the rural community (Horn, 1985; Montgomery, 1994; Stone, 1990). When rural school districts find such teachers, they typically remain for three or four years and then leave for better opportunities in other school districts, forcing district and school administrators to start recruiting for new teachers for each position. Researchers note that less-experienced teachers, with four or fewer years of experience, were the most likely to leave rural school districts (Allred & Smith, 1984). Other research suggests that teachers use teaching in rural school districts as a ladder rung to find positions in suburban and urban school districts (Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010; Moriarty, 1981; New Mexico Center for Rural Education, 1983).

Researchers postulate that teacher recruitment and retention will only worsen as time progresses, and rural school districts will have to endure the reality of this truth, especially with a decline in the availability of teachers from education programs (Seifert & Simone, 1981). School districts must continually recruit teachers who will be successful professionally and personally in rural school districts. According to Williams and Cross (1985), teachers in rural school districts perceived the following reasons as contributors to their success in rural schools: sense of humor, diplomacy, tact, community involvement, resourcefulness, and rural orientation. School and district administrators must also work more closely with higher education institutions in order to obtain more pre-service teachers and assist in strengthening induction and mentoring programs for new teachers (Harris, 2001; Ludlow, 1998). Furthermore, once rural school districts hire the most qualified teachers for the rural schools, then the schools and school districts must focus on mentoring and induction to retain them.

School leaders who support induction and mentoring programs may influence a teacher's decision to leave or remain in education. Wong (2002) argues that new teachers "need more than mentors. They need induction programs that acculturate them to the school, surrounding area, and equip them for the classroom" (p. 52). District and school administrators have a responsibility to be instructional and academic leaders to new teachers. The learning needs of new teachers are real and cannot be grasped in advanced or outside of the contexts of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) note that teachers who have mentor support are less likely to leave education or migrate to other schools. As noted in urban and suburban areas, participation in a comprehensive induction program can decrease teacher attrition by over

50% (Russell, 2006). Teachers remain in schools that support them and are part of a team working toward common, attainable goals. More research is needed in rural school districts for a clearer understanding of why teachers remain in rural school districts.

Statement of the Problem

As student enrollment increases in P-12 education and veteran teachers retire, the supply of highly qualified teachers will not be adequate enough to staff the United States' rural school districts (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012; Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Student success, affluent communities, and recruitment incentives appeal to many of the most capable teachers who choose to work in urban and suburban school districts; thus, leaving a less-qualified pool of teachers for rural school districts from which to hire. Researchers (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Davis, 2002; Hammer et al., 2005; Lyons, 2002) report there are discrete characteristics that conclude whether or not a teacher is well matched for rural education in a rural community including being from that rural community, belonging to the ethnic majority of the community, and teaching within the teacher's trained discipline with a balanced student-teacher ratio. Other researchers (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley, Bodkins & Hendricks, 1993; Gersten & Keating, 1994) have also found that school and district administrative practices may influence teacher turnover rates. The purpose of this study is to explore what conditions contribute to teacher retention in rural settings.

Too many teachers leave school districts or exit the profession during the first five years of teaching; thus, the first five years is an important opening of opportunity for administrative mediation (Allen, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fox & Certo, 2001; Nielson, 2001). The first five years in the profession are also

important because it is during the third through fifth years of teaching when teachers experience the greatest professional advancement (Brock & Grady, 1998; Shulman & Colbert, 1988; Zumwalt, 1984). It is also during these years that most teachers are likely to impact student achievement significantly because of their fervency and newness to the field (Eberhand, Reinhardt-Mondragon, & Stottlemyer, 2000).

This study explored teacher retention in three rural school districts. Specifically, it investigated why teachers in three rural public school districts and across six schools in eastern Kentucky (i.e., three elementary schools and three secondary schools) remain in the profession. Additionally, the study examined which social, geographic, economic, and administrative-support conditions impact a teacher's decision to remain in the rural school district. Finally, this dissertation provided recommendations and strategies for school and district administration to improve teacher retention in rural school districts.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was, *What conditions contribute to the retention of teachers in rural school districts?* Three guiding questions assured the overarching research question was answered:

1. In what ways do professional relationships influence teacher retention?
2. How does school culture impact teacher retention?
3. What conditions outside of school influence teacher retention?

Significance

This study assessed specific conditions that contribute to teacher decisions to remain in their positions. Davis (2002) asserts that current rural teacher

recruitment and retention research "appears thin and much of it has been conducted outside of the United States" (p. 46). Other researchers note rural teacher recruitment and retention is limited or of poor quality (Davis, 2002; Storey, 1993; De Young, 1987; Stephens, 1985). A majority of the research conducted has determined why teachers leave rather than why they remain and the populations studied have predominantly been administrators, first-year teachers, or pre-service teachers (Davis, 2002). Ingersoll and Rossi (1995) recommend further research on specific reasons that influence teachers' decisions to remain in their schools or remain in the profession. School leaders are unable to systematically impact the issue of teacher attrition without understanding the perspectives of teachers who chose to remain in rural schools.

Methodology Overview

This study explored conditions that contributed to teacher retention across six schools within three rural school districts in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Qualitative methods (i.e., document review, observation and field notes, individual interviews, focus-group interviews) were used gain understanding about these decisions.

This multiple-case study was an exploratory inquiry about teacher retention in rural school districts. The intentions that guided data collection and analysis and report findings were based on two fundamentals: (a) review of the literature on retention of elementary and secondary school teachers, and (b) my personal experiences as a teacher, instructional coach, and university instructor.

The literature selections used to construct theoretical frameworks for this study include elements of researcher bias. Also, my prior experiences as an elementary

and secondary teacher and teacher leader in rural schools inclined me toward an interest in teacher retention. While conducting this study, I consciously diminished personal perspectives and expectations to assure any biases I had did not infringe on data collection, data analysis, or interpretation of study findings.

Definitions of Terminology

The understanding of certain terminology is central to the following chapters.

The key terms in Table 1.1 were used within the framework of this study.

Table 1.1

Definition of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Appalachians	Appalachians are individuals born in the geographic area of the Appalachian Mountains that spans 13 states from New York to Mississippi (Tang & Russ, 2007). This term is synonymous with Appalachian people.
Attrition	Attrition is the reduction of employees in an organization due to resignation. Attrition also includes teachers who leave the field of education or transfer to different schools or school districts (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014)
Central Appalachia	Central Appalachia includes all Appalachian counties in eastern Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, and some Appalachian counties in Tennessee (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2014). This study was completed in that region.
Elementary School	An elementary school in Kentucky may consist of a primary school program through grade 8. This may include any appropriate combination of grades in this range, as determined by the organization plan for schools authorized by the district's school board (Kentucky Department of Education [KDE], 2013).
Induction Programs	Induction programs are system-wide, coherent, comprehensive trainings and support processes that continue for two or three years and then effortlessly

Table 1.1 (continued)

	become part of the lifelong professional development program of a school district to retain new teachers teaching while improving their practice and increasing their effectiveness (Wong, 2004).
Mentoring	Not to be confused with induction programs, mentoring is an action process. Mentoring is the process that mentors do. A mentor is a single person who helps a new teacher. This help for the new teacher primarily includes survival skills during the first year of teaching and is not sustained professional learning that leads to becoming an effective educator (Wong, 2004).
Professional Relationships	Professional relationships are the beliefs, practices, symbols, and language that are characteristic to a particular group of people (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005). These relationships are the identification and example of what is necessary and expected of the members within an organization (Evans, 2008). This type of relationship enables colleagues to develop an awareness of competency through role modeling, acceptance, and professional guidance (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2011).
Rural County	For this study, a rural county was defined as a county with a population between 2,500 to 19,999 residents that is not adjacent to a metro area (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2013).
School Culture	A school culture is a context that a group may use to solve different problems. Essentially, school culture is social teaching of unwritten rules that employees learn as they try to fit in a specific school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).
Secondary School	A secondary school in Kentucky may consist of grades 6 through 12. This may include any appropriate combination of grades in this range, as determined by the organization plan for schools authorized by the district's school board (KDE, 2013).
Teacher Migration	Teacher migration is the shift from school-to-school or district-to-district searching for better working conditions. This often takes place when teachers are seeking affluent,

Table 1.1 (continued)

	higher-performing schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Teacher migration is synonymous with teacher mobility.
Teacher Retention	Teacher retention exists when teachers remain in the same teaching assignment two years in a row. This term is also used when referring to teachers who remain in the same school systems from one year to the next, but change schools (Brown & Wynn, 2007).
Teacher Turnover Rate	Teacher turnover rate is classified as a number or percentage comparing the number of classroom teachers in the current year against the number of teachers reported in the previous year. Teachers leaving a school or a school district each year classify the teacher turnover rate (Colorado Department of Education, 2015).

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to this study on teacher retention in rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Chapter 2 offers a literature overview that describes teacher retention, teacher satisfaction, the role of educational leadership in teacher retention, and approaches for increasing retention in schools in rural school districts. Chapter 3 presents the research methods used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the research organized by the three guiding questions of this study. Chapter 5 presents a discussion and conclusion of the findings and provides direction for future practice and research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter a review of the literature is presented. The review begins with an examination of national retention programs. A record of school districts in rural Kentucky and rural retention programs are examined while theoretical frameworks are discussed and related to leadership in schools. Overall, the determination of this literature review is to note influences that may impact teachers to remain in a rural school district. In this way, school administrations may be able to focus more efforts on growing student achievement due to the more established partnership between teachers, school leadership, students, and parents.

National Teacher Retention Programs

Diverse programs have been implemented on a national scale with the purpose of improving teacher retention rates. The Yale National Initiative has been implemented in order to attempt to increase teacher retention, as well as aiming at enhancing the overall standard of teaching in public schools. This initiative provides opportunities for educators who teach within deprived communities to collaborate with higher education professors in order to create curriculum material that appeals to their classes. It is clear that the greater the extents to which teachers are able to perform their roles, the greater the chance of them remaining within their jobs.

This initiative also pairs teachers with academic mentors who remain associated with them for several years and advise them how to make their classes appeal to their pupils. Teaching staff have praised mentorship of this nature and stated that it contributed to their passion for their subjects. The initiative also provides seminars for teachers in

which they are able to reflect about lesson content and pedagogy. This is intended to further boost their enthusiasm (Leitch, 2011).

The Small, Rural School Achievement program provides grants to rural school districts. These schools can apply for a grant for activities related to increasing teacher retention including professional development, career and job fairs, and financial incentives for teachers. In 2011, these grants allocated \$86 million across nearly 4,000 school districts. Each grant the Small, Rural School Achievement program administers ranges from \$20,000 to \$60,000.

The Rural Low-Income Schools project also awards grants for activities, which are aimed at increasing teacher retention in rural schools. One of these activities is awarding grants to teachers in order to ensure that they remain within the job. Schools that are eligible for grants from this project are not eligible for grants from the Small, Rural School Achievement program. In 2011, over \$87 million were awarded via the Rural Low-Income Schools project. This money was split between approximately 1,200 districts. Eligibility for grants from this program is dependent on the poverty level of each individual school district (Baker, Hupfeld, Wickersham & Yettick, 2014).

The Teacher Quality Enhancement program funds initiatives aimed at improving retention in an effort to improve standards of teaching within America's public schools. It is aimed at inducting teachers into their roles in order to reduce the chance of them quitting at a later date due to the fact that they were not adequately prepared for the current teaching situation. Fayne and Matthews (2010) note that this program also aims at improving the standard of education teachers are capable of delivering.

National teacher retention programs highlight the issue of teacher retention across America. These programs employ a range of different methods, including funding induction, providing seminars, and affording grant money for additional bonuses for teachers. Some of these programs only benefit schools that fall within specific demographic categories, while some may only be available in schools of certain geographic regions.

Retention Program in the Commonwealth—Kentucky Teacher Induction Program

Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS), Chapter 161, focuses on school employees, administrators, and teachers. This state law mandates that all new teachers and out-of-state teachers with less than two years of teaching experience must participate in a one-year Kentucky Teacher Internship Program (KTIP). Subsection five notes that KTIP incorporates mentoring and a comprehensive assessment of the teacher prior to professional certification. This assessment is comprised of meeting three required components from the completion of 12 tasks of the Teacher Performance Assessment. KTIP integrates a beginning teacher committee including teachers, site-based administrators, and teacher educators assigned by universities. These individuals focus on supporting and measuring intern teacher growth throughout the school year. Teacher interns, or first-year teachers, who do not pass KTIP during their initial year, may have an additional year to complete the process.

While Kentucky does not have formal standards that govern the specific design of a local school district's teacher induction programs, foundations implemented by the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) govern KTIP. One of those foundations is the components of the KTIP assessment. The beginning teacher

committee resolves successful completion of the one-year internship by unanimous consent. If a unanimous consent cannot be reached, a majority vote serves as passage for each standard of the assessment. These standards are assessed using the rubrics within the KTIP intern performance record. The rubrics consider the progress of the teacher intern throughout the school year, including the level of performance that has been accomplished by the end of the internship year.

Mentors, or resource teachers as they are known in Kentucky, are required to serve on the beginning teacher's committee (EPSB, 2011). The EPSB appoints individual resource teachers with recommendations from the school district from a list of qualified candidates. State policy further requires a resource teacher to have four years of teaching experience and hold a master's degree or its equivalent of over 2,000 continuing education units. These subsections of the law also require at least three people who have completed special training in the supervising and assessment of the performance of beginning teachers to serve on the beginning-teacher committee. These three people include the resource teacher, teacher educator and the school principal or assistant principal. The EPSB provides required training through a contract with teacher education institutions in Kentucky. Passing specific assessments prescribed by the EPSB evidences completion of such training for those wishing to serve on beginning teacher committees.

Subsection six defines priorities for selecting and matching resource teachers to beginning teacher interns. The first priority is teachers with the same certification in the same school or teachers holding a teacher leader endorsement. The second priority includes teachers with the same certification in the same district. The third priority is

teachers in the same school. The fourth priority contains teachers in the same district. The last resort is a teacher in an adjacent school district. Resource teachers are commonly assigned to one intern, but may serve a maximum of two interns at a time.

Subsection seven requires a minimum number of contact hours between the teacher intern and the resource teacher, including classroom observations and a procedure for formatively assessing teacher instruction. The resource teacher is required to spend a minimum of 60 hours during the school year working with the beginning teacher. Twenty of these 60 hours must be in the classroom, while the remaining 40 may be in consultation outside of class. Within these 60 hours, state law requires the resource teacher to conduct three official observations, with each observation lasting at least one hour or one class period. In lieu of this, resource teachers may hold two observations followed by an observation of the teacher intern's videotaped classroom lesson. In addition, state law requires the classroom observations be preceded by a pre-observation conference and lesson plan review followed by a post-observation conference. Additionally, consultations must be spent assisting the teacher intern with developing a professional growth plan, discussing instructional planning activities, planning time to attend professional growth seminars that align with the professional growth plan, and continually assessing the teacher intern's progress in teaching the state standards throughout the internship. Interns must complete 12 tasks within three cycles of the internship that include lesson planning, a leadership project, a collaboration project, and a reflection of classroom performance. The internship is finalized in cycle three with the culmination of a capstone project (EPSB, 2011).

KTIP is funded from the EPSB's general fund with help from federal funds. Funding may be used to support other teacher development opportunities, such as training for coaches, university course credit, and supplemental teaching materials. Moreover, when state funding is available, resource teachers are paid a stipend for work outside contract hours. All new teachers or out-of-state teachers with less than two years teaching experience must complete KTIP in order to have their initial certification extended to a professional certificate (EPSB, 2011). If teacher interns are twice unsuccessful in passing KTIP, they are not eligible for a teaching certificate in Kentucky.

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (KCPE) conducts annual surveys and participates in a regular review of the KTIP. The KCPE utilizes the New Teacher Survey as the annual survey to determine how well a teacher intern and the teacher intern's resource teacher feel about the preparation for the teacher intern in his or her first year. The number of successful interns from each teacher preparation institution is documented as part of the Kentucky Education Preparation Program Report Card. The KCPE has also conducted surveys solely with resource teachers to determine desirable enhancements to the program. With the help of KCPE, EPSB established the Kentucky Advisory Council for Internship (KACI). The KACI selects members (i.e., school administrators, teachers, teacher education professors) for this committee from public and private institutions across the Commonwealth. The KACI meets three times a year to discuss KTIP-related issues. The EPSB staff meets annually with regional KTIP coordinators and discusses issues with the teacher educators who serve on committees in order to categorize issues and strengths of the KTIP program. EPSB staff also host

statewide sessions multiple times a year to discuss concerns and listen to questions regarding KTIP from district appointed KTIP coordinators (EPSB, 2011).

Research in teacher job satisfaction notes that teachers are either satisfied or dissatisfied (Akpinar, Bayansaiduz, & Toros, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Marston, 2010). These findings are distributed after researching teachers from elementary school to the college classroom. Part of this includes teacher interaction with anywhere from 15 to over 100 students each day in P-12 education, plus meeting with parents and other colleagues in the building. KTIP provides an opportunity for teachers to have support and learn all facets of the job with a master teacher. If incorporated correctly as defined, a goal of this internship program includes improving job satisfaction and eradicating job dissatisfaction in order for teachers to remain encouraged, stimulated, and revitalized for the sake of Kentucky's students.

Rural School Districts in Kentucky

Among the 120 counties within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 56 are designated rural with a population of less than 19,999 people in each county (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2013). Three of these 56 rural counties include Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens. According to Kentucky Tourism (2014), these three counties are in Central Appalachia in the Eastern Mountains and Coalfields (EMC) region of Kentucky. German and Scotch-Irish clans began settling the region in the late 1700s and often turned away newcomers, an occurrence that is still common in the 21st century (Drake, 2001). Drake continues to note that the majority of residents in this region have lived there all of their lives. Kentucky's overall population is nearly 90% "White alone" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010); in counties where the study was conducted it is 98% or higher.

During the New Deal era, welfare was introduced to the EMC region of Kentucky, and today numerous generations are receiving government support (Drake, 2001). Pickens County experienced a population decrease by 5.3% when the coal mining industry declined beginning in 2000. Demographic statistics also indicated that the average median household income for counties where the study was conducted is less than \$32,000 annually (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Fairfield and Laurens County populations have been considered *distressed* regions of Appalachia since their 5-year unemployment and poverty rates are 1.5 times the national average (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2015; Hilston, 2000). The ARC notes that Pickens County is considered *at risk*; over half of the population of the region is distressed, with the other half returning to economic distress after a period of economic growth. The ARC defines a distressed county as a county that has at least twice the national poverty rate and a per capita market income 67% of the national average or a three-year average unemployment rate twice the national average. The ARC describes an at-risk county as one that meets two of following criteria: 3-year unemployment rate 125% of the national average, per capita market income that is 67% or less on the national average, or a poverty rate of at least 125% of the national average.

Although Fairfield County Schools and Laurens County Schools serve all children residing in their respective counties, Pickens County Schools serve the students outside of the city limits of Journey's Rest, Pickens County's largest town. Since the three districts share common borders and are located in the same geographic area, it is assumed that similar diversity conditions exist.

Effective Teacher Retention Programs in Rural School Districts

In spite of the additional difficulty involved in ensuring the retention of teachers in rural school districts, there have been a number of successful programs that have increased retention rates. This section of the literature review seeks to describe some of these initiatives in order to provide background information on effective methods for improving retention rates within these areas. The teacher-housing program implemented in the Rusk Independent School District in rural eastern Texas is an example of a successful program designed to reduce teacher retention in a rural area. Rusk's city authorities donated 20 acres of land so that a non-profit organization could construct a thirty-two home complex to serve as living arrangements for teachers. Prior to this, retention rates had been low due to a deficit of suitable homes for teachers to reside. The homes that were created were rented at a cost of between four hundred and seven hundred dollars per month. This opportunity provided a very modest living experience to only the teachers in the district while adding zero expense to the school district. Teachers were also more likely to stay at schools in the area as a result of the program (Lowe, 2006).

The Remote Rural Practicum program in Alaska is another effective program for increasing rural retention. It was established in order to provide prospective teachers with the experience of teaching in rural communities in Alaska while being more likely to remain in these teaching roles for many years to follow. This program provided participants with teaching sessions in rural Alaskan schools, engaging them with rural Alaskan communities in order to familiarize them with the local culture, and enabling them to observe lessons taught by established teachers in these areas. This program

prepares prospective teachers for the realities of rural teaching, provides them with hands on experience of teaching within rural schools, and allows them to be more knowledgeable about these areas. Research (Stelmach, 2011) indicates that this program increased the extent to which the individuals appreciated the remote, rural teaching context, which in turn increased retention rates.

Teachers who attended the Remote Rural Practicum program praised the experience for the ways it increased their enthusiasm for working in a rural environment (Boylan & Munsch, 2008). Specifically, Boylan and Munsch studied the way in which this program changed prospective teachers' attitudes towards teaching in rural Alaska. The researchers concluded that all of the participants improved the extent to which they understood the challenges that are involved in teaching in rural Alaskan communities. Teachers also improved their knowledge of teaching in environments of this nature and experienced alterations in the level of anticipation that they experienced for teaching. According to Boylan and Munsch, all of these influences indicate that the program increased teachers' likelihood of entering into teaching jobs within rural settings and remaining in teaching roles within these communities.

The Technology Supported Induction Network is another example of an initiative that has improved teacher retention in rural areas. The network was implemented in order to provide induction for teachers in remote, rural locations in which it would not otherwise be available. Prior to its implementation, lengthy travel time was required in order for some teachers to receive adequate inductions, thus likely to negatively impact retention rates (Fry, 2006). Fry suggests that the network successfully improved access to inductions for rural teachers and helped to prepare them for their roles. Fry also asserts

this network prevented them from feeling isolated and cut off from advice and collaboration. This sort of isolation is almost certain to contribute to teacher attrition in rural environments.

Quality teacher induction programs can also aid in increasing performance and retention of new teachers (Ingersoll, 2012). An induction program in the predominantly rural county of Walla Walla in Washington also proved to be highly effective (Fry, 2006). Walla Walla contains remote areas with high levels of deprivation (Gonzalez & Ruiz, 2014), but within five years of program implementation it achieved a 93% percent teacher retention rate across the county. With this in mind, it is clear that the induction initiative of teachers in this area was a reason for overwhelming success.

It is clear from examining the literature that effective programs have been established all over the country for the purpose of enhancing teacher retention levels. Although not all programs have the same level of success as the ones that have been described, there is no doubt that initiatives of this nature are sometimes capable of producing the desired results. Successful retention programs can improve the likelihood of teachers remaining in their roles for an extended period of time and school and district leaders should implement such retention programs.

Frames of Organizational Leadership

Organizations have different structures. Some can be seen with a typical organization chart depicting job responsibilities and different levels within the organization. Other types may be a triangular shape with a minute number of authorities at the top and plenty of workers at the bottom. The purpose of any organization includes employing good people, completing tasks, satisfying the customer base, and including

leaders that lead the organization to success. These are all reasons that organizations should exist. Unfortunately, organizations do not always follow these purposes.

Bolman and Deal (2008) categorize four frames—structural, human resources, political, and symbolic, in which organizations are viewed. Individual frames include a set of ideas, values, and descriptions that provide a framework for systematizing an organization in the modern world. While leaders do not always use a single frame, Bolman and Deal note that leaders show a preference for two of the four frames. These frames provide a specific focus for filtering activities and prioritizing experiences within an organization.

Structural Frame

Pillars of the structural frame include goals, rules, environment, and policies. Organizations thrive to complete goals and objectives that have been previously established. This establishment is a tenant in the structural frame. Without the establishment of goals the frame itself would have a very weak springboard. These goals assist in developing a comprehensive conception of the organization.

Bureaucracy is a term for organizations with departments and officials. Rules often find their way in an organization through a bureaucracy and bureaucracies often present themselves inside organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Organizations can increase effectiveness and improve performance through a specific division of labor. If these divisions of labor are not thought through specifically, they can, however, negatively impact the organization.

Every organization has a culture, which can be impacted by internal and external influences. An organization's culture works best when it meets the needs of the

organization's current situations, and when organizational control and monitoring can positively impact the organization's culture. If the control is not properly in place, the organization will die in its own cultural environment (Shafritz & Ott, 2001).

Top down leadership means the directions come from the top of the organization's leadership chart. Bottom down leadership means employees influence leaders and promote a better way of practice. Policies within an organization typically begin from the top down. When problems arise and performance of the organization suffers, it is commonly due to the deficiencies of the structure of the organizations itself. These struggles can typically find remedy through evaluating the problems and restructuring the elements of that organization. Though this may not be a simple task, it can be accomplished by restructuring the organization within a single frame, or across many frames of leadership.

Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame focuses on what organizations and people do to and for each other (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The human resource frame focuses on the well being of people within an organization (Shafritz & Ott, 2001). In this frame, it is important that organizations meet the needs of people in order to get the job done. Organizations need new ideas and vigor, while people need to earn money and be fulfilled through their careers. When the fit between the individual and the organization is poor, one or both suffer. According to Bolman and Deal, a good fit, however, benefits both; employees find satisfying work and organizations find the talent and vigor desired to be successful.

Motivation. In psychology, the terminology of a person's need is very difficult to define and measure. Individuals desire to satisfy their needs and also desire that organizational environments enable them to grow physically and psychologically (McGregor, 1960). With this in mind, managers may generate conditions in which employees are able to meet their needs while also meeting goals of the organization. Situations that are satisfying bring the person contentment and happiness. This allows the employee to grow and the organization to benefit. Conversely, frustrating work situations may create annoyance and fear for people while being psychologically malnourished; thus, this causes the individual and the organization to suffer.

Motivating employees is a primary concern for leadership within an organization. General principles of motivation allow effective leadership to use a more holistic approach that includes several variables (Bolman & Deal, 2008). First, individuals are motivated by their own needs, external demands, expectations, and environmental conditions. Leaders may also influence the nature and the quality of a worker's motivation. Long-term, facilitative approaches, which inspire and encourage people to strive for self-actualization show an increase in an organization's efficiency while benefiting individuals. Leaders in an organization are primary contributors in creating growth in environments by nurturing the culture and climate of the organization.

Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs has become one of the most influential theories about human needs. He noted that people are motivated by many wants while some wants are more essential than others. Maslow grouped human needs into five categories arranged from highest to lowest need: self-actualization, esteem, social belonging, safety, and physiological. This view is widely accepted and very influential in

leadership practice (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Deal & Peterson, 2009). It is obvious that every person has physical, social, and emotional needs that must be met. Maslow also noted the term *proponent need*. A proponent need is the one need that has the greatest power or influence over our actions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Maslow claimed everyone has a proponent need, which will differ among individuals. It is important for these needs to be met in the workplace in order for an organization to benefit from the energy and talent that employees have to offer.

Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, and Capwell (1959) issued their analysis following five years of research that examined employees' attitudes in the workplace. Their findings affirm that the primary failure of former research related to attitudes in the workplace was its disorganized descriptions. Before this time, job satisfaction was discussed as a solitary field of its own. This single continuum trailed the belief that employees were either being entirely satisfied or entirely dissatisfied due to different elements of the career (Hoppock, 1935). Herzberg and his associates found that job elements might have the power to satisfy an employee, while also dissatisfies an employee simultaneously.

Herzberg and colleagues (1959) continued to develop a new framework in the area of job satisfaction. Research was conducted involving 200 accountants and engineers from Pittsburgh. Each individual participated in a structured interview. The 16 factors are divided into four areas: (a) recognition and achievement; (b) work, advancement, and responsibility; (c) salary; and (d) ten infrequently mentioned factors (Herzberg, 1966, p. 69). Five issues were flagged regarding the capability to increase job satisfaction. Herzberg concluded that relationships exist amid positive events and specific factors of

the job. Herzberg also argued “a relationship occurred between undesirable events and other factors of work or the workplace” (p. 70). Herzberg notes optimistic happenings that emphasize the job itself: (a) doing the job; (b) liking the job; (c) success in doing the job; (d) recognition for doing the job and; (e) moving upward as an indication of professional development (p. 71). Other factors present emphasize the job situation. Factors that affect job satisfaction do not affect job dissatisfaction, and factors, which affect job dissatisfaction, have no effect upon job satisfaction.

Herzberg (1966) categorizes the job factors of the second continuum that affect job dissatisfaction, or having no job dissatisfaction as *hygiene factors*. Hygiene relates to the prime essentials for life and the prevention of discomfort. The hygiene factors include working conditions, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, supervision, organizational policy and administration, subordinates and superiors, salary, personal life, and job security. When these factors are not met from an employee’s viewpoint, the employee develops a negative mindset toward the job, which creates dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors typically depict elements of the employee’s work environment. Herzberg states that hygiene factors are *dissatisfiers* in the workplace. He also notes that hygiene factors “serve primarily to prevent job dissatisfaction, while having little effect on positive job attitudes” (p. 74). Employers that meet an employee’s hygiene needs can cause that employee to feel that the employer cares for his or her happiness in the work setting. Herzberg also argues that if an organization meets the hygiene needs of the worker by preventing dissatisfaction, providing additional hygiene factors cannot deliver job satisfaction. According to the *motivation-hygiene theory* (Herzberg, 1966), satisfying motivational factors is the only way to produce feelings of satisfaction to an employee.

The next groups of factors report employees having no job satisfaction:

Motivation factors relate to the psychological needs of man. Herzberg (1966) discovered that motivation factors were connected to job satisfaction and were “effective in motivating the individual to superior performance and effort” (p. 74). The motivational factors include recognition of achievement, advancement, work, responsibility, and achievement itself. Herzberg advises that if these motivation needs are not met within an organization, an employee will not be satisfied in his or her career.

Leadership. Managers in the human resource frame are responsible for meeting individuals’ needs while making the organization work. McGregor (1960) developed two theories of meeting individuals’ needs: *theory X* and *theory Y*. Theory X states that most subordinates are passive and prefer to be led than resist change. This leadership style builds on both *hard* and *soft* types of theory X. The hard version of theory X displays managers with tight control who provide punishment that can present sabotage and produce low productivity in the organization. The soft version of theory X urges the avoidance of conflict and promotes work that would satisfy everyone’s needs. Bolman and Deal (2008) assert this can create apathy and eradicate unity within an organization. McGregor’s theory X suggests that if a manager treats an employee in such a way that they are in need of directives and authority, the employee will give in to the beliefs and follow suit. In contrary, theory Y managers view work as ordinary, and theory Y employees pursue organizational goals when they are treated appropriately.

Theories of action. What people do within an organization impacts progress within that organization. Argyris and Schön (1974) believed that an individual’s behavior was measured by personal theories for action. First, *espoused theory* includes the

accounts individuals provide when they try to describe, clarify, or predict behavior. *Theory-in-use* guides what individuals actually do as described by two different models (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Model I was developed with the assumption that a manager deems the organization as a dangerous place where one would have to look out for himself or herself so that conflict can be avoided. Behaviors in Model I lead to nominal learning, strained relationships, and weak decision-making. Model II, however, focuses on achieving interpersonal effectiveness and emphasizes integration of inquiry and advocacy. Model II also incorporates how managers think and feel while also asking them to understand the thoughts and feeling of different people.

Political Frame

Conflict arises in an organization because of the different needs and vantage points of individuals. The political frame focuses on the struggle between scarce resources and individuals' share of power. Coalitions, or individuals with similar interests, are used to negotiate and compromise scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Scarce resources and daily conflict permits the issue of power to be an important characteristic of an organization. Power inside a coalition can damage the organization's goals and mission if not carefully handled.

Coalitions. The assumptions of the political frame surround the fact that organizations are made up of coalitions composed of various individuals and interest groups. Politics in organizations focus on organizations as arenas in which different interest groups compete for power and limited resources (Kotter, 1996). Enduring differences occur among individuals and groups in regard to respect of personal values, beliefs, information, and perceptions of reality. Lasswell (1958) notes that politics is

about the distribution of resources. Conflict arises in an organization when there are competitions for scarce resource. When scarce resources and unending differences occur, conflict is primary to an organization's dynamic, and power is the most important resource. Organizational goals and decisions emerge from bartering and negotiating among key people within coalitions of the organization. These assumptions provide a useful view as to why and how organizations can be political in nature.

Goals of organizations are determined through negotiations among members of coalitions. A coalition is an accord among people or a group in which they join forces for a common cause. Different groups have proven to have different purposes and resources with which they use to bargain and sway opinions during the goal and decision processes. Argyris and Schön's (1974) espoused theory and theory-in-use provide a window into this political frame. Espoused theory refers to the words one uses to convey what one does, or what one would like people to think what one actually does, while theory-in-use is the theory that actually decides the actions of what one actually does. In other words, espoused theory can be thought of as something one knows about himself or herself, and theory-in-use can be described as things one does not know about himself or herself.

Power can also impact political processes, including coalitions and controlling decisions. Control over a decision process can occur both directly and indirectly. Direct control over decisions may involve placing people on key decision bodies to influence the decisions that are made thereby. Indirect control involves developing criteria upon which conclusions result. Coalitions help members of an organization get what they want. Intriguingly, coalitions may be formed inside or outside of an organization. Examples of this include unions and coalitions of policy groups in education.

Power. The power in the political frame has influence. Influence is the force of one part or person on another, and the amount of power is varied upon the situation. Influence itself is most prosperous when a person complies with a request and carries it out to form a commitment to the power thereby. An individual may comply with the request because of influence, but carries out the request with minimal effort and an apathetic drive. This drive is not out of commitment, but is a form of compliance. Power from a political leader in an organization is in play when that leader has the capability to motivate an individual to do something for the leader's cause. Often times, the fact of having a formal authority title is not enough to complete a task for political gain. Multiple forms of power are needed to close this power gap. Forms of power can include position, money, and the ability to help stabilize an individual's retention in the workplace. If a leader only has one form of power, this may make the leader vulnerable, and jobs may not be completed adequately.

The power of politics also stems from three different sources: positional, personal, and political. First, positional power of actual authority can control resources, information, punishment, and exhibit ecological control. French and Raven (1959) assert legitimate power refers to formal power that develops within a position in an organization that has a significant amount of control over others. The control over punishment can include sanctions for unacceptable behavior by firing a worker in an organization. A leader's ability to design the physical work environment and social work conditions involves ecological control. These power plays are very much a part of organizations today.

Personal attributes and an interpersonal relationship between a leader and a follower can lead to personal power. Personal power also includes friendship and charisma between two parties. Expertise can lead to personal power when someone has knowledge in problem solving or executing tasks when a dependency is placed on the expert. Friendship and loyalty power from the leader to the subordinate shows concern for the feelings of other people, while at the same time demonstrating trust and respect for others. Charisma is a crucial emotion for a leader to possess. Charismatic leaders have a view into the hopes and dreams of his or her followers. This creates a desire for people to rally behind the leader and generates commitment from the followers.

Power and leadership may be intertwined. Barnard (1938) notes the influence of leadership must be granted from those being led to the actual leader. The power-influence approach accepts that leadership is given to those who hold certain positions in an organization. After Barnard's research, this influence approach was contrary to popular belief. Researchers later identified, however, that there are sources of power over participants in an organization that permit leaders to lead (French & Raven, 1959).

The question remains: How much power should one use when leading? This simply depends upon the circumstances and what needs to be accomplished. There are several influences to consider to aid in guiding this process. First, more power is needed when changing attitudes and behavior. Second, less power is needed when the leader has majority support from juniors in an organization. Expert and referent power are positively related with job satisfaction and the performance of subordinates in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Last, reward power often results in lower levels of job satisfaction and job performance of subordinates in an organization.

Conflict. Scarce resources and diverse interest create conflict between individuals in an organization. Conflict is as a natural and inevitable condition that develops from differences between individuals and group interest (French & Raven, 1959). A department often experiences horizontal conflict, while individuals in the organization with a higher status in leadership may experience vertical conflict when forming rules and regulations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Cultural conflict arises when different values, beliefs, and lifestyles are noticeable in society. Conflict as a whole can be used purposefully to repair problems and unite an organization together. Solving problems allows organizations to intertwine individual and social change within the organization itself. Organizations that show no conflict or struggle put themselves at risk for a larger lack of unity. According to Bolman and Deal, if this avoidance occurs, other problems will arise, and individuals will have difficulty recognizing the primary issue of the conflict in general.

Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame brings together a conceptual overarching frame of ideas from other disciplines including political science, organizational theory, psychology, and anthropology. These disciplines within this frame focus on symbols and their place in the culture and lives of individuals (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The symbolic frame seeks to understand the primary meaning, belief, and faith that make symbols so powerful in the lives of people and organizations. This frame also explains how humans use symbols to communicate ideas, bring out meaning from confusion, and predict the unknown. This frame separates from other organizational theories, which stress rationality, certainty, and

linearity, and provides a framework for leaders to understand and effectively use symbols in organizations.

Theatre and drama. This symbolic frame views organizations and processes as theatre. Essentially, this is a drama that expresses sorrow, joy, and expectations. The structure of the organization is seen as a stage. This includes the arrangement of space, lighting and props, and costumes that make the drama exciting for the audience. Drama can arouse emotion, kindle individual spirits, reduce doubt, and provide opportunities to understand the present with a vision for the future (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Organizationally, the process of theatre is seen in several ways. Meetings serve as symbolic grounds to help prevent individual and organizational collapse. Planning is a ceremony structure and must be conducted to maintain genuineness. Evaluation ensures an accountable, thoughtful, and well-managed image. Collective bargaining occurs when individuals and managers meet and discuss how to change standoffs into workable agreements. Last, power is a concrete quality that individuals or organizations possess, but power is also seen as unclear and undefined in the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The theatre and drama experience allows individuals and organizations to discover what was expressed, what was attracted, and what was changed for the better revision of the organization.

Myth. Myths come into vogue and shield people from ambiguity. While myths are implied to display no truth, organizationally, myths communicate noteworthy truths (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Myths, unlike theories, are not intended to be empirically testable. According to Cohen (1969), myths explain, communicate the unconscious wishes and conflicts, and provide a narrative that anchors the present to the past.

Myths are positive and negative. Optimistically, myths establish and maintain stability, certainty, and meaning (Cohen, 1969). These myths are shared and reinforced continually and strengthen claims of individuality while making it easier to advance internal unity in an organization. Adversely, myths can blind us to information and opportunities to learn. Myths are often believed, even though individuals continually encounter information to opposing facts.

Ritual. Rituals are often incorporated into organizations. Likewise, rational and instrumental activities are connected to rituals (Bolman & Deal, 2008). First, performance appraisals are used and rarely yield learning or information about an individual's actual performance. Regular weekly meetings and committee meetings actually yield few valuable outcomes. Management training programs show few visible improvements in managerial skills, while the individual in training receives a special status for his or her deeds. Last, tests and job interviews produce very little valuable data. Fair treatment is an evident part of the process as well as an increase in confidence for the one hired for the position. Rituals may be rational yet may not be practical.

Fairy tale. In general, fairy tales provide entertainment and moral instruction for young children. They convey morals, values, and hope for the future through optimistic characters, such as heroes overcoming a corporate dragon and a creative manager thriving in the face of adversity (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In everyday organizations, fairy tales are presented to people inside and outside of the organization in order to gain support, empathy, and self-confidence. While young children may enjoy fairy tales of old, adults may enjoy fairy tales of victorious men and women from within the organization in which they work.

Leadership and Administration in the School System

School administrators are expected to lead students, teachers, and the entire community (Schlechty, 2001; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). This expectation has changed since the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to this, an understanding of current leadership is imperative to further comprehend the role of school administrators as related to teacher retention.

Combined Use of the Four-Frame Model in Organizational Leadership

Leaders who effectively combine the four frames when participating in organizational leadership are typically capable of being more understanding when carrying out administrative tasks. This is believed to be due to the fact that they are able to perceive the organization in which they work from multiple perspectives, which enables them to interpret situations in various ways. Maintaining a number of different perspectives can provide educational staff with a more accurate image of a set of circumstances so that they may react accordingly.

Leaders within educational establishments who are capable of thinking and acting using multiple frames have a higher likelihood of fulfilling the plethora of frequently conflicting expectations, which are placed upon them more skillfully than those who fail to differentiate situational requirements. Effective leadership is reliant upon flexibility and the ability to deal with cognitive complexity (Cibulka & Mawhinney, 1995). Educational institutions are turbulent organizational worlds in which competing scenarios often make the tasks of leaders difficult. The ability to utilize multiple frames increases teaching staff's ability to formulate clear judgments and act upon them in an effective manner. Innovative thinking is required in order to display successful organizational

leadership in educational institutions (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Combining the frames can enhance innovative thought processes.

Leaders within educational institutions who are capable of simultaneously viewing the organization through the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic lenses are generally more effective than those who focus only on a single component of an educational institution's functioning. Being able to combine the frames is also becoming more and more important as educational settings become increasingly complex in their nature (Bolman & Deal, 2010). The human resource frame tends to be used by leaders in educational institutions to a greater degree than the other frames. It is arguable that this reflects a necessity to combine the frames in order to effectively lead within an educational setting (Beck-Frazier, McFadden & White, 2007).

Leaders have influence for retention, as it indicates that those who remain within leadership roles within schools for longer periods of time are more adept at using all four leadership frames (Tan, 2012). This suggests that a constant stream of new teaching staff may lessen the extent to which those in leadership roles can effectively make use of all four frames. The fact that leaders in schools need to combine the frames in order to deal with change effectively also means that if teachers are frequently leaving and entering a school, only leaders who have mastered the art of combining the frames will be able to adapt to the changes in an appropriate manner. Tan (2012) has linked each of the four frames to different components of organizational leadership within schools, suggesting that the reason that all frames need to be used by leaders is that they are all essential elements of learning institutions. The author has proposed that the way in which each leadership frame is used in schools differs according to the cultural environment of the

school. Thus, although the application of the frames might differ from institution to institution, it is still clear that the ability to combine them all is required in order for leaders in schools to be adept in organizational leadership roles.

Organizational adaptability is an essential requirement for facilitating institutional change (Drinan & Gallant, 2006). Therefore, it is arguable that leaders who cannot effectively combine the frames cannot prepare their schools for alterations of this nature. Combining the four frames enables leaders in educational settings to define the territory between best practices and organizational culture in order to effectively engage in problem solving behavior. Using a single frame only can cause teachers to demonstrate narrow-minded thinking, resulting in issues only addressed via habitual schemas and scripts that act as an obstacle to the implementation of innovative solutions.

Public school leaders within the United States may be able to use the four frames more successfully. At this time, however, many public school leaders are failing to utilize all four frames in an appropriate manner, which is having a detrimental impact upon students' educational progression (DuBois, Gomez, Farmer, Messner & Silva, 2009). This indicates that leaders at these schools could benefit from learning how to combine the frames in a manner that may better facilitate organizational changes which are designed to enhance the learning experiences of the students (DuBois, et al., 2009). College, Ginsberg, Jordan and Tatum (2005) have pointed out that leaders within educational settings need to be able to use all four frames because they may encounter situations in which either one, or a combinations of different frames, are required in order to effectively deal with said situation. It is important for leaders within schools to combine the frames in order to arrive at visions that everybody within the schools can

collectively work towards. Combining the frames is an essential component of organizing others within educational institutions and indicates that it is required for fostering effective collaboration and emphasizes the fact that it is not only necessary to be able to combine all four frames; leaders in schools also need to be able to combine multiple different combinations of frames (Bolman & Deal, 2010; Strong, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

From analyzing the literature, it is clear that combining the four frames is an important element of organizational leadership within schools. There are also multiple components related to this area, which can distinguish between effective leadership and ineffective leadership. However, there is evidence that some individuals in leadership positions within schools have room for improvement with regards to their ability to draw upon multiple frames or organizational leadership.

Justification for Use of the Four-Frame Model in P-12 Schools

The four-frame model is applicable to the issue of teacher retention in P-12 schools for a number of reasons. Schools are subject to frequent changes in the fiscal, environmental, social, and political landscapes. The domain of P-12 teaching is by no means static; it is constantly transitioning from one state to another (Gosnell-Lamb, Matt & O'Reilly, 2013).

If leaders within schools use the four frames in an effective manner, it can have a positive impact upon their institutions with regards to enabling them to cope with change (Strong, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Grable, Overbay and Patterson (2009) found a correlation between the extent in which teachers are resistant to change, and the likelihood that they will leave the schools of their employment. This research indicates

that the four-frame model is directly relevant to teacher retention in P-12 schools because frame use is linked to the ability of leaders to increase retention rates.

Change in schools has not stemmed solely from within the institutions. According to Kenney and Spillane (2012), federal policy makers have also been responsible for substantial changes within America's schools. These policy makers have been responsible for alterations in education including decisions of what is considered a permissible level for student achievement and examples of important teaching practices in the classroom. Kenney and Spillane assert using rewards and sanctions for compliance with changes in policy has caused this, which has resulted in dramatic changes throughout the course of the last 25 years.

Federal policy makers are not the only external bodies that have brought about drastic changes within schools. Philanthropic organizations, charter school networks, and other similar groups (i.e., non-profit groups) have also had an influence on the transformation of the educational landscape. School principals have been charged with the task of ensuring that their institutions are able to adapt to these constant changes (Kenney & Spillane, 2012). This failure to adapt could have resulted in decreases in teacher retention rates.

Effective use of the four frames can also be used to increase leaders' abilities to support others within organizations (Grace & Korach, 2006). Given the link between the amount of administrative and collegial support that teachers receive, and the likelihood of remaining within their roles, this emphasizes the importance of the four frame model with regard to teacher retention in P-12 schools.

There are numerous areas in which teachers currently lack support. Bingimlas (2009) has found that teachers do not receive enough support when dealing with changes in the technological landscape of the classrooms in which they work. Technological innovations within the classroom are likely to become increasingly important as time progresses and proper support is vital for teacher success.

Teachers do not receive adequate levels of support when it comes to facilitating the inclusion of pupils with emotional behavioral disorders (Cassady, 2011). Teachers who deal with pupils who fall within this category display below average retention rates and often find it difficult to deal with the additional challenges that they face when working with this population (Prather-Jones, 2011). An increasing amount of emphasis has been placed upon inclusion within mainstream educational settings in recent years (McLeskey & Waldron, 2010). This issue in teacher retention is likely to become even more relevant as mainstream education continues. It is clear that support is lacking in numerous areas, and that the situation is likely to worsen in the future. This emphasizes the importance of the four-frame model as it indicates that mastery of the four frames may play an increasingly important role in teacher retention.

The increasing scrutiny and pressure that is being placed upon teachers related to standardized tests, as well as a greater emphasis upon accountability measures are contributing to elevated stress levels (Bonus, Davidson, Flook, Goldberg & Pinger, 2013). This pressure is likely to be an even more important influence in teacher retention rates throughout the years to come. Given the impact of effective organizational leadership methods on reducing stress amongst educators, the four-frame model could be used to develop better teacher retention rates in P-12 schools.

The inverse relationship between stress and likelihood of retention amongst teaching staff is well established. Benders and Jackson (2012) conducted a study aimed at ascertaining whether or not the levels of resilience to stress amongst teachers at P-12 schools have an impact upon their likelihood to quit the teaching profession. The study found that teachers within these schools who are resilient to stress have far higher retention rates.

If teachers who are resilient to stress are more likely to stay within their roles at schools, then by logical extension of this fact, it can be concluded that stress makes teachers at P-12 schools more likely to quit their jobs. It is clear that stress wears down their resolve and increases the chance of them deciding that they wish to change to a different profession. According to Benders and Jackson (2012), resilience to stress is a result of nature as opposed to nurture. This indicates that the only effective way to reduce the extent to which teaching staff quit their jobs due to stress is to implement methods, which are capable of reducing the levels of stress that they experience.

From examining the literature, there appears to be a wealth of texts, which indicate that the four-frame model can be applied to the issue of retention in P-12 schools. Retention is linked to satisfaction through issues such as stress and the degree to which teachers receive support. Leaders' use of each of the four frames and combinations of them is also linked to these phenomena.

Role of the Principal in Teacher Retention

The leadership of the school principal is a primary influence in teacher retention. The Met Life Foundation (2003) contends teachers highly commend principals who made it easy to ask questions, consider difficulties, and provide guidance and solutions to

challenging tasks. Positive school culture is a predictor for teacher retention and student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2007). Teachers who migrate to other schools are looking for leadership that meets their needs. Teachers also desire to receive respect, support, and direction from their principal while being able to be a professional in a community of learning where collaboration can occur between colleagues (Harris, 2015; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

High stakes achievement testing in the classroom has increased negative feelings among teachers toward administrators (Huysman, 2007). Administrators should understand how the accountability movement impacts teachers' job satisfaction, which can result in teacher attrition. A school administrator has an undeniable influence on teachers (Davis & Wilson, 2000). Huysman (2007) adds,

If leaders are to create an empowering organization, they need to establish relationships within the work setting, develop work groups that work collaboratively in decision making, inspire and guide the organization, and put into place the process of renewal for the organization (p. 28).

According to Catapano (2001), administrators must implement four actions to retain teachers. Principals must (a) contribute to teachers' learning about development of children; (b) encourage the close relationships of faculty; (c) create clear and consistent expectations for teachers and; (d) arrange interview questioning for teacher candidates to decipher candidates' childhood experiences in relation to the new geographic location. These guidelines are particularly important in supporting new teachers. Research notes the dissatisfaction teachers feel about their careers eventually impacts their day-to-day routine, which impacts not only their own performance, but also the performance of the students in their classrooms (Haughey & Murphy, 1983).

Leadership Support

School administrators have a great opportunity to impact teacher retention. Research presents a positive relationship between teacher commitment and leadership support (Billingsley & Cross, 1994; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Morris & Sherman, 1981). School administrators are responsible for positive impacting the culture of the organization of schools that teachers work in each day (Littrell et al., 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989). When administrators provide acknowledgement, encouragement, feedback, trust, and offer decision-making opportunities through collaboration, teachers stay more committed to the teaching career.

The conduct of school leaders also strongly influences teacher job satisfaction (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982; Knoop, 1981; Littrell et al., 1994). Teachers experience greater satisfaction with their career when principals encourage collaboration in decision making (Knoop, 1981), are understanding about professional growth (Blase, Dedrick, & Strathe, 1986), trust teachers to work dutifully (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; McGregor, 1960), provide appreciation and support (Chapman & Lowther, 1982), and offer opportunities to develop relationships among faculty and staff (Littrell et al., 1994; Sparks, 1979). In contrast, when school administrators are unorganized, unproductive, provide little to no teacher support, and lack planning abilities, their actions produce considerable stress for new teachers (Hammer et al., 2005).

Working Conditions

Research has found that teachers believe working conditions are a causal reason for their attrition (Hammer et al., 2005). These working conditions include a lack of a professional culture and simple resources, large class sizes, extreme discipline issues,

poor physical conditions of the school building, unproductive school leadership, and little to no educational planning time. Studies from Canada and Australia revealed almost one-third of teachers complained that collegial isolation was a large detriment to the teaching career because of the inability to learn from others (Davis, 2002). A group of special educators in a rural school in Hawaii decided to remain at their schools because of professional support and dedication from students and parents alike (Benjamin & Black, 2012). Davis continues to note a lack of collegiate support due to the fact that there are not other colleagues of the same content matter to interact with on a continual basis is a hurdle for teacher retention. An absence of resources, outdated curriculum, and a lack of funding also impede teachers to teach successfully (Berry, Smylie, & Fuller, 2008; Davis, 2002).

School Culture

Organizations have their own culture; schools as organizations are no different. A school culture is a context that a group may use to solve different problems. Primarily, school culture is social teaching of unwritten rules that employees learn as they try to fit in a specific school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The social indoctrination of an organization's culture is learned as people try to be part of the group (Schein, 1992); thus, members feel good when they are part this group.

Members of a school culture help shape one another, as a group of individuals in the school culture become unique and set apart from other outside groups. It is important for school leaders to be cognizant of the role of a school's culture since it has the potential of being predicted and controlled or controlling over its members (Gruenert &

Whitaker, 2015). Similarly, it is important that a school's culture stay positive and healthy in order to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

The concept of school culture may be perplexing to grasp, but its influence on what happens to a school from day-to-day and year-to-year is remarkable (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Increasing an awareness of school culture, “being able to understand it, measure it, and change it—is one of the most important things” (p. 166) educators can do for students. Likewise, a positive school culture is a predictor for teacher retention and student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

Summary

Even though some teacher retention influences cannot be controlled (e.g., spousal employment, birth of a child), many issues that impact teacher retention can be controlled and influenced by school administrators. A major focal point of school administrators should be to provide support to its teachers in order to increase teacher retention (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2010). School administrators should also be actively involved in providing a collaborative working environment to increase working professional relationships among teachers and between teachers and administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2003) while being aware of the school's culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Because teachers who are committed socially and professionally to the goals and mission of the school are more likely to remain (Chapman, 1983), school administrators can have a major influence on whether or not a teacher decides to leave or remain at a school. House (1981) contends that teacher development is so important, and that it can provide a stable outline for school administrators to address teachers'

developmental concerns, consequently decreasing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention.

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature on teacher retention and examine approaches for increasing retention in schools in rural school districts. Chapter 3 presents a description of the research methods through a multiple-case study design.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This multiple-case study explored conditions that contribute to teacher retention in rural school districts. The overarching goal was to identify contextual conditions and administrative mediation strategies that appear to stem the flow of teachers exiting the profession (Allen, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fox & Certo, 2001; Nielson, 2001). This chapter presents the research design (e.g., study focus, study context, study participants, data sources) and describes how data were analyzed and what strategies were used to assure credibility of study findings.

Research Design

In an effort to comprehend the characteristics of teacher retention in rural school districts, a qualitative research design was developed. Creswell (2007) notes qualitative research places the investigator into the activities and world of the phenomenon being studied; thus, the research procedures best suited for this investigation are qualitative. The overarching research question was, *What conditions contribute to the retention of teachers in rural school districts?* Three guiding questions assured the overarching research question was answered:

1. In what ways do professional relationships influence teacher retention?
2. How does school culture impact teacher retention?
3. What conditions outside of school influence teacher retention?

Because the study was conducted in three rural school districts, a case study design was used (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). According to Creswell (2007), case study research includes the study “of an issue explored through one or more cases within a

bounded system” (p. 73). Merriam adds that a case study is an “intensive holistic description of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii).

This multiple-case study utilized a qualitative approach in which I explored teacher retention in three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky between November 2015 and February 2016 through (a) document reviews, (b) observations and field notes, (c) individual interviews with superintendents, or his designee, and principals, and (d) focus-group interviews with teachers. Studying this phenomenon in context provided insights about how teacher retention actually occurs within specific situations. Thus, this multiple-case study provides an “examination of a facet, issue, or perhaps the events of a geographic issue over time” (Goodson & Walker, 1995, p. 186). Further, using a multiple-case study enhanced the opportunity for me to compare and contrast data sources across the three rural school districts. Two data collection protocols were developed for this study: (a) an individual-interview protocol for district and school administrators and (b) a focus-group interview protocol for teachers.

Study Focus

Although teacher retention across the United States is a national problem, many researchers deem the issue of teacher retention in rural school districts to be more serious than in urban school districts (Davis, 2002; Hammer et al., 2005; Monk, 2007). District administrators report major retention problems for novice teachers in rural school districts due to geographic remoteness, sparse populations, and difficulty fitting into a small-community lifestyle (Lambert, 2013). Rural districts typically have fewer prospective teachers residing within their local community, more outdated school

facilities, and lower salaries for public school educators than urban districts. Nationally, teachers are leaving the profession in greater numbers than in the past, including an estimated 30% of all new teachers leaving during their first three years of service. Among that 30%, more than 10% leave before the end of their first year (Huysman, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Further, Huysman posits these percentages are thought to be even higher in rural school districts.

Among the 120 counties within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 56 are designated as rural with a population of less than 19,999 people in each county (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2013). Three of these 56 rural counties include Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens, which are the locations where this multiple-case study was conducted. Kentucky is ranked sixth in the nation for its high percentage (57%) of low-income students in public schools (Southern Education Foundation, 2013). Among all students in Kentucky, 59% receive free lunch through federal funding while another 21% receive reduced-priced lunch, resulting in a total of 80% of students in public schools receiving free or reduced-priced lunch each day. Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens counties have an average of 21.6% of its population under the age of 18 and a total population average of 25.9% living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), which is an average of over 7% higher poverty rate than the poverty rate for the entire Commonwealth. Despite their poverty conditions, these three school districts reported high rates of teacher retention; thus, these districts, which share common county borders, were selected as study sites.

Study Context

With a teacher response rate ranging from 84% to 93%, teachers from the three selected school districts reported between 87% and 91% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the school where they worked was a good place to work and learn during the 2012-2013 school year (Kentucky TELL, 2013). According to the Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) (2013), Kentucky employs 45,842 teachers in P-12 schools across the entire commonwealth. Table 3.1 displays educational demographics for Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens counties in 2013.

Table 3.1

Educational Demographics for Three Counties in Eastern Kentucky

Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky	Number of Schools in District	Number of Principals in District	Number of Teachers in District	Number of New Teachers in District	Percent of New Teachers in District
Fairfield County	15	15	432	39	11
Laurens County	9	9	237	21	9
Pickens County	19	22	569	15	3

Results of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) indicated the national average for the teacher retention rate in 2013 was 84.3% (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). SASS has been tracking teacher retention since in 1988, and this percentage is near the lowest it has been since its inception. According to EPSB (2013), the three rural school districts where this study was conducted have a higher than normal national average teacher retention rate (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Teacher Retention Rates for Three Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky

Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky	Teacher Retention Rate by Year		
	2011	2012	2013
Fairfield County	93	93	91
Laurens County	91	90	91
Pickens County	95	95	97

Cases Defined

Because a case is a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bound context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25), a case study allows a researcher to answer a question and explain fundamental links to real-life situations (Yin, 2011). This multiple-case study sought to understand high teacher retention rates in three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky where teachers perceived their work settings were supportive (Kentucky TELL, 2013). District superintendents, or his designee, and school principals were interviewed individually. Teachers with over five years of experience in the school district were invited to participate in focus-group interviews. Since a majority of teacher attrition occurs during the first five years of teaching, teachers who remained in the school district over five years are more likely to remain in that school district for a longer period of time (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Marston, 2010). The interview protocols developed for this study focused on potential contributors to the high teacher-retention rates in those three rural school districts.

The New Teacher Center (NTC) administers the anonymous Kentucky TELL survey to which school-based certified teachers are encouraged to respond. NTC asserts that results provide a positive association between student achievement and teacher retention. The survey results also provide administrators and teachers with data, tools,

and direct support to facilitate school and district improvement across the Commonwealth (Kentucky TELL, 2013).

The 2013 TELL survey response rates for districts that participated in this study were: Fairfield, 93.7%; Laurens, 88.26%; and Pickens, 88.32%. Section 10 of the survey focused on overall professionalism and satisfaction of a teacher’s individual school. Question 10.6 of the survey asked teachers to rate if their school is a good place to work and learn by indicating *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. Table 3.3 displays the percent of *agree and strongly agree* responses in the three school districts in this study compared to the percent of responses for the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Table 3.3

TELL Kentucky Q10.6 Categories

Regions	Percent <i>Agree</i> Responses	Percent <i>Strongly Agree</i> Responses	Total Percent <i>Agree and Strongly Agree</i>
Fairfield County	38	50	88
Laurens County	35	55	90
Pickens County	32	55	87
Commonwealth of Kentucky	40	43	83

Research Sites

For this study, a rural county was defined as a county with a population between 2,500 to 19,999 residents that is not adjacent to a metro area (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2013). According to the USDA, 56 of 120 counties within the Commonwealth of Kentucky are rural counties; included within these 56 rural counties are Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens in the eastern region of Kentucky. According to

Kentucky Tourism (2014), these three counties are located in Central Appalachia defined as the Eastern Mountains and Coalfields (EMC) region of Kentucky (see Figure 3.1). German and Scotch-Irish clans began settling the region in the late 1700s and often turned away newcomers, an occurrence that was still common in the early 21st century (Drake, 2001). The majority of residents in this region have lived there all their lives (Clark, 1992). Although Kentucky’s population is nearly 90% “White alone” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), it is 98% or higher in the three counties where the study was conducted.

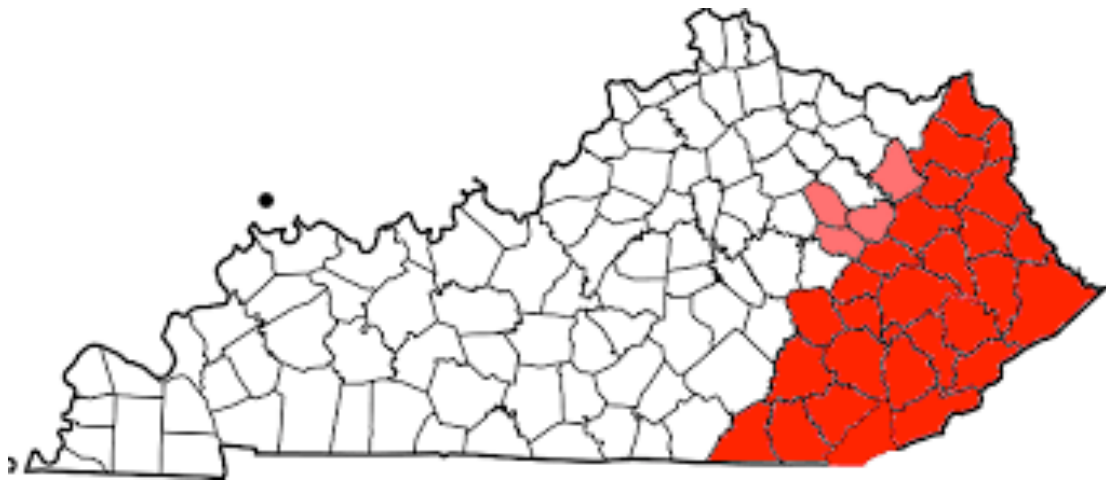


Figure 3.1

Eastern Mountains and Coalfields Region

During the New Deal era, federal welfare support was introduced to the EMC region of Kentucky, and numerous generations have relied on government support for decades (Drake, 2001; Wilber, 2015). Pickens County experienced a population decrease by 5.3% when the coal mining industry declined beginning in 2000. Fairfield County and Laurens County populations have been considered *distressed* regions of Appalachia since their 5-year unemployment and poverty rates have been 1.5 times the national average (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2014; Hilston, 2000). The ARC notes that

Pickens County is considered *at risk* because over half of its population is defined as distressed while the other half is returning to economic distress after a period of economic growth. The ARC defines a distressed county as one that has at least twice the national poverty rate and a per capital market income 67% of the national average or has a three-year average unemployment rate twice the national average. The ARC describes an at-risk county as one that meets two of following criteria: (a) 3-year unemployment rate 125% of the national average, (b) per capital market income that is 67% or less on the national average, or (c) a poverty rate of at least 125% of the national average.

Although Fairfield County Schools and Laurens County Schools serve all children residing in their respective counties, Pickens County Schools serve only the students living outside of the city limits of Journey's Rest, Pickens County's largest town. According to Pickens County administrators, some students in isolated areas of the county have not traveled outside of the county or even visited Journey's Rest. Further, the diversity within Pickens County is based upon residence location, education level, socioeconomic status, and not ethnicity. Since the three districts share common borders and are located in the same geographic area, it is assumed that similar diversity conditions exist.

The land area of Fairfield County is 395 square miles in size and includes 2.4 square miles of water, whereas Laurens County encompasses 339 square miles and includes 1.1 square miles of water. Larger than Fairfield and Laurens combined, Pickens County covers 789 squares miles, including 1.8 squares miles of water. These counties are regions of scenic landscape that can generate sometimes harsh climate due to variance of 610 to 3,149 feet above sea level. These three counties are an average distance of 130

miles to 170 miles from an in-state urban center. The top three employing industries in the county are education, healthcare, and energy trades (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2014).

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) demographic information for Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens counties is displayed in Table 3.4. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has a median household income of \$43,036 and averages 2.50 persons per household.

Table 3.4

Demographic Information for Three Counties in Eastern Kentucky

Counties in Eastern Kentucky	Population in 2010	Median Household Income in 2010	Mean Persons per Household in 2010
Fairfield	38,728	\$30,476	2.49
Laurens	24,519	\$31,200	2.56
Pickens	63,380	\$32,961	2.41

The USDA developed Beale Codes, also known as Rural-Urban Continuum Codes, to provide a rural classification system that distinguishes metropolitan (i.e., metro) counties by the population of that metro area and non-metropolitan (i.e., nonmetro) counties by the degree of urbanization and contiguousness to a metro area or metro areas. These codes were used to classify counties in this study. Beale Code definitions include a ranking of 1-3 for metro counties and 4-9 for nonmetro counties. Fairfield and Pickens have a Beale Code ranking of 7 (i.e., non-metro rural counties) while Laurens has a Beale Code ranking of 9 (i.e., non-metro, completely rural county).

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) provided 2014 student demographic data for Fairfield, Laurens, and Pickens counties including student participation rates for reduced-price lunch and free-lunch data (see Table 3.5). The agency also provided teacher demographic data and school financial data (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.5***KDE Student Demographic and Reduced-Priced and Free Lunch Data for 2014***

Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky	Population (P-12)	Percent Male	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Other^a	Percent Reduced-Priced Lunch	Percent Free Lunch
Fairfield	5,963	52.6	98.8	0.4	0.5	66.7	8.1
Laurens	3,173	52.8	98	0.5	1.5	63.1	6.6
Pickens	8,982	51.2	97.7	1.1	0.5	62.1	7

^a Includes Hispanic, Asian, and Other designations

Table 3.6***KDE Teacher Demographic and School Financial Data for 2014***

Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky	Population (P-12)	Percent Male	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Other^a	Annual Salary	Annual Amount Spent per Pupil
Fairfield	383	18.3	99.7	0.3	0	\$48,893	\$10,520
Laurens	213	32.9	98.6	0.1	0.1	\$48,532	\$10,364
Pickens	559	22.2	99.5	0.3	0.2	\$51,498	\$10,420

^a Includes Hispanic, Asian, and Other designations

Study Participants

All study participants are employed within one of the three eastern Kentucky school districts (i.e., Fairfield County, Laurens County, Pickens County). The superintendent and two principals from each district were invited to participate in individual interviews conducted at a location mutually determined by them and me. Due to a scheduling conflict, the superintendent of Fairfield County Schools asked the Director of Human Resources to participate in the interview. Two schools in each district were chosen for this study because teacher responses are above the school district and commonwealth's average of the combined percentage of *agree* and *strongly agree* categories on Question 10.6 of the KY TELL survey.

Focus-group participants in the study included teachers from each school with over five years of full-time experience in their respective school district. Because teachers with over five years of experience are more likely to remain in the field (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Marston, 2010), I perceived they would be able to articulate the mission, vision, and workings of their school district and their school.

Participant Selection

Using a criterion-sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007), I selected individuals to participate in interviews because they are the superintendents of the school district, principals of the selected schools, or teachers of the selected school who had worked in the district for over five years at the time of data collection. Table 3.7 displays the two schools in each district that had the highest percentage on Question 10.6 on the Kentucky TELL survey for 2013.

Table 3.7

TELL Kentucky Q10.6 Specific School Response Categories

Schools in Eastern Kentucky School Districts	District	Percent of Agree Responses	Percent Strongly Agree Responses	Total Percent Agree and Strongly Agree
Marion ES	Fairfield	10	83	93
Jasper MS	Fairfield	48	52	100
Aiken ES	Laurens	20	73	93
Lancaster ES	Laurens	52	41	93
Beaufort MS	Pickens	29	68	97
Berkeley HS	Pickens	20	71	91

Individual interview inclusion criteria. Superintendents and school principals at the selected sites were invited to participate in phone or face-to-face interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data about conditions that contributed to the

retention of elementary and secondary school teachers in rural school settings. These participants provided their perspective as a leader on teacher retention from their respective school districts as they answered interview questions, including their perspectives as being former teachers in their district. Table 3.7 displays individual schools within the three rural districts in eastern Kentucky that were invited to interview for this study.

Focus-group interview inclusion criteria. Teachers at the selected sites with over five years of teaching experience in their respective school district were invited to participate in face-to-face, focus-group interviews. Each school principal provided names of potential focus-group participants to whom invitations were sent to participate. All focus-group participants were teachers holding professional certifications who either had earned a minimum of a master's degree or who were working on a master's degree as is required of teachers between the fifth and tenth year of teaching (EPSB, 2013). A total of 93 teachers participated in focus-group interviews that ranged in size from 19 participants to 2 participants. The range in number of participants was due to a snowstorm that required changes in the original focus-group interview schedule. The purpose of these focus-group interviews was to gather data from teachers to understand why they have remained in each rural school district. Table 3.7 displays which individual schools had teachers invited to interview for this study.

Data Sources

According to Yin (2011), a case study must follow three principles of data collection in order to increase the construct validity and reliability of the study: (a) multiple sources of evidence, (b) a case study database, and (c) a chain of evidence.

Multiple sources of evidence (i.e., evidence from two or more sources) are required for triangulation of study findings. A case study database provides a formal assembly of evidence from the data collected. A chain of evidence links the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions made. Proof that Yin's first principle (i.e., use of multiple sources of evidence) was met is provided in this section. Explanations about how the second and third principles were met are presented later in this chapter.

Multiple sources of evidence were employed in this study. Data sources included document reviews, observations and field notes, individual interviews, and focus-group interviews. Multiple data sources supported triangulation, which is a requirement for qualitative research, to determine the phenomenon examined "remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995, p. 112). Multiple methods were used to gather data from a variety of sources including (a) document reviews, (b) observations and field notes, (c) individual interviews with superintendents or his designee, (d) individual interviews with principals, and (e) focus-group interviews with teachers having five or more years of experience working within their current district.

Document review. According to Stake (1995), nearly every case study requires examination of documents. In designing this multiple-case study, I collected and reviewed (a) demographics for three rural counties in eastern Kentucky, (b) teacher retention rates for three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky, (c) KDE student demographics and reduced-priced and free lunch data, (d) KDE teacher demographics and school financial data, (e) TELL Kentucky responses, (f) policies from school and district websites, (g) comprehensive school improvement plans and district school

improvement plans, and (h) school-specific documents (e.g., newsletters, handbooks). I kept a research journal of field notes during data collection and developed a case study database to organize the documents. Similarly, the document review promoted an understanding of the study context, which informed the interviews. I referenced these documents during data analysis to understand and discover new insights relevant to the study (Ellis & Bochner, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2011).

Observations and field notes. According to Merriam (1998), observations and the written account of a case study must be parallel to the interview transcriptions. During this multiple-case study, I followed Merriam's advise of being a careful observer by taking time to observe important influences including (a) the physical setting, (b) the participants, (c) activities and interactions, (d) conversations, (e) subtle concerns, (f) and my own behavior. Observations were recorded in detail as field notes that included descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments, which were employed to form a database for data analysis. Likewise, the observations and field notes promoted an understanding of the study context, which informed the interviews. When combined with the interview transcriptions and document review, the observations and field notes allowed for a complete interpretation of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1987).

Interviews. Interviews provide the opportunity for me to understand the phenomena that I cannot directly observe. Two types of interviews were conducted for this research: (a) semi-structured individual interviews with superintendents, or his designee, and principals in these rural school districts and (b) semi-structured focus-group interviews with teachers from these rural school districts who had taught in the school district for five or more years. I communicated with the superintendent's office of each

school district to gain approval to conduct the study. Each principal of each selected school was contacted to participate in the study and to obtain approval to conduct focus-group interviews at each school.

Individual interviews. Individual interviews took place at a convenient time for the interviewee and me and lasted approximately 50 minutes. Before beginning the interview, participants were given time to read the questions and articulate some of their thoughts. I asked all of the structured interview questions to maintain consistency on the focus of the interviews, thus allowing for a later comparison of responses. The superintendent, or his designee, was interviewed before school principals in each school district. The purpose of conducting the individual interviews was to gain leadership insights about teacher retention in the respective school district. An important part of this research approach included my showing respect for the participants' views and the crucial aspect of these views being deemed as valuable. I sent interview invitations via electronic-mail messages (see Appendices A and B) and followed up with telephone calls to make an appointment with each interviewee.

Open-ended questions asked during the interviews were semi-structured to ensure any difference in interviewees' responses could be attributed to the differences in responses and not to the way questions will be presented. Interviews were audio-recorded with a portable digital recorder and transcribed using a trained transcriptionist. See Appendix C for the individual-interview protocols.

Focus-group interviews. Focus-group interviews with teachers from six different schools across three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky were conducted after interviews with school principals. Focus-group interviews took place in each school at a

convenient time for the teachers and me and spanned from 40 to 75 minutes in duration. I asked all of the structured questions to preserve consistency on the attention of the interviews, which later allowed for a comparison of responses. The purpose of conducting focus-group interviews with experienced teachers was to gain understanding about teacher retention from their perspective. I sent interview invitations via electronic-mail messages (see Appendix D) and followed up with telephone calls to make an appointment with each interviewee.

While conducting the focus-group interviews, I listened carefully to their responses and observed their behavior. Open-ended questions asked during the interviews were semi-structured to ensure any difference in focus-group participants' responses could be attributed to the differences in responses and not to the way questions were asked. Focus-group interviews were audio-recorded with a portable digital recorder and transcribed using a trained transcriptionist. See Appendix E for the focus-group interview protocol.

Feedback on Interview Protocols

Prior to launch of data collection, a current superintendent, a former principal, six teachers of elementary and secondary school students outside of Kentucky, and two researchers from the University of Kentucky reviewed the interview protocols. The former principal noted that a sub-question about family should be added under the section asking about influences that contributed to a teacher remaining in a school district. One of the teachers mentioned that I needed to be careful about making too many assumptions in the protocol (i.e., asking a question if conditions outside school impacted teachers' decision to stay). This teacher also noted to review the language of the questions

carefully. For example, there is a difference in *should*, *could*, and *would*; thus, these words needed to be used carefully. Another teacher noted the difference in asking *how* and *did* in the protocol. A researcher encouraged me to alter the order and numbers of both protocols for clarity and ease of readability. The interview protocols used in this study were revised or edited to address concerns raised during this process. These revisions made the interview questions more focused, intentional, and understandable for the participants in this study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Due to the sensitivity of the information provided, all efforts have been made to protect the identities of all the study sites and the study participants. To preserve this confidentiality, superintendents, principals, and teachers who participated in interviews were assured the information shared was classified as confidential and would be shared only with those approved to view data gathered during this study. The focus-group interviews were conducted during school or during after school-hours, and individual interviews were conducted at the convenience of each administrator. All study participants received my contact information, my faculty advisor's contact information, and contact information for the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board's in case they had questions about this study.

All interview participants were assigned a numeric code to assure protection of their identity. All information connecting the participant to his or her pseudonym was stored in a secure location with access only available by me. All interview transcripts were stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Although participants in

the study were told they could withdraw at any time before the study was complete, no participants withdrew.

Arrangement of Data

I cautiously created a data storage system using suggestions from Yin (2011), Merriam (1998), and Stake (1995) to assure all data were organized into a manageable system and available for quick retrieval. Thus, this multiple-case study met Yin's (2011) second and third principles of data collection: (a) creation of a case study database and (b) chain of evidence.

A case study database was created that other researchers could use to replicate this study to increase the reliability of the multiple-case study (Yin, 2011). Further, the construction of data-collection protocols explicitly connected to the research questions preserved a chain of evidence, thus meeting Yin's third principle of data collection. Throughout each case, I organized the data and documentation from each data source in different files. The first page of each file included the purpose of the study and the research questions that guide data collection in order to remain focused during data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Data collection materials file. A single file contained all important information related to data collection: (a) an IRB approved certification form for human subjects research (see Appendix F), (b) original signed consent forms from all participants (see Appendices G and H), (c) correspondence with participants from the study, and (d) participant roster and contact information. Data collection protocols, electronic-mail messages to participants, and journal memos were also placed in this file.

Original data sources file. Another file contained original data gathered during interviews. All of the interviews were conducted in a conversational style; thus, the interviews were easy to follow. The interview transcriptions were given an identification code, and the protocols and data were organized into sections according to the interview code. A trained transcriptionist transcribed all protocols. Before beginning analysis of interview data, I carefully compared the transcriptions to the original recordings to ensure their accuracy.

Participant data file. Each participant received a copy of the findings chapter. The member checking process (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995) allowed the participants to review the material for accuracy and truthfulness. This process also helped triangulate my observations and interpretations of the data collection.

Document review, observations, and field notes file. All documents and field notes were placed in a single file. The information was placed in chronological order by school district and individual school beginning with the first document reviewed.

Organization of the multiple-case study. In order to monitor the progress of my study, I created three study organizers (Yin, 2011). First, I used a calendar to record all interview meetings and ensured I did not miss an appointment. This calendar showed the distribution of data collection throughout each case. Second, I created a matrix of participant responses for data collection. The matrix indicated who agreed to participate in the study. When participant response rates were slow, I sent another request to the study participants. Finally, I organized a record of relevant information about the data sources used in this multiple-case study. Information included the type of data sources available, the dates when data were collected, and the content of the data source. Table

3.8 displays the content of the arrangement of data into a quick reference guide for use during data analysis (Stake, 1995).

Table 3.8

Data Source Record

Data Source	Date Administered	Purpose
Document Review	November 2015-February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational demographics for three rural counties in Kentucky • Teacher retention rates for three eastern Kentucky school districts • KDE student demographics and reduced-priced and free lunch data • KDE teacher demographics and school financial data • TELL Kentucky responses • Policies from school and district websites • Comprehensive school improvement plans and district school improvement plans • School specific documents
Observations and Field Notes	January-February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations and written account of the physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle concerns, and my own behavior.
Individual Interviews	January-February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview questions using protocol as a guide
Focus-Group Interviews	February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview questions using protocol as a guide

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study used a direct interpretative approach (Stake, 1995). I observed what occurred through the testimony and actions of others and represented these

events with my direct interpretation. The data-analysis process also included creating a descriptive framework, which Yin (2011) notes can yield important associations between data and allow the researcher to arrange the data across descriptive categories.

After the completion of site visits and interviews with superintendents, principals, and teachers in the selected school districts, a trained transcriptionist transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. I then analyzed all interview transcriptions for each district to identify categories and themes concerning teacher retention within each case. A coding process advised by Stake (1995) was utilized: While listening to each interview recording, I highlighted important quotes and phrases on the printed transcripts and later coded the words electronically using NVivo software. I also placed the codes, categories, and themes on sticky paper and organized the data by hand. Figure 3.2 displays the process I developed to analyze the data.

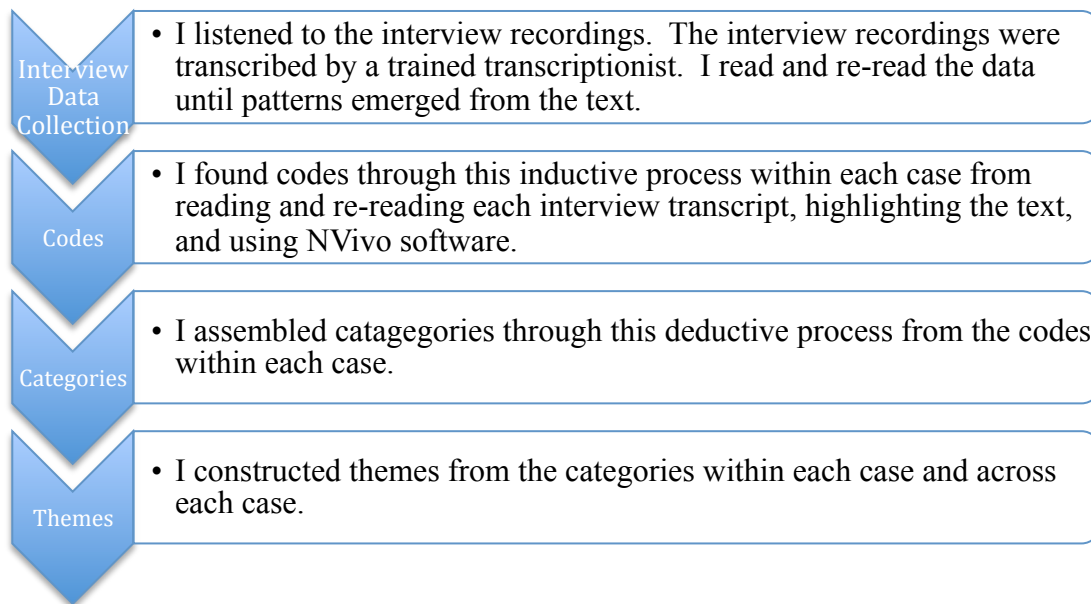


Figure 3.2

Data Analysis Process

Document reviews were an important element of this study because the reports and resources about and from the three counties and school districts provided insights about teacher retention. Observations and field notes were likewise a vital part of this study; the observations penned to words provided an “incontestable description” (Stake, 1995, p. 62) of each case that permitted further analysis and comparison for the case study report. The analysis and combination of interview data from the three sites were completed after the three site visits. The rich, thick descriptions offered by participants’ voices were authenticated in the findings presented in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2007).

Credibility of Qualitative Research

Since qualitative research methods were utilized, it was important that precautions were taken to ensure credibility of the data (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). Credibility of qualitative research began with the qualitative researcher who was the sole data collector. In other words, credibility of qualitative research began with data collection and continued through the revision process of reporting the findings.

First, the multiple-case study required me to use multiple sources of evidence to support both data-source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). The use of varied sources of evidence reduced potential complications of construct validity (Yin). Additionally, a data management system was developed to support developing a chain of evidence (Stake; Yin). Yin also notes that the reliability of a case study depends on the researcher carefully documenting the procedures, which minimizes errors and biases in a study. The creation of this data management system that linked data to conclusions increased the reliability of this multiple-case study.

Next, I understood potential researcher bias must be addressed before the study began (Hatch, 2002). My prior experiences as an elementary and secondary teacher, teacher leader, and university instructor inclined me toward an interest in teacher retention. While conducting this study, I instituted a careful balance between partisanship as a participant and impartiality as a researcher.

Last, I realized the importance of having interview participants review the draft of the study findings for accuracy of reporting and interpretation. To support member checking (Creswell, 2007), all study participants were sent a draft of the report as an attachment to electronic mail messages. I asked study participants to identify critical observations and interpretations I presented and provide suggestions for the final report (Stake, 1995). I received comments back from several participants, which improved the findings discussed in Chapter 4.

Additionally, the case study report was written with rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2007) using participants' own words. This case study report presents a detailed story, which may allow any reader to transfer information from this case to other research settings that may share common features. To ensure the quality of the case-study report, I compared the finished report to Stake's (1995) "critique checklist for a case study report" (p. 131).

Data collection was linked carefully to the purpose of conducting this study and to the research questions (Stake, 1995). A data management system was created and employed so a sequence of evidence was assembled (Yin, 2011). The breadth of data sources and data analysis allowed for multiple forms of triangulation.

Summary

This chapter delineated the methodology that was used in conducting this study about the exploration of teacher retention in elementary and secondary schools in rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the research organized by the three guiding questions of this study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion and conclusion of the findings, in addition to providing direction for future practice and research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study explored teacher retention in rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Three purposefully selected rural school districts served as sites for this multiple-case research study. In two school districts, an individual interview took place with the superintendent; in the other school district the superintendent appointed a representative to participate in the interview. An individual interview was also conducted with principals from two purposefully selected schools in each school district. These individual interviews with administrators were followed by focus-group interviews with teachers from the selected schools; all participating teachers had taught in the district where they currently worked for five or more years. District and school documents (e.g., teacher demographics, financial data, policies, school handbooks) were reviewed to gain a better understanding of characteristics utilized in selected districts and schools to increase teacher retention. During the document review and interview processes, I wrote field notes that resulted in capturing ideas for the description and analysis of teacher retention in rural school districts. I read the interview transcriptions several times while listening to the audio recordings to assure I obtained sufficient data to answer this study's overarching research question.

The overarching research question was, *What conditions contribute to the retention of teachers in rural school districts?* Three guiding questions assured the overarching research question was answered:

1. In what ways do professional relationships influence teacher retention?
2. How does school culture impact teacher retention?

3. What conditions outside of school influence teacher retention?

As in Chapter 3, the research sites (i.e., cases) were randomly identified as Fairfield County Schools, Laurens County Schools, and Pickens County Schools to assure anonymity. Table 4.1 displays general demographic and other statistical information about the study sites. The data depict information accessed from the EPSB (2013) and the TELL Survey (2013) including agree and strongly agree responses from Q10.6, which asked respondents to respond to the statement, *Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.*

Table 4.1

Educational Demographics for Study Context

Kentucky Schools	Number of Schools	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teacher Retention	Percent Agree Responses	Percent Strongly Agree Responses	Total Percent Agree and Strongly Agree
Fairfield County	15	432	91	38	50	88
Laurens County	9	237	91	35	55	90
Pickens County	19	569	97	32	55	87
Commonwealth of Kentucky	1,233	45,842	89	40	43	83

In order to gain clarity about teacher perceptions of teacher retention, I included in the focus-group interviews only teachers who had taught in the district over five years; four of the six schools had 100% participation from eligible teacher participants in those interviews. Table 4.2 displays the number of teacher focus-group participants for this

study. Each principal encouraged teacher participation and facilitated time for such participation. These participation rates suggest that teachers in these schools had information they were both willing and eager to share.

Table 4.2

Teacher Focus-Group Participants

Eastern Kentucky School Districts	Number of Eligible Participants	Number of Actual Participants	Percent of Actual Participants
Fairfield	39	39	100
Laurens	33	19	58
Pickens	44	42	95

Unfortunately, not all qualified teachers at one of the schools in Laurens County Schools were able to participate in a focus-group interview. On the day previously scheduled for one of the focus-group interviews, I arrived at the school and was told that district office personnel would be conducting a site visit (e.g., observing classrooms, co-teaching seminars). This shift in the teachers’ day influenced their participation in a previously scheduled focus-group interview; thus, I attempted to capture all voices by sending the interview protocol three times via electronic mail message to teachers who did not participate, a strategy supported by the school principal. Although some teachers provided written responses to prompts on the interview protocol that they returned to me as an attachment to an electronic mail message, not all eligible teachers provided responses. Likewise, Pickens County Schools had two eligible participants at one school that did not participate due to their being absent on the day I visited the school. Although I sent the two teachers the interview protocol three times via electronic mail message that

included encouragement by the school principal for them to respond, neither teacher replied to my invitation to provide responses.

In qualitative research, saturation of data is reached when evidence of the same reoccurring code and categories appear in the data (Merriam, 1998). Since the six schools participating were similar in many ways (e.g., geographic location, teacher satisfaction) and data gathered and analyzed revealed common findings, I perceived it was doubtful that any new findings would emerge from comments by the teachers who were not able to or chose not to participate. Saturation occurred with data across all three school districts; thus, not having all eligible teachers participate in focus-group interviews did not impact data analysis.

The following three major sections present findings under the themes that emerged during data analysis. Since the responses by study participants in the three districts were more similar than anticipated, my initial attempt to present findings as a cross-case comparison was not effective due to redundancy within participants' comments. Furthermore, the context in which the study was conducted (i.e., three adjacent rural school districts in Central Appalachia) appeared to have been a greater influence on teacher retention than I perceived it would be. I present my assessment of contextual influences in Chapter 5.

Influence of Professional Relationships

Understanding the ways professional relationships influence teacher retention was a central focus of this study. The conversations between superintendents, principals, and teachers provided helpful feedback on how this concept is understood at varied levels of employment. Superintendents and principals responded to this issue by the professional

support they provided to teachers. Comparably, teachers often responded about support they received from other colleagues.

Superintendent Perspectives

A question posed to all superintendent interviewees was, *What do you think building administrators and districts administrations should do to ensure that new teachers remain in the district?* The superintendent's designee from Fairfield County Schools immediately responded,

Administrator support does not work [for teachers] like it used to . . . [But we] can't just leave them out by themselves. We have to back them up. If they have issues with parents or students, we can't turn our backs on them. We have to show them that this is a really good place to work and learn and we just have to be there for them.

Before responding to the questions, the superintendent for Laurens County Schools described findings from a recent study in the district that revealed that professional support includes instructional support, teacher-leader opportunities, mutual respect, and colleague support. He asserted that teachers need "support" from administrators in order to retain them and then made this assessment: "I think [our teachers] feel supported, and I think that support translates into success and is proven in student achievement." The superintendent of Pickens County Schools responded to the question by discussing district induction programs and mentoring programs that promote teacher retention in the school district.

We [have] teacher academies [in Pickens County Schools]. We provide professional development here at the district and at the school level. Plus teachers go to the internship program. It is a positive experience. The support they are getting [during] their internship program [includes having] someone at the school level that's assigned to [a teacher] to mentor them. New teachers have a supervisor to oversee in the process. It's pretty positive.

Principal Perspectives

A slightly different question was posed to all principals that asked if administrative support impacts a teacher's decision to stay. The principal from Marion Elementary replied in the affirmative: "I think that support is very important because if [teachers] don't feel like [they] have that support and [they're] not going to be supported, [they] are not going to want to stay in that position." The other principal at Jasper Middle School heartily agreed that school administrative support was important, but not important enough to lose a teacher: "I honestly don't think I would ever have a teacher leave my building because of the lack of support that they would have received."

While discussing professional relationships as a reason that impacts a teacher's decision to remain in the school district, the principal of Lancaster Elementary reflected on how she responds to people that praise her school and also discussed the importance of instructional support:

This is what I tell people all the time when they say, 'You're doing such a good job.' I say, 'Thank you, but I'm not doing the good job. I'm not the person teaching kids. I'm not the person tying shoes and zipping pants and wiping noses and checking heads for lice and planning lessons. I'm not the one planning this new math curriculum that makes no sense to me, and I'm not the one teaching kids to read.' I'm not that person. I'm here to be their cheerleader, to be their resource leader, to be their runner, and to be their defender. I'm not the person that needs the credit for what's happening in this building. If everything is going right, everybody else gets the credit. If something goes wrong—now that's my burden.

The principal at Aiken Elementary laughed when discussing the support he provides to teachers and said, "I hope that's part of the reason teachers are staying." He continued to talk about the professional support he provides, and the conversation shifted to the importance of colleagues and support and camaraderie.

I personally bring food and cook lunch for everybody. Once a month for our teachers—instead of a 30-minute lunch, they get an hour lunch and they're all together as a staff. This made a huge impact this year. Just like pieces like that—little culture pieces help bring the staff together. It also makes them feel like they're a part and they belong here.

The principals in Pickens County Schools responded similarly to the same question when they were asked, *Do actions of building level administrators influence teachers decisions to remain in the current school district?* The principal at Berkeley High School said, “very little.” He added that actions do influence teachers to remain in the district, including the importance of collegial support through mentoring for any teacher that is new to the building.

We assign teachers a mentor teacher in the building . . . like a partner teacher. If that [new] teacher has something they have an issue with, whether if it's a policy, it's a procedure, or if it's just the day-to-day logistic aspect, they always have somebody they know they can go directly to [for assistance].

Beaufort Middle School's principal responded similarly to the principal at Berkeley High and explained teacher-to-teacher support as an influence of teacher retention. He said, “I don't believe an administrator's support affects a teacher's decision to stay.” However, in the next two sentences he spoke of collegial support: “The research [indicates] new teachers leave within the first five years. Having additional collegial support could help teachers [remain].”

Teacher Perspectives

Teacher responses about professional relationships among colleagues were consistent across all three school districts. Moreover, teachers strongly valued elements of collaboration, collegial support, and teamwork. One teacher from Marion Elementary conferred her collegial support and noted the importance of building relationships within the school and “not being just another teacher in the classroom. I walk through [the

hallways] to fellow teachers' classrooms just to say, 'Hi,' and ask them how their day's going, and tell them I'm here if they need anything." One teacher's comment about professional relationships between teachers and administrators varied from the other teachers across the three school districts. This teacher from Jasper Middle contended the effect of administrative support on collaborative teacher efforts by saying, "If I didn't think the administrator supported what we were trying to accomplish, I wouldn't stay"—disproving the comment by the principal at Jasper Middle but confirming the comment by the principal at Marion Elementary.

Teachers agreed that support from administrators was nice, but a majority noted that it was not a determining issue for their remaining in the school district and only one teacher provided a comment about its potential negative influence. When teachers were asked if the support from administrators influences their decision to stay, a teacher from Jasper Middle responded, "The school is why I stay." Similarly, another co-worker responded, "I love the team of teachers that I work with now. If I didn't like them, I would try something else."

The same sentiment was seen at Lancaster Elementary when teachers preferred discussing collegial support. "I have had wonderful administrators and some that were not so wonderful. We just carried ourselves regardless. We have a staff that I think is dedicated and want our school to be successful." As the dialogue continued and teachers discussed the camaraderie among each other, it was evident that teachers at Lancaster Elementary go out of their way to help each other. Another colleague at that school noted that a teacher in the building would

give another teacher their last marker if she needed it. If a teacher puts on the school-wide email that she needs poster board, she will have more than she needs

before the email has been out there a few minutes because everybody just wants to help each other.

The teachers at Lancaster Elementary were then asked, *What factors have contributed to teachers' decisions to remain in this district?* The conversation again shifted to the mutual respect each teacher had for one another. One teacher talked about the trust she had in her colleagues by saying there is “not one person here that I could not go to and ask for something if I needed something.” Another co-worker considered the care and concern all employees in the building had for each other and said,

When I think of this school, it's hard for me to draw that line between here's the principal, teacher, and our support staff. I mean [support encompasses] their role, their responsibility, and their job. Our bus drivers and our cooks—there's a respect here amongst all of us that no one is considered [having a] higher status than another person. I would swear to that. And not only that, I think that's one thing all of our teachers have—such respect for the children. I would never disrespect one of my students, and I think that is one thing that goes across this whole school.

An Aiken Elementary teacher similarly responded to the same question and suggested her school would not currently exist if it were not for the teachers in the school building.

I don't think the school would be functioning right now if we [as colleagues] weren't together. We form a pretty good force here [at school]. We may have differences, but when it comes down to the big battles we stand together as one.

Teachers in these two schools had a mutual respect for their colleagues in the same school building.

Teachers in Pickens County Schools also showed appreciation for the collegial support in their respective schools. They were asked, *What helped you adjust and acclimate to the current school district?* A teacher from Berkeley High School considered the teachers there “were very accommodating and very helpful.” Her co-

worker explained the importance of belonging to a school. She said, “Making a teacher feel like they fit is [important]. I’ve worked at two different schools, and the atmosphere from both of them is very, very different. This one is very welcoming and friendly and the other one was not.” A teacher from Beaufort Middle similarly noted the friendly spirit of her colleagues when she was new to the building: “I came here five years ago and the department welcomed me. They included me in everything and I felt like I immediately had friends and people that had my back and they made it a good experience.”

Impact of School Culture

Understanding the impact that school culture has on school was another focus of this study. The interviews with superintendents, principals, and teachers revealed how employees in three school districts recognize school culture is a crucially important issue. Interestingly, their perception of school culture includes personal connections among employees and between students throughout the area. The superintendent in each district presented general information about school culture, but the principals and teachers provided vivid examples of the day-to-day interactions at the school level.

Superintendent Perspectives

The three district administrators discussed the need for teachers to connect to colleagues at school, evidenced by their response to the interview question, *What keeps teachers here in the current school district?* The superintendent’s designee from Fairfield County Schools immediately focused on student success when he said, “I think the kids. The teachers love their kids. The teachers can make a difference with them, and I think that is the biggest influence.” The superintendent of Pickens County Schools

responded similarly when reflecting about teacher retention: “[We must] welcome the teachers, make them feel at home, and make them feel part of the faculty.” The concept of school a family was likewise an integral part of the personal connection described among colleagues within Laurens County Schools. The superintendent noted that a large number of employees are involved together in local area churches. He reflected further, “It would be good to get teachers involved with a church if that’s [their interest]. And in the church or whatever activities they’re involved in, I think [it] would be helpful if [the district] shared [how to] get involved.”

Principal Perspectives

When asked the same question about what keeps teachers in the district, the principal of Marion Elementary explicitly mentioned school culture in her response: “We have a very good culture here at our school. As far as our teachers and everybody [at the school], we all have good relationships. I think once those relationships are built, it’s kind of hard to leave the district.” The principal continued discussing the importance of out-of-school relationships.

We are all human. Sometimes we just need a place to come to that is not all school related. We have things going on outside of school that we just need an ear sometimes—just to listen. We’re just a very, very close family. This is our other family. We’re really here with everyone within our building as we spend more time with each other than we do our immediate families.

The principal at Jasper Middle explained the importance of focusing on a common goal and mentioned his school family: “One thing we are doing is the framework for understanding poverty. I brought that to my family, my faculty, this year because I think there has been a disconnect [between] the faculty and the students because of poverty.”

The principal at Lancaster Elementary was asked, *How should the school and the district engage teachers socially in order to attract and retain more teachers?* The principal paused, and then explained the value of school-family relationships: “I think it’s important that teachers feel part of the school family and [that] we really nurture relationships in our school. I think it’s very important for people to feel welcomed, valued, accepted, and respected.” The principal also reviewed planned fellowship outside of school for her employees.

We [design activities] outside the school day. . . . in the spring of the year and every summer as we do ATV riding. We only have three or four men who work here, but the point of this is to be together. All of the girls show up with their husbands or boyfriends so they all participate. We do ride through the mountains and camp and cookout over an open fire and just spend the day together. We do a movie night occasionally where everybody will gather together and [bring] food as it is such an important part of the culture.

The principal then talked about activities planned within the school day that helped to build and sustain interpersonal relationships within the workplace.

Once a month we do a soup and salad day . . . [when we all bring food] in one room and then during their lunch break, everybody gathers together and eats together. People talk and eat together. That’s been really good because it gives people an opportunity to network. We also get to learn about [one another].

When asked about what influences teachers to remain in the school district, she talked about the importance of relationships and family.

It’s all about the relationships. . . . Just like in any relationship, we have to give of our own self. In a marriage spouses have to be willing to be in service to your spouse and to your kids. It’s no different [at school]. If the custodian is in the cafeteria cleaning and mopping up a spill and somebody throws up in the hallway, I’ll grab the [cleaning] powder and the broom and head that way. I have to show them I care. I have to meet their needs. It’s just like raising kids. I have to get to know them personally and professionally. I have to spend time with them, and I have to invest in them.

The principal at Aiken Elementary also examined personal relationships between colleagues at school: “Teachers look forward to their day at Aiken Elementary. We really just have a family atmosphere here.”

Principals in Pickens County Schools see themselves in a familial relationship with colleagues and students. This relationship is similar to a biological family—one that creates a familial school culture. Examples of this school family were seen through school pride and personal relationships. The principal of Berkeley High School replied that school pride and a family atmosphere contributed to a teacher’s decision to remain in the school district.

A lot of our teachers actually went to school at Berkeley. I think having that connection to the tradition of Berkeley is important. I also think that helps our teachers to stay here once they get the opportunity to teach at Berkeley.

He continued talking about the impact of the family atmosphere that he and colleagues purposefully encourage at school:

Teachers feel the difference [in the school culture], and they feel the family atmosphere that we encourage and promote within our school. It says a lot when people from other schools come to work [at Berkeley High] and [tell] our other teachers that we have it pretty good here . . . I think we really promote a family atmosphere with each other. We rally around [one another], and I think that part of it is because we have such a huge number of teachers that are Berkeley people. . . . [This was especially evident] when there is a crisis with one of our teachers. I think that a lot [of what happens here] has to do with family tradition.

This high school principal also noted the importance of spending time with members of the school family outside of school hours and activities.

We started having a Christmas party [a few years ago]. We got together not just with our colleagues, but our families. We [include] not just our teachers, but also all of our support staff. Our classified people to come in along with their family members, and I think that has helped us. Our families realize that we are going to be part of the larger part of the [Berkeley] family.

The principal became almost passionate as he continued discussing the school-family atmosphere, particularly while talking about a new teacher who arrived a few years back. Before coming to Berkeley, she had gained considerable teaching experience outside of the school district.

She was talking about the closeness of our staff and said she worked to build it in the last school she was at. She said in the math department nobody would talk to [one another]. . . . There was no connection—professional or personal. That was one thing that amazed her . . . how close we were as a staff and how close we worked together as a whole group and in her department.

When asked if support influences a teacher’s decision to stay in the school

district, the principal of Beaufort Middle responded, “I think the personal relationship [a principal has] with teachers absolutely affects their decision to stay. A principal has to make herself or himself personable to teachers so that they know [they are appreciated].”

When asked if the actions by building administrators influence teachers’ decisions to stay in the school district, he stated, “I think it goes back to that personal kind of relationship.”

The principal then continued,

I don’t think we have one teacher in this building that’s from another part of the state or actually even from another part of the county. . . . [Those that are here are] here because they want to be here. It’s not a job to them. They don’t treat it like a job. They treat it like this is their family.

Teacher Perspectives

School culture evidences itself in the way that colleagues view themselves as family and describe a need for each other in their lives. This is evident through the various comments about “school as family,” out-of-school support from co-workers, and colleagues exhibiting a strong personal bond. Focus-group participants were asked about what influenced their decision to stay. A teacher from Jasper Middle School who was

recently offered a position in a different county replied to the question about reasons teachers remain.

I just didn't want to leave. I love the people I worked with, and I didn't want to go. It would have been advancement for me—more money and all of that, [but] I was satisfied. I told them I'm happy where I'm [employed]. Thank you for considering me but I'll just stay.

A colleague at her school mentioned the death of a sibling and talked about being overwhelmed by the support received from her co-workers. Emotionally, she said, "I received flowers from teachers and staff. We're just a family." Another teacher in the group noted, "It is the years that I have been here. It is the established relationships here and it does feel comfortable."

A teacher from Marion Elementary replied to the same question. "When we walk in the door, we are a team. We are a family." A co-worker agreed and said they were family "not just inside of our school but outside of our school." When asked about why teachers stay in this specific school district, when other school districts may be closer to their home, another teacher from Marion Elementary said, "the people we work with here become your family, and [you] actually spend more time with the people here than you do your actual family"

When asked about pay and other incentives at their school, a group of teachers from Marion Elementary described *other incentives* as being the school family. One teacher replied, "This is our family. We're all family and we all depend on each other. That's why we're tight. If we walk away, we leave our family too." As the conversation continued about the school family, two teachers discounted the monetary salary. One said, "It's worth more than the money." Her peer asserted that being part of a school

family was “worth more than a little bit of a raise.” Another teacher in that same focus-group interview described why the school functioned as a family.

We [help] each other through each day. When the hard times . . . when the demands are so overwhelming, we share them with each other. If one of us is free, we’ll take that load. We try to help each other. And, I think that’s what makes us not want to leave because we’ve that connection [with] everyone here, and it is a family.

Teachers from Marion Elementary were also asked, *What is keeping you here in the current school district?* One teacher considered the joys of being with her colleagues: “I enjoy coming here every day and the people I work with. I enjoy their company. We are so open, and we have each other. Not everybody has that.” Her fellow teacher added,

It doesn’t stop here at school. It goes beyond that to our home lives. We’re checking on each other constantly. We’re no more than a day off in the summer, and we’re checking on each other. It doesn’t stop when we go out the door in the evening or in the summer. It’s not [just] “see you around” [until next school year].

A teacher in another focus group at the same school talked about the care and concern for one another and then provided an example: “It is a simple thing of . . . [asking a colleague], ‘You weren’t here yesterday. How’s your baby? Is she okay? Did you check with the doctor? Is everything okay?’ I mean it is just this simple stuff.” A co-worker continued to discuss positive attributes about the staff at Marion Elementary:

It’s just having a personable staff that knows how to communicate. Our principal is Mrs. Smith to us [at work], but to our [biological] children she’s Aunt Ona. I can’t get that anywhere. Maybe, I [could], but I’m not willing to throw that away to find out. Just have a baby shower, and you’ll have 70 staff members show up. Have a child’s first birthday, and the majority there will be staff. We’re family.

An originally unplanned question was asked to another group of participants at Marion Elementary. The older teachers in the room were asked about how they would

feel if younger teachers in the room would announce that they were transferring to another district. After posing the question, the room became very quiet. Quiet unexpectedly, one of the older teachers began to cry and then other older teachers followed. Then an older teacher stated, “We’d be highly sad and very upset. [We’d be] happy for them, but sad.” The younger teachers in the room were likewise asked how they would feel if an older teacher told them today that they were retiring. After a minute of silence, a majority of the younger teachers in the room began to cry. A young teacher spoke up to answer the question, and he said, “[I] would be sad. From day one, I felt like I was part of the team, and it’s a tight-knit group.” I asked if there was something outside of my questions that impacted their emotional responses. One of the older teachers responded, “We just love each other.”

Teachers in other school districts described the importance of school family as part of the school culture. When asked if support of school administrators impacts teacher retention, teachers often used the word “family” in their responses and did not even discuss the role of the principal as culture builder. For example, a teacher at Aiken Elementary said, “This is all I have right here. We are family here.” Her colleague added, “I don’t think the school would be functioning right now if we [were not] together. We form a pretty good force here.” Another teacher in the same focus-group interview explained the element of safety and attachment to the faculty: “I feel like this school is more of a safe haven. I never felt that at any other school I have been at. Never felt that closeness with the staff.” A co-worker described his close relationships with teachers outside of school.

At school we’re co-workers and we’re friends. But then we also celebrate [together] and go to someone’s child’s birthday party. All of us would show up . .

. If someone was sick or something, everyone would help. We have group text messages and it's just common to say, "There is a slick spot in the road watch out." We know about each other's personal lives also. [Our relationships are not limited] to 7:45 AM and 3:00 PM. We know what is going on with each other.

Another teacher at Aiken Elementary conferred the life-long relationships she has with her colleagues.

We are family, and it's specific. When I first started here, I had known my colleague Sammy my whole life. We get major snow over here. I hadn't been used to driving, a horrible snowstorm [arrived while] we were still here. They let us out [of school] too late. When we got to the top of the mountain, there were 18-wheel trucks coming backwards. Sammy got out of his vehicle and walked beside my car. I rolled my window down, and he walked beside to help get me off this mountain. That's what I'm talking about—we're family.

When asked what keeps teachers in their current school district, a teacher at Lancaster Elementary School replied about the love she has for her school family:

I just never had the desire to leave because of such [a] strong [bond]. All of my friends are at this school. Everybody I spend my time with is at this school. Not just in the district but at this school. Even outside of work, I spend my time with the people [who work] at this school or at one time worked at this school. I think we do have a unique atmosphere, and we do have a true love for each other. They are my family. If I need something, [these are the people] whom I would come to. These people will be more help to me even than sometimes my own family would. Overall, I feel like anybody here would do anything [for me].

A fellow employee agreed about the close bond at Lancaster Elementary and shared how different it is compared to where she previously worked.

I am not typically afraid to be in a different setting, and it's not that I am completely closed out to try new things and new situations. I just didn't have the family atmosphere [at my other school]. I wasn't meant to feel uncomfortable there, but I did not have the same feeling of family [there] that I do over here.

During the focus-group interview at Lancaster, another teacher explained what helped her adjust and acclimate to the current school district.

What helped me adjust [to being new the school] was it's so family-oriented. I had never set foot a day in this school before the first week I worked here, I felt

like I have been here all my life. The teachers here made me feel like family, and they continue to do that today.

A peer compared her school family to her home family.

The first day I walked in the door here, I felt like I was just part of something that I'd never been part of before. It's like coming home. But there's not one person here that if I needed something, I couldn't go to and ask [for it] . . . Like a family.

Another teacher in the same focus group expounded on how this family atmosphere not only exists in school but also outside of school, agreeing with teachers at Aiken

Elementary School.

It's not just inside the school. This school will help in family emergencies, the loss of a loved one, and things like that. They come together and they help. I didn't know anyone in the school when I walked in here, and [now] they're like my second family. Some of these people in the school, and mainly these girls sitting right here, probably know more about me than some of my own family [members do].

Teachers in the Pickens County Schools district see their colleagues as family, including school leaders and support staff, but some view their students as family as well.

Teachers also evidenced an explicit interest in student success within their comments.

When asked about what influences teachers' decisions to stay in the school district, one teacher from Beaufort Middle noted the personal relationships teachers at her school have with the students.

We've had so many parents—like children with parents that have overdosed and died. We're at the funeral homes and we step in. If we're [at another school], we may not know that need of the child. Those situations help us to form relationships with the children. I'm not just meeting the children's educational need—I'm stepping into their world.

Similarly, another co-worker examined the relationships she and her colleagues have with students, including a spiritual emphasis:

We pray for [the students] and we pray for each other and we know that and we may not be able to do that elsewhere. I have kids that email me and say, 'When

you have your prayer group, will you please pray for my mommy? Will you please pray for me?' The [children] have that confidence in us because they see our lives. Students say, 'I saw you at Wal-Mart.' I said, 'Yes, teachers buy groceries, too.'" You may not get that elsewhere—that relationship which is so important. We are a lifeline for these students.

When another focus group at Beaufort Middle was asked the same question, a teacher explained the necessity for her teaching at Beaufort Middle.

The kids [are the] reason I'm here. These kids need me. Until [my] job's over I'm going to be here for my little kids. [I was] gone the past two days for meetings at the [district office] and the students bombarded me with messages [while I was gone]. I have a few of them that call me Mom because their mom is worthless. And these little kids—there was one year we had seven of them that lost parents. Those kids are needy. They need [me].

Similarly, their colleagues see each other as family. One teacher recalled, "[When I came here] teachers came to my door, welcomed me, and said, 'we've adopted you.' [I realized] that was my group." She continued to discuss out-of-school relationships with colleagues: "We travel together. We do weddings together. We hurt at those funerals together. When [one of us] is hurting we're all hurting." Another teacher at the table discussed the experiences these teachers had together over the years.

[We] have a bond with each other. That bond continues [to develop] including when there's the birth of a child or [when there are] happy times and sad times. That's the way it should be. We have fun [together] and we [have] traveled [together]. A whole bunch of us were taking [students] to Disney World. We [each] take a team of kids—three kids [which meant] there were 15 of us traveling together. We have those memories and we have that bond with each other. When [we have that bond] everyone knows that we love each other.

Teachers at Berkeley High expounded on the elements of school pride and personal relationships from the very beginning of the first focus-group interview. When introducing each other, one teacher said, "I consider this school my home." Another colleague said, "When I came here I first thought I was with family." Likewise, another co-worker in the same group conversed about the familial aspect at work and explained

how he learned this when he was a new teacher at this school. “I found it was a family-based place and people are very good here.”

All the teachers in this study from Pickens County Schools agreed that the family atmosphere in their school influenced their decision to stay. One teacher from Berkeley High said, “We just treat everybody like family. We don’t see a stranger. If teachers allow us to do so, we bring them in.” The teachers were asked if they had teachers that did not want to be part of the family they described. The same teacher responded,

We have been a stepping-stone for some teachers [over the years] and teachers need to be cared about in order to flourish. I wanted to come home [because] Berkeley was home. [It was] not that I didn’t like where I was at before. I made that my home for 16 years, but Berkeley was my home. Once a General always a General—that’s our motto and that’s true.

Teachers at Berkeley High were asked, *Does administrator support affect your decision to stay?* A teacher explained the principal and teachers’ relationship to the school: “This is our school. Where I came from they made it feel like it was the administrators’ school. Here we don’t feel that.” When asked after considering everything what keeps them in this school district, one teacher from Berkeley replied, “I have great people to work with. I have gone through some personal things in the last few years and if it hadn’t been for my job, I probably would not have done well.” A colleague added, “This school is my home.” Another teacher joined the conversation connecting her biological family to the school culture: “I have two boys that want to go to this school and we’ve brainwashed them [about this school]. They have that school pride and this is where they want to be.” Nearly every teacher in this group commented on this issue. One example is how a teacher described the help she received from colleagues: “I just think the family support and all the help us get around here. I

wouldn't think of wanting to go anywhere else." A fellow focus-group member added, "I love Berkeley High School and I love the people I work with."

The same question about what keeps you in the school district was asked to a different group of teachers at Berkeley High. One teacher reviewed his personal health history.

Many years ago I had Leukemia. Sometimes I would pray to God to just take me. But I remember the nurses—they used to joke about coming to cheer me up because I was always happy and even calm when I was in pain. I think the Lord was with me during those times, but the only time I ever cried the whole time I was there was because the school had put together a video of teachers, staff, and students wishing me well and sending me messages. The tears [I had] were tears of joy.

After this teacher became emotional in his response, his colleague added, "We know our Berkeley Family. [If there are] deaths in the family, my Berkeley family is going to be there just as much as [my] blood family." Another teacher explained emotionally a hardship she experienced several years back and interjected how employees and students from Berkeley High School offered assistance during that terrible time.

I lost my home in 2009 due to a flood. I can't thank Berkeley people enough. There were groups of teachers—groups of students who were at my house every day for weeks. [They] shoveled, scrubbed, tore down and rebuilt my porch for me. That's what Berkeley is—Berkeley is home and Berkeley is family.

Influence of Conditions Outside of School

The influence of conditions outside of school was a fundamental reality to this study. Discussions with superintendents, principals, and teachers revealed a commitment to the community. The connection to the local community and desire for its success was evident through conversations across each school district.

Superintendent Perspectives

Administrators across all three school districts considered the impact the community had on teachers in the school district when asked during their interviews, *Do conditions outside of your district affect teachers' decisions to stay?* The remarks by the superintendent's designee for Fairfield County Schools were somewhat surprising in their scope and positivity:

Teachers love the kids. We have really good kids, and teachers really like them. Teachers are comfortable with the kids and feel like they can make a difference with them. I think that's the biggest [influence]. Teachers love their job and it's because of their students.

The superintendent from Laurens County Schools originally answered the question from a perspective of teacher attrition and discussed the influence of the local economy.

People [meet] in college and they marry someone. If a teacher marries someone that is an engineer then there's no work here. I think that plays a role [in teacher retention]. . . . A lot of younger teachers are interested in moving away from eastern Kentucky because the economy is so bad now. We've lost all the mining jobs that we had. It's tough for people who want to stay here.

Immediately after finishing the last sentence, he discussed the positive aspects of teacher retention in the district:

[Teachers] that live here desire to stay here. We have a lot of teachers that are from here originally [and] they come back to work here. . . . We pride ourselves [in the fact] over the last few years, as we have made sure we put the focus on students and student success.

The superintendent of Pickens County Schools focused on the impact of the community's economy when he initially replied that the "availability of jobs [and] the job market" influenced teacher retention. Reflecting for a moment, he then stated, "It could [also] be job stability and job security" that retained teachers in his district.

Principal Perspectives

When asked about conditions outside of school that influence teacher retention, principals primarily conferred situations in the community that were outside of their control. The principal from Jasper Middle School asserted that the “economy and the spouse” are outside of school and could impact teacher retention. He continued, “I look at that as an external factor, but again, it’s the region and the downward economy that is the strongest external factor for retention.” Contrastingly, the principal reviewed some positive influences: “A lot of our teachers graduated from this school district and their children go here. I think that sense of loyalty keeps people here.” The principal at Marion Elementary responded similarly when discussing conditions outside of school that impacts teacher retention. “Teacher retention could be influenced [by] what the spouse does for a living because that could have an effect on teachers as well.” Later in his interview, he stated, “Teachers are very dedicated to our students. Teachers are here for our students and sometimes do whatever we have to do to take care of our kids.”

The local community impacts the employment and commitment of teachers in Laurens County Schools based on conversations with two school leaders. The principal of Lancaster Elementary was asked about conditions outside of school that influence teacher retention. She responded similarly to the superintendent when discussing spousal employment.

For the area, [teaching] provides a comfortable living, especially if there is another spouse that works. I know most of our teachers have a spouse who was a coal miner. Coal miners made between \$65,000-\$120,000 a year, depending on their role. That provided a very lucrative living. It allowed the teacher to live more of an upper middle-class lifestyle instead of just a lower middle-class lifestyle. I think some of our teachers are struggling with that now because so

many of the miners are out of work. My spouse, for example, went from making \$110,000 a year and now makes \$30,000.

The principal at Aiken Elementary added another perspective when talking about the resources in the community.

People are not going to find a Wal-Mart here, and they are not going to find a restaurant. People are not going to find a convenience store. People have to want to come here in order to live here. Folks don't just pass through here on their way somewhere else. A person had to intend in [her or his] heart to visit here. I try to tell people that our situation is unique here in this school district. But to be quite honest, I wouldn't want it any other way.

This principal continued to talk about teacher contentment and commitment to Laurens County Schools and explained an unfortunate school-building situation that occurred just before the Christmas break that year.

We're the only school left in the county that is heated by a coal-fired boiler system. On the last day of school before the Christmas break, my custodian called my house about 6:00 A.M. and said our boiler was losing water. There was a leak in the boiler somewhere, and the water was running on the floor. The boiler was still putting out heat at that time so we were able to make it through the rest of that day. However, the boiler is so old that the section that had cracked, and it was [challenging to find] a part for its replacement. Over the break I met with the principals from middle schools and elementary schools, those with schools on the same campus, but with two separate buildings. They had enough empty classroom space, or rarely used classroom space, that we could use for our classes because we didn't know if the heater was going to be fixed before January 4th [when school resumed]. We made a plan until the heat was fixed to continue school on a regular schedule in the other facility. There was a revolt from my teaching staff because they didn't want to be anywhere else but our school. Even though being in another building was temporary, we made it very clear to parents and to staff that we are still going to be Aiken Elementary, but just in another building. We were still going to run our same schedule and have the same expectations. I was still going to be the principal and teachers would still have the same class. We were not closing our school and going to be a new school. We just [needed to] have a warm place in order for students to have class. My teachers did not want to do that because of the fear that it would not be like our school on our campus.

When asked what kind of information should be provided to teachers regarding conditions that exist outside of school, the principal of Lancaster Elementary said, "Our

community seems to be very welcoming and very appreciative of their teachers. Our local faith-based organizations and church are so supportive of their schools.” The principal continued by discussing the decline of the “public knowledge” of the local economy and the support her school provided to students and families each week.

We do about 90 to 100 weekend backpacks of food. We have almost a 90% reduced-price lunch rate and we have 40% of our kids that have an IEP [individualized education program]. We have about 37% of our kids being raised by somebody other than a biological parent. We have to network with any and every agency that we can find to try [to address] the non-academic needs of our kids, as well as their academic needs. Sometimes we just [ensure] there are mattresses for students to sleep on [at night] or that students have food when they are not at school.

When asked what keeps teacher in the school district, she replied, “I think teachers appreciate the opportunity to work in their community schools. A lot of the teachers in our district went to school where they work. I am a graduate of this campus as well.”

The principal at Aiken Elementary was asked the same question and responded about the desire to give back to the school’s community.

Historically, in the last 16 years the majority of our teachers got placed here or decided to take a job here just to get their foot in the door. These teachers had full intentions of leaving [but] fell in love with this school and desired to stay. We have people who just love this area and want to be here. Teachers want to give back to this community and really care about the people of eastern Kentucky. . . . Our staff and great students are what make a huge difference. It makes a difference when a teacher wants to get up and come to work instead of having to go to work.

The principal of Berkeley High School reviewed the problems of the local economy impacting the school district when asked about information that exist outside of school.

Obviously, I think the status of the economy for the community and for the district as a whole [is a problem]. In the last three or four years we have lost 60-70 students on an average, and a lot of that has to do with our families with the

father losing his job. I think the status of the economy [for] the area is a major problem.

Through a positive perspective, he discussed his teachers' connection to community pride.

I think a lot of it is because we have such a huge number of teachers that are Berkeley people—that a lot has to do with family tradition. In our community we know everybody and everybody knows us and I think that helps as well. . . . I would be curious to see the number of teachers from this county [that are from here]. I would venture to say that probably a high percentage of over 80% of the teachers working this district are probably from this county and probably went to school in this county. That's an estimate, but we have 25 people here at our school that actually went to this school as a student, live in this school's community, and returned back to teaching. That's probably the case throughout our county. [It is important] to have that social aspect—having the ability to fit in socially here.

The same question was asked to the principal of Beaufort Middle School. He responded with a personal connection.

We love football in this school district. If a new teacher comes in here and has no idea about football, then it could be a problem. Teachers shouldn't come here and bad-mouth our district's football or football in general and expect to make friends.

He also discussed the impact of community pride for the teachers in his building and noted teachers at Beaufort Middle “have a vested interested in this community.” He argued that teachers “grew up here, and this is where they went to school. They went away and earned their education with the intention of returning home and giving back to the community they grew up in.” He then boasted that teachers in his building displayed a “sense of school pride, community involvement, and [a desire] to better the lives of children who grow up in this area.”

Similar to the district superintendent's response to the question about external influence, the principal at Beaumont Middle School also explained how the local economy impacted his school's community. “Some families are surviving on one

teacher's salary, though I don't know how. All we can do is pray for them and hope things get better. I think most [teachers] are glad to have the opportunity [to be here]."

He then reflected on his own situation and explained why he continues to live in the area.

I want to be in this area. I am here for my wife and children. This school is home. I took a pay cut [from my previous job]. Before I came here I was coaching three sports, working all year round, and completing classes [while] learning how to become a teacher. I suffered through because I wanted to be here—that was my intent. I wanted my kids to grow up here, and I think a lot of teachers in this business will probably say this, too. It is a sense of community pride and giving back to the area in which we have grown up.

Teacher Perspectives

Teachers across the school districts saw value in the community of the students they served. This sense of community was so great that teachers called the community home even though it may not literally be the community of their residence. Illustrations of these teachers giving back to the school's community included community pride, love for students, and commitment to student success.

When asked what kind of information should be provided to teachers regarding conditions that exist outside of school, a teacher from Jasper Middle School immediately said, "Everyone knows everybody." A colleague agreed, "I think that's unique to this community. We still have a good sense of community." Another co-worker talked about the school's pride and heritage in the community.

Our school still has that competitiveness. Different schools have handed down stories of uncles [and] brothers that have played [sports against] each other and that is still carried with a lot of pride in the community. . . . Knowing the history and knowing the political genre of things also has a sense of security. I think that the trust hasn't been lost because teachers in the building care for kids.

When asked the same question, a teacher in another focus group at Jasper Middle said, "The importance of giving back to your community. It is amazing to stay [in the field]

and see [students] grow up and be educated. We stay so we could remain in the area and try to help the community.” A colleague continued to discuss her students’ living conditions, which was a condition outside of school.

I’m here because of the kids. I know a lot of them, and I live in a rural area where many of our poverty kids live. We help a lot of them through our church so [these kids] know me. These students come to school here and know when they need anything, they can ask me.

The same question about conditions outside of school was asked of a group of teachers at Marion Elementary School. A veteran teacher in the group replied emphatically, “I love teaching. I love being here. I drive 35 minutes just to get to this school in this area because I want to be here.” Her colleague smiled and nodded, but also considered the struggles of the local economy and its impact on the community.

I see our area struggling especially with the demise of the coal industry and the recent demise of the railroad. That doesn’t make me want to leave. That makes we want to stay here more because that makes me want to fight harder. There are issues like drug use, but I think that just makes me want to fight more, and not just for our kids that march out of our schools at graduation. I don’t want our kids to march out [embarrassed] and say, “Oh yeah, I’m from Fairfield County.” I want my daughter to be proud. I want to instill that in her. If I’m ashamed [about where I live], then she is going to be ashamed.

A group of teachers at Jasper Middle School also talked about what keeps them in their school district. One teacher said, “Everybody wants to change the world. I have the chance to do that. Why would I leave?” His co-worker added, “I love it here.” A teacher from another group reflected on her home life and replied, “I understand the commitment to the kids. My [biological] kids are gone so I take the students on as mine now, so there’s just no other place I want to be.” A fellow employee talked about loving her students and the delight they bring her: “I love those sweet babies. When I come

down the hallway, they hug me around the neck and tell me that they missed me. I mean that is the joy of coming back to school after the weekend.”

Teachers at Marion Elementary responded to the same question in a similar manner. One teacher contended that the relationships that exist with former students and parents were important to her. She was somewhat overcome with emotion when she responded,

I think we get attached to our kids and we know their parents. Last night I [communicated virtually with] one of our former students whose mom has cancer right now. This child has been contacting me for a while and the mom did not know about it. I keep in touch with my kids—all of us do. We check on our kids even when they leave this building. We love them.

During focus-group interviews at Aiken Elementary, teachers were also asked about the influence of conditions outside of school. A teacher immediately provided her perspective about what is essential for her peers to understand.

Teachers have to know the backgrounds of the communities—the trials we have in this community. We have a lot of kids who struggle with basic needs, and I think teachers don’t really understand what the kids have to go through to just to come to school each day.

A colleague agreed and then described the challenges that teachers at Aiken Elementary also face.

I think if [a teacher] comes from a richer community, and then comes to a school in eastern Kentucky, they would consider the school below standard. Our building happens to be one of the oldest buildings in the county. We struggle with basic things. We just struggled with our boiler going out and that was a big issue. It was scary there for a while, and we don’t know if it is going to be eventually resolved [in order to] have school here. We struggle with the basic things. We don’t have a staff bathroom. Everybody goes to the bathroom in the same place, and there is no privacy. There’s no teachers’ lounge. If you’re coming from a school that has everything, including a supply room, it is kind of a shock for some people to come to a little country school like ours and see that it just does not have the resources like a wealthier community may have.

A co-worker in the group conversed about some unfortunate realities in the community that impact students, saying, “It’s no secret. So many people have lost their jobs; they are starving, and they can’t keep their power on [each month]. We also have a drug problem. These are real issues and kids are worrying every day.”

Interestingly, another teacher in that focus-group interview changed the direction of the conversation by expressing her loyalty to the school when she stated, “My mother went to school here.” Another teacher in the group understood the problems in the community that must be overcome, but she also had lauded her local society: “This community is inviting. The people in the community tend to reach out and are friendly and sociable.”

The same question about what external conditions may influence teacher retention was asked to teachers at Lancaster Elementary. One teacher in the group immediately stated, “I’ve been here [at this school] since grade school. This school is part of my being. This is my school.” Another teacher in the focus group reflected on the impact of the local economy on the teaching profession in the past.

I remember when my children went to school here. . . . there were some teachers that weren’t at this school very long. I don’t think it was because they didn’t embrace the school. It was because there weren’t enough jobs here [for family members]. They had to [move] somewhere else.

Despite the economic conditions in the area, a third teacher stated proudly, “I don’t think there is anything that could personally make me want to leave my school.”

A teacher at Aiken Elementary examined why she remains in the school district, which included an assertion about her investment in the students.

I have a lot invested in this place and in these kids. I feel like we work really hard to step outside the normal to get things that we need, [including] taking our kids to show them different opportunities and get them involved in [new experiences].

There are new experiences students can be involved in and our students do have the ability to do these things if they want to do so.

Another teacher explained the connection she has with her students inside and outside of the classroom.

I know every student's story in our class. Once I know their story and know what they are going through, when I go to look in their faces about not having their homework, or not completing this or that, it makes it a little . . . I'm more sympathetic. I desire to help those kids because I know what they have just gone through the night before. I have children that are not getting their basic needs met . . . [yet] the district wants them to [achieve] proficient and distinguished scores on [the state assessment tests].

When the same question about remaining in the school district was asked of Lancaster Elementary teachers, one immediately replied, "I went to school [here] where my children went to school. I have one child in school here now, and my husband works locally." Her colleague added, "I want to contribute to this area and to the kids here."

Teachers from Pickens County Schools discussed the influence the local context has on teachers in the school district, including the negative demise of the local economy due to closure of many coal mines. One teacher from Berkeley High expounded,

The population of the area is decreasing. I have another hopefully 20 or 30 years ahead of me, and I would most definitely love to be here. But if my entire teaching career falls apart because of the economy, now that's an issue [for me] to consider.

A teacher from Beaufort Middle examined the personal conditions that exist outside of school.

The decline in the coal industry is impacting people, and I believe that [affects] people's income. My husband is a coal miner. He could be out of a job very soon so we may have to move. That is an area that does impact [this region of Kentucky] that is outside [of school].

Although some teachers in Pickens County Schools expressed concerns about negative influences within the region, others countered that with positive perspectives.

For example, a teacher from Berkeley High had a two-faceted response when discussing the positive influences that keeps her in Pickens County Schools.

There are two things. First, the students keep me here. I enjoy the students. I always learn from them, and they learn from me. Second, this school is my home. This is my community, and I don't want to be anywhere else.

Another teacher in the same focus-group interview said, "I love my area. I love my school. [My children attend this school]. We have fun with concessions, football, and basketball. Ultimately it comes down to the fact that I invested years here at this school."

A teacher from Beaufort Middle noted optimistic reasons teachers remain in the school district when she considered the students she loves.

I love my children and desire to see them succeed. Also, I have learned that the need in this area is so much greater than what I ever dreamed when I began teaching, and the district can only contribute and control certain factors. There are certain things that there are no answers for in this profession. There are no solutions to why a child comes to school, and no one even knows if they got up [tired and hungry] and came to school. We have situations like that here. Those children are particularly near and dear to my heart. I have and will continue to help these students in every way I can.

Her colleague also explained the joys of working with students from the school's local community as a reason for staying in the school district.

There is a different culture [here] than one would see in an inner city or an urban area that has more opportunity or resources. We understand the culture here, and we know the children well. That's where my burden has kept me in this area because I really have a heart for the kids at this school. I know what it takes to reach them because I understand the culture here myself. Students come to us many times and say, 'Will you pray for us?' The students know the role model that we are, and they know that in this school there are about five or six of us that have a prayer group and we pray for each other.

Another teacher in the group agreed about uniting with the local community when discussing parents and friends in the school's community. "We have connections with students' families. Many times we know their parents or we are neighbors with them. I

have that connection with this area and that's what brought me back here and that's what has sustained me here.”

Personal connections between the school and the community were also considered among other focus-group participants at Beaufort Middle. One teacher stated proudly, “This is where I went to school. I want to see this district and community succeed. I love it here.” A fellow teacher added, “I was a student, first of all, and from there my mom was a retired teacher from this school district.” Another teacher explained the compassion she had for the students and love for the community.

I love teaching the children in this area. That's number one. Grandparents raise a lot of our children [here in our school] because the parents are not in the picture. There are times when I want to just wrap them all up and take them all home with [me] and take care of all of them, but I cannot. Issues like that are emotionally draining on the teacher—they are on me. It is my desire to help our school children work their way out of poverty—to teach them that a good education is their ticket to do what they want with their life.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from a multiple-case study about teacher retention in eastern Kentucky school districts where teachers perceived their schools were good places to work and learn. Three primary themes were identified that emerged at the research sites including influence of professional support, impact of school culture, and conditions outside of school.

Professional relationships across these three school districts were primarily nurtured through support from colleagues. District and school leaders discussed the value of hiring teachers from the area that have an interest in the school; thus, these hires have a common bond with each other that fosters a common purpose. Although support

from administrators occurred, teachers focused their conversations on the appreciation of collegial support, collaboration, and teamwork.

The impact of school culture was evident by study participants' examples of "school family" created through their interpersonal relationships, school pride, and out-of-school support within their local communities. Teachers and principals across all three school districts believe in the importance of "school family" among colleagues and between students. This familial approach creates a unique school culture across all schools where data were collected for this study.

Conditions outside of the three school districts influence actions of teachers within their extended school communities. Teachers in all six schools expressed genuine care and concern for their students and their local community. This influence was seen through their comments about pride for the local community and a desire for student success that inspires community success.

In Chapter 5, I discuss these findings and present my interpretation of how Appalachian culture may have influenced them. I also discuss implications for further research based on the study findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study describes and analyzes teacher retention in rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Although the inquiry explores perceptions of teacher retention from individuals serving many roles (i.e., superintendents, principals, teachers), the purpose of the research was to identify why teachers remain in rural school districts. Identifying the conditions that contribute to the retention of teachers in rural school districts was thus the main focus of this multiple-case study.

As student enrollment increases in P-12 education and experienced teachers retire, the number of highly qualified teachers may not be sufficient to staff school districts in the United States (Brown & Schinker, 2008; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012; Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Affluent communities, student success, and recruitment incentives appeal to many of the most capable teachers who choose to work in urban and suburban school districts, thus leaving a potentially less-qualified pool of teachers to hire for rural school districts (Lambert, 2013; Lowery & Pace, 2001). Researchers (cf. Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Davis, 2002; Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012; Hammer et al., 2005; Lyons, 2002) report there are discrete characteristics that determine whether or not a teacher is well matched for rural education in a rural community including (a) belonging to the ethnic majority of the community, (b) being from that rural community, and (c) teaching within the teacher's trained discipline with a balanced student-teacher ratio. Other researchers (cf. Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley, Bodkins & Hendricks, 1993; Gersten & Keating, 1994; Harris, 2016) have also found that school and district administrative practices

influence teacher turnover rates. Researchers have called for additional investigations about conditions that contribute to teacher retention in rural settings.

The participants selected for this multiple-case study work in one of three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky and included the superintendents or his designee, principals from six schools, and teachers from purposefully selected schools who had taught in the district for more than five years. Their responses to questions posed during interviews provide specific examples of what contributes to teacher retention in rural school districts.

The overarching research question for this investigation was, *What conditions contribute to the retention of teachers in rural school districts?*

According to responses by the study participants, the conditions that contributed to the retention of teachers in their rural school districts were (a) professional relationships, (b) school culture and, (c) conditions outside of school. I was truly surprised by what I discovered because I anticipated hearing about specific initiatives and strategies (e.g., new teacher induction, formal peer mentoring) that is described in the literature. Although I also assumed that the context in which the study was conducted (i.e., three adjacent rural school districts in Central Appalachia) would influence findings to some extent, I was surprised that it appeared to have been a much greater influence on teacher retention than I perceived it would be.

Several research propositions guided the design and focus of this qualitative multiple-case study about teacher retention. The discussion that follows is organized around the three guiding propositions for the study and addresses common issues found in all three school districts. The analysis combines the findings into a descriptive

framework (Yin, 2011). The reasons for high teacher retention in these three rural school districts are reported in the following section, which is followed by a discussion of potential study limitations. The chapter closes with a short reflection and conclusion by the author of this study who previously served as a teacher in eastern Kentucky.

Perceptions of Professional Relationships

One proposition for this study was that professional relationships influenced teacher retention. For this study, *professional relationships* were defined as the beliefs, practices, symbols, and language that are characteristic to a particular group of people (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005). Such relationships are the identification and example of what is necessary and expected of the members within the organization (Evans, 2008). This type of support enables colleagues to develop an awareness of competency through role modeling, acceptance, and professional guidance (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2011). Professional relationships were esteemed by teachers and were a contribution to teacher retention across all three school districts. The findings and implications from this proposition are presented below.

Findings

Employees in each school district discussed the value of professional relationships in schools. Interestingly, each school district termed these relationships differently. For example, employees in Fairfield County Schools discussed concepts around mentorship, collegial support, teamwork, and administrative support when discussing professional relationships that exist in schools. Employees in Laurens County Schools discussed ideas of instructional support, mutual respect, colleague support, and teacher-leader opportunities that were categorized as professional support in their district. Finally,

employees in Pickens County Schools expressed thoughts that were encapsulated as teacher support in the school district, such as induction program, respect, mentorship, and collegial support. Employees across all three school districts emphatically noted the importance of professional relationships between teachers. Teachers across all three school districts expressed appreciation for school administrative support, yet asserted that support from fellow teachers was the primary influence on teacher retention when professional relationships were discussed.

Although findings from this study indicated that the role of district administrative support is important, it was not the major contributor to teacher retention across the rural districts in this study. This finding is similar to the conclusions of Brown and Wynn (2007) and Morgan and colleagues (2010). As expected due to their daily interactions with teachers, principals had a stronger impact on teacher retention in their respective building than superintendents did. Strong relationships with colleagues and opportunities for collegial support can increase teacher retention (Haar, 2007; Harris, 2015). Interestingly, all six principals interviewed for this study viewed themselves as colleagues of the teachers working in their school building. Similarly, teachers at each site saw their principal as their colleague as opposed to their superior. Schools in this study had a culture of collaboration as seen in collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership in a school is seen when teachers and leaders work toward a shared goal (Rubin & Futrell, 2009). Although teachers appreciated one-on-one support from school administrators to teachers, it was not perceived to be vital. Most highly valued were the professional relationships among teachers, whether veterans or novices, that provided opportunities and guidance for teacher leadership, collegial support, and encouragement.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Because teacher support was found to be a key theme for teacher retention in this study, it is my recommendation that school leaders make an intentional effort to provide direct support to their teachers while also fostering collegial relationships among all personnel within the school (Haar, 2007; Harris, 2015). Keeping teachers who can effectively enhance student learning should be one of the most important aspects of the job for any principal (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Harris, 2015; Whitaker, 2012). Support could be defined as a principal taking a direct or indirect role in encouraging, assisting, and displaying a positive attitude as member of the team. Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) posit "school principals reinforce the institutional culture by providing guidance and offering instructional and institutional resources" (p. 130). Providing teacher support through instructional support, clear communication, and fostering supportive relationships among and between colleagues is essential to this success because it produces a positive impact on teacher retention.

Recommendations for Further Research

Little to no separation between the role of leader and followers was evident in interview data gathered from principals and teachers across the three school districts in this study. While the study participants may innately know the difference between the two concepts, direct observations of interactions between principals and teachers at the six schools did not align with the usual condition of the principal as the leader of the school and the teachers as the followers of the principal's leadership (Catapano, 2001; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Litrell et al., 1994; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Stronge, Richard, & Cantano, 2008). Principals and teachers at the study sites described the role

of the principal as a *team player, defender, and cheerleader*. Principals understood the need for these diverse roles, and teachers comprehended the value of ensuring the school as a whole met the academic and non-academic needs of students. This is a different approach than the principal's primary role as supervisor of educational practices in the building (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). One teacher from Berkeley High School in Pickens County noted that she was glad the school was not "the principal's school" and that it was not "run by the principal alone." Further research is needed to understand how unique the different roles assumed by the principal in these rural school districts positively influenced teacher retention.

Effects of School Culture

A second proposition for this study was that school culture impacts teacher retention. *School culture* was defined as a context that a group may use to solve different problems in an organization. Fundamentally, school culture is a social teaching of unwritten rules that employees learn as they try to fit in a specific school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). School culture was regarded as a contribution to teacher retention across all three school districts. The findings and implications from this proposition are explained below.

Findings

Individuals living in eastern Kentucky have a strong and unique sense of familial culture. Just as the family is central to rural Appalachia's social organization (Drake, 2001), the teachers in each school district in this study viewed themselves as "family members" and shared a common bond with each other. Teachers in Fairfield County Schools shared a school culture in which they perceived themselves as members of an

extended family, noting a need for each other in their lives beyond the school day. All six principals across the three school districts reported having strong school culture, but the two working in Fairfield County Schools reported that they were members of the “school family.”

Two common familial classifications are the nuclear family and the extended family as defined by their members. According to Seven and Ogelman (2012), the nuclear family includes a couple and their child(ren), while the extended family includes the nuclear family and other family members (i.e., grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins). Teachers in all three school districts viewed those working at their schools as a group known as their “school family.” Keefe (1988) describes a rural Appalachian family group as a unit composed of many different households. This unique family group has a location where consistent communication takes place. The family group also provides assistance (i.e., financial, decision-making input) in times of need and is also a unit for emotional support. Members of the family share common values and provide each other a sense of affection and belonging. Family members understand they have a group that can be leaned on for help in a time of emergency. Though not a biological family, teachers across all three school districts still saw themselves as a school family similar to a family group.

In this study, the concept of *school families* described by study participants ranged from teachers as members of a nuclear family to members of an extended family. Teachers in Laurens County Schools declared the school family was an integral part of the personal and professional connection of colleagues in their school culture, a connection that was such an essential part of school family that a teacher stated she

would be willing to “give her own life for a colleague if needed.” A male teacher in Fairfield County Schools responded to the family connection of his colleagues and said, “I would give my own life for [my colleagues] at school.” These statements used powerful, somewhat shocking language that is typically reserved for a member of one’s biological nuclear family. Other teachers from Laurens County School remarked during a focus-group interview that the only people they spend time with outside of school are current or former teachers at their school. A comment such as this may be used when referring to spending time with one’s nuclear or extended family.

The main group of family kinship (kin) is the nuclear family, though in Appalachia the wide networks of kin relationships receive a greater emphasis than other places in America (Brown & Schwarzweller, 1978). Brown and Schwarzweller note that these kin relationships, which include family outside of blood relation, were an important part of happiness and endurance during the frontier era. Similarly, the kin between teachers and students in Pickens County Schools is an imperative part of teacher retention in the current era. Teachers saw themselves in a familial relationship with colleagues and students, a relationship similar to among biological family members and kin (Batteau, 1982). This familial approach to employment in a school setting creates a familial school culture, which also created a collaborative school culture. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) assert that a collaborative school culture is one where teachers share their values, work together, and are dedicated to improving the work and lives of their students. While the colloquial term *school family* is in vogue in education in the 21st century, the principals and teachers in the rural school districts in this study used the term differently by including the students and other local community members with their nuclear or extended

family members when talking about their “school family.” This broad interpretation of the phrase positively impacted teacher retention.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The concept of school family to describe school culture can positively impact teacher retention (Davis, 2002). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), a family is a householder and one or more people living in the household who are related to the householder by marriage, birth, or adoption. While nearly none of the participants in this study were biological family member, the participants expressed views and exhibited behavior that one would anticipate applied only to a biological family member. These included expressing care and concern for one another inside and outside of school, along with expressing emotional, sometimes deeply personal feelings toward each other. A school principal can positively impact teacher retention by being involved in and providing and promoting opportunities for personal relationships to expand among and between colleagues (Billingsley & Cross, 1994; DeWitt & Slade, 2015; Harris, 2015). These opportunities could include in-school and out-of-school fellowship opportunities and activities that foster a strong bond for school pride. Since principals can have a major influence on whether a teacher decides to remain at a school, their nurturing opportunities for teachers to commit socially and professionally to the goals and mission of the school can positively impact teacher retention (Chapman, 1983).

Recommendations for Further Research

Schools will continue to serve as important education providers to young people across rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Previously conducted research on the culture of the population in eastern Kentucky described below provided important

insights on teacher retention. I realized the importance of family among the residents of this region while studying the history and demographics of eastern Kentucky before the study took place. While conducting data collection, I was nonetheless surprised by the evidence of colleagues perceiving themselves as family members in each school I visited. While residing in the area for two weeks during data collection, I continually observed that family connections were so strong that many homes in the area had a family cemetery in the front yard with freshly decorated gravestones for the season. I also noticed multiple times across the region that the death of a loved one was memorialized at the site of death (e.g., a memorial decoration was placed at the location of a car accident).

School culture impacts teacher retention and can transform teachers throughout a school district (Manikandan & Raveendran, 2012; Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary, & Clark, 2010; Protheroe, 2008). A positive school culture is also predictor for teacher retention and student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2007). Similarly, school administrators are accountable for impacting the school culture that teachers work in each day (Littrell et al., 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989). The familial aspect of the Central Appalachian region influences school culture across the school districts of this study. Because the teachers who participated in my study were veterans who had worked in their district for more than five years, further research is needed in order to discover how a school culture perceived as a school family immediately impacts a new teacher in a school building.

A veteran principal at one study site told me that graduates of his school district go to college but typically drop out, not because of grades or abilities, but rather due to a

lack of family connection while away at college. Further research is also needed to determine how the role of family can be a positive impact on the continuing education of students and how the impact of teacher retention positively guides student success in this region.

Influence of Conditions Outside of School

A final proposition for this study was that conditions outside of school influenced teacher retention. For this study, *teacher retention* was defined when teachers remain in the same teaching assignment two years in a row. This term is also used when referring to teachers who remain in the same school system from one year to the next, but change schools (Brown & Wynn, 2007). Teacher retention also is the “ability reduce or eliminate teacher turnover” (Lasagna, 2009, p. 2). Conditions outside of school were a contribution to teacher retention across all three school districts. The findings and implications from this proposition are described below.

Findings

Prior to conducting this study, I assumed teachers in rural school districts remained in their school district for one reason: Their biological family in their home area influenced their decision to stay. My assumption was verified but not the way that I anticipated it would be. Although this assumption may be a reason teachers gained employment and taught in the rural school districts where this study was conducted, living near one’s biological family was rarely cited as impacting teacher retention.

The employees across all three school districts in this study discussed the great value they felt in giving back to the school’s community. Even though each school district described supporting the school’s community differently, there was a clear

evidence of a combined love and urgency for assisting each school's local community and for helping it survive in the 21st century. Teacher retention in these school districts is high because the teachers desire to help students in their local community be successful in life. This perception of teacher influence is supported by Brown and Schwarzweller's (1978) notion that children in Appalachia are raised not only by their biological parents or grandparents, but also by outside kin who share some of the parenting responsibilities. Principals and teachers across all three school districts described conditions outside of school that impacted teacher retention—such as being able to provide affection and security to students in the hope that the students will be happy and successful in life.

Employees in Fairfield County Schools appreciated the community of the students they served and desired for that community to thrive and be successful. Their love for students and student-focused mentality were evident in conversations with all participants from the school district. This sense of local community was so widespread that teachers often called the community *home* even though the community may not have been their home residence. Teachers in Fairfield County Schools evidenced a desire for the community's success during hard times, including teachers who lived outside of the school district's boundaries or teachers who lived in the school district's boundaries but outside of the school's local community.

Teachers in Laurens County Schools demonstrated strong appreciation for community pride and commitment to their school's identity. Principals and teachers also discussed the love they had for students and their families, perhaps because many had themselves been students at the schools in this study. This reality supports the importance of teachers having an “accurate, positive, asset-based view of the parents and

the children they teach . . . in order to achieve successful outcomes” (Winter, 2013, p. 131). The local community recursively influences the employment and commitment of teachers in the school district.

The local community of study sites within Pickens County Schools shaped the impact teachers had on students each day. Principals and teachers in the school district described their respective schools as *home* while the superintendent did the same for the school district as a whole. When teachers were asked about why they remain, they often discussed how their school was their home—and not just during normal school hours. This sense of place ran deep in school and community pride for principals and teachers because most had completed their P-12 education in district schools, sometimes in the schools where they currently work. Teachers in Pickens County Schools also noted that a former teacher influenced them greatly in life, and they desired to have the same influence on the next generation. This desire for the local community to improve and thrive was evident while talking with principals and teachers.

This commitment to the community is supported by research (Davis, 2002; Zost, 2010) and has made the difference in teacher retention across the three school districts in this study. It is laudable to give respect to the many men and women that have devoted their lives to the education of boys and girls in eastern Kentucky through both good times and bad times. When talking about teachers working in this region, a former superintendent once said, “We should build a monument to those real professional school [educators] who held education in Appalachia together” (Ogletree, 1978, p. 197).

Recommendations for Future Practice

District and school leaders should value the school's community and express that value to the school's teachers in order to support teacher retention in a school building (Hammer et al., 2005; Stronge, Richard, & Cantano, 2008). This notion was more apparent for the teachers in this study, undoubtedly because most were a product of the school district in which they served. The joys of community pride, love for students, and commitment to student success were all extensions of giving back to the school's community and thus reasons for teacher retention. Superintendents and district leaders could replicate these values in school districts across the country because these values do not have to be unique to eastern Kentucky. Principals must help instill a love for students within the heart of his or her teachers (DeWitt & Slade, 2015; Neito, 2003). The education each student receives is his or her ticket to life in the school's community and beyond.

Recommendations for Further Research

Nearly all of the participants of this study had a close connection with the school district of their employment in some way. For example, all of the superintendents or his designee had taught and been a principal at a school in their respective school district. Five of the six principals in this study taught at the school where they are now leading, and all six principals were former students at the school or consolidated school in which they are now the principals.

It can be surmised from this study that that most individuals interviewed chose education as a career path in order to return to their respective rural area and give back to the community, live in their home area, and have a job with a sense of security, an

assessment that was evident in previously conducted research (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Davis, 2002; Lyon, 2002). Teachers in this study likewise enjoyed the opportunities to invest in relationships with parents and their local community (Davis, 2002; Zost, 2010). Other reasons that teachers embraced conditions outside of school include the prospects of developing closer relationships with students outside of school (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Harmon, 2001) and receiving appreciation of respect and professionalism from the school's community (Davis, 2002; Murphy & Angeleski, 1996; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008).

Many teachers across the school districts in this study noted they earned a master of arts degree in teaching that provided initial teaching certification at the master's degree level since certification was not earned at the bachelor's degree level (i.e., typically in a field outside of education). Further research is needed to understand the impact of making decisions about a career path that promotes the opportunity to teach and give back to a teacher's home community. Similarly, it is unclear how the continued demise of the local economy will impact public education in Central Appalachia. Further research is needed to examine what influence the local economy has on teacher retention across the school districts of this region in the years that follow.

Appalachian Culture

The context in which the study was conducted (i.e., three contiguous rural school districts in Central Appalachia) was a greater influence on teacher retention than I perceived it would be. This influence posed the need for a secondary literature review of Appalachian culture. The literature review included an examination of the (a) geographic area, (b) ethnicity, (c) relationships, and (d) religion of the individuals in Appalachia.

People who live in an Appalachian culture have become a hidden minority because they are not perceived to be different from other Americans citizens who are classified as White alone (Porter, 2001; Tang & Russ, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Because most individuals of Appalachian culture have their own unique cultural values that contrast from the values of mainstream America, these individuals are a hidden minority in America. Likewise, literature on contemporary Appalachian culture is limited.

Appalachian People

Appalachians are people born in the geographic area of the Appalachian Mountains and span 13 states from New York to Mississippi (Tang & Russ, 2007). The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) (2014) divided this area into three regions: (a) Northern Appalachia, (b) Central Appalachia, and (c) Southern Appalachia. Central Appalachia includes all Appalachian counties in eastern Kentucky (i.e., where this study was conducted), Virginia, West Virginia, and some Appalachian counties in Tennessee. As displayed in the student and teacher demographics of this study (see Tables 3.5 and 3.6), the ethnicity of this region is primarily White alone (Porter, 2001; Tang & Russ, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Appalachian people have kept their individuality, language pronunciation, and basic culture that began when Scot-Irish immigrants settled the region immediately after the Revolutionary War (Clark, 1992; Drake, 2001). Elements of popular American culture often display negative stereotypes toward Appalachian culture (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008) when using terminology such as *redneck* and *hillbilly* to describe the regions' residents. This labeling seems to have instilled a cultural cohesiveness (Jones,

2002) because individuals living in the region are overwhelmingly dedicated to the local culture even with the absence of resources throughout the rural communities (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008).

Appalachian Culture

Family and community ties were reinforced over the years because of recurrent separation from the broader national culture due to the mountainous terrain. Living far from cities and even neighbors, the Appalachian people were exclusively dependent on family and kin. Breckinridge (1972) posits electricity and telephones did not reach Appalachia until the 1950s and modern forms of automobile transportation did not arrive until a decade following—and only to those few who could afford it. Transportation was difficult, however, because of poor or no roads in the area (Tang & Russ, 2007). Such remoteness made it difficult for interaction outside of the region. Because of this issue in Appalachia, a superior dependence for support evolved of family, church, and community (Obermiller & Maloney, 1994), while mistrust developed for folks outside of their world (Drake, 2001). Nonetheless, parents are frequently concerned with career and education programs that prepare their children for opportunities that are not offered in their home area; thus, affording opportunities for their children to move away from their family.

Religion is central to the people in Appalachia (Drake, 2001) and is part of the extended family. The residents are predominately members of Christian churches, and their religious views permeate the culture (Welch, 1999). For example, many individuals in Appalachia would not assume a job that contradicted the teachings of their church. When in need of help, Appalachians first reach out to their extended family, which

includes their church, local community and organizational affiliations (Obermiller & Maloney, 1994).

Researcher Reflection

All of the characteristics described in the literature review above were evident within the schools where I conducted principal and teacher interviews for this study. The distance between schools ranged from 3 miles apart to 77 miles apart across the three adjacent counties. Though the distance between many of the schools I visited was over an hour's drive, the district employees with whom I engaged exhibited the same cultural characteristics.

On the first day of data collection with focus-group participants, teachers would enter the room, sometimes with a scowl. They typically asked, "Where are you from?" as a way to greet me. At the conclusion of data collection on that first day, I realized that evening that I must share the story of my background and upbringing in eastern Kentucky. I realized the importance of being perceived as an insider with the participants instead of only being an outsider. One participant during my second day of interviews even exclaimed, "You sound like us!" when my introduction was complete. I realized then that I had to tell my personal story to each group before asking interview questions.

After all of my interviews were complete, I realized I had only talked with one participant who was *not* White. This gentleman had lived in the area for many years and had embraced the local culture. Nonetheless, I think it would have been interesting to talk with him privately about his enculturation into the community where he lives.

The concept of *school family* was evident in nearly every conversation I had with the study participants. Like most other P-12 educators, the teachers in the three eastern

Kentucky districts spent more daylight hours with their work peers than they did with to their biological family. What made their interpersonal relationships unique was how those extended into non-school activities across a calendar year and included members of the personal extended families. The schools truly served as community centers.

A majority of study participants were originally from Appalachia and understood the community ties and family connections that developed among one another for this simple reason. Additionally, many participants openly discussed the religious and spiritual relationship they had with their church and between each other because many participants attended church together. This religious connection is yet another reason for the school family to be part of the extended family as explained in the literature.

The professional relationships, school culture, and conditions that exist outside of school collectively influence of teacher retention within the three eastern school districts where the study was conducted. These findings are also influenced by the culture of Central Appalachia.

Study Limitations

As the researcher for this qualitative case study, I served as the data-collection instrument and thus could have unintentionally included elements of researcher bias because I lived in eastern Kentucky as a child. Also, my prior experiences as an elementary and secondary teacher and as a teacher leader inclined me toward an interest in teacher retention. While conducting this study, I attempted to minimize my personal perspectives and expectations to assure any biases I may have had did not influence data collection, data analysis, or interpretation of study findings.

Lessons Learned

As a doctoral student at the University of Kentucky, I had the opportunity during the course of this study to collect data on teacher retention in rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Visiting the individual schools in each school district and interacting with teachers and school and district leaders was important to my development as a postsecondary professional, and equally strengthened my understanding as an educational leader in the 21st century.

Recounting complex phenomena experienced by school district employees required the blending of two interpretations. First, exploring phenomena from the perspective of the study participants was one method used to report findings. The emic perspective (Krathwohl, 1998; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) appoints subjective meanings to the phenomena studied. Participants provided insider interpretations through their comments recorded during interviews. These words gave previews in the participants' understandings about their position as school district employees in eastern Kentucky.

Second, as an outsider to the participants being studied, I used an objective viewpoint. This outsider viewpoint, known as the etic perspective (Krathwohl, 1998; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), enabled me to make conceptual sense of the cases and report the findings through connection to the present research literature. By visiting the school districts of the interviewees and observing them during the interviews, I explored phenomena from an outsider perspective.

Exploring teacher retention has reminded me that an organization's most important resource is its people. The participants in this study renewed my zeal for the primary reason I chose my career the field of education—the students. The institution of

higher education where I am employed prepares aspiring teachers who will hopefully become teachers soon after graduation. This study has reminded me what it is like to be *on the front lines and in the trenches* of P-12 education. I hope to be able to share with preservice teachers the joys and the sorrows, the gains and the losses, and the realities of being a P-12 teacher in the 21st century because many graduates of my university will work in school districts situated in or adjacent to Central Appalachia. I believe it is important that I share the commitment and resilience of the eastern Kentucky teachers from this study with the teachers of tomorrow. I hope the outcomes of this study will ultimately lead to higher teacher retention rates for the ones who matter most—the next generation of students in P-12 classrooms across this country.

Conclusion

Current literature suggests that the amount of highly qualified teachers will not be sufficient enough to staff the growing school districts in the United States, especially in rural school districts. Since school leadership is a primary influence for teacher retention, it is vital that school and district leaders in rural districts understand reasons for teacher retention in order to meet the needs of the teachers they serve and recruit.

This multiple-case study described and analyzed influences of teacher retention across three rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. The case study was bound in time, from November 2015 to February 2016. It began at document review and continued through completion of the focus-group interviews. A set of researcher propositions guided the focus of this qualitative study. The inquiry explored and analyzed participants' perceptions of teacher retention in their respective school districts.

Findings reflect important implications for the further development of school and district leaders. Four noteworthy findings emerged from the study. First, professional support positively influences teacher retention. Second, the effect of positive school culture impacts teachers' decisions to remain. Third, conditions outside of school optimistically influence teacher retention. Last, the context and culture of where this study was conducted (i.e., Central Appalachia) was a reason for high teacher retention.

Data indicate the need for change in future practice for school and district leaders' approaches to teacher retention. While principals are more closely connected to the needs of teachers, as they should be, there is disconnect between superintendents and the needs that impact teacher retention in P-12 schools. Similarly, as principals in Appalachia provided indirect support (e.g., opportunities for out-of-school fellowship, opportunities for in-school fellowship, opportunities for colleague relationship development), it is important that school leaders across the United States guide and provide indirect support to teachers in order to increase teacher retention. Additionally, further research is needed in rural school districts and among rural populations, including an understanding of the impact of teacher retention on what matters most—students success.

**APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW INVITATION—
SUPERINTENDENTS**

October 1, 2015

Dear Superintendent:

As I am sure you are aware, rural school districts across the country are experiencing difficulties in retaining quality teachers. After growing up and teaching in Appalachia, I understand the significant impact that a stable cadre of teachers can have on promoting student achievement. According to the 2013 Kentucky TELL Survey, your school district had an average satisfaction response at a greater percentage than the average in the Commonwealth. Rural district administrators need to know what they can do to retain satisfied teachers like those in your district. Therefore, I am currently conducting a study to explore factors influencing teachers' decision to remain in your rural school district (name of district). Would you consider being part of my study by participating in an individual interview regarding the issue of teacher retention in rural school districts? The interview will take approximately 30-90 minutes of your time and will be conducted in a location convenient to you that assures privacy. Responses you provide in the study may be utilized to improve and/or revamp policies and programs regarding teacher retention in the Commonwealth and across the country.

Your name will not be identified in a report of the responses, as responses will be reported in aggregated form only.

Again, I truly appreciate your time and consideration for this opportunity. I look forward to analyzing the data, which may make a difference for the next generation of students and teachers to come.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Watts

Primary Investigator, Doctoral Candidate, University of Kentucky

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Advisor: Professor Tricia Browne-Ferrigno; Email: tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu

APPENDIX B: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW INVITATION—PRINCIPALS

October 1, 2015

Dear Principal:

As I am sure you are aware, rural school districts across the country are experiencing difficulties in retaining quality teachers. After growing up and teaching in Appalachia, I understand the significant impact that a stable cadre of teachers can have on promoting student achievement. According to the 2013 Kentucky TELL Survey, your school had an average satisfaction response at a greater percentage than the average in your district and the Commonwealth. Rural district administrators need to know what they can do to retain satisfied teachers like those in your district. Therefore, I am currently conducting a study to explore factors influencing teachers' decision to remain in your rural school district (name of district). Would you consider being part of my study by participating in an individual interview regarding the issue of teacher retention in rural school districts? The interview will take approximately 30-90 minutes of your time and will be conducted in a location convenient to you that assures privacy. Responses you provide in the study may be utilized to improve and/or revamp policies and programs regarding teacher retention in the Commonwealth and across the country.

Your name will not be identified in a report of the responses, as responses will be reported in aggregated form only.

Again, I truly appreciate your time and consideration for this opportunity. I look forward to analyzing the data, which may make a difference for the next generation of students and teachers to come.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Watts

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APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Guide—Superintendents and Principals

1. Please tell me about yourself and your work.
2. How did you come to work in the current school district?
3. What factors have contributed to teachers' decisions to remain in this district?
4. Did money or other incentives affect teachers' decisions to stay?
5. In what ways does administration help new teachers adjust and acclimate to the current school district and the community as a whole?
6. Do these efforts affect teachers' decisions to stay? If so, how so?
7. How should the district and school socially transition new teachers to the district?
8. How should the district, school, and the community engage teachers socially in order to attract and retain more teachers?
9. What kind of information should district leaders provide prospective teachers, prior to beginning a teaching assignment, regarding conditions outside of the district?
10. Do conditions outside of your district affect teachers' decisions to stay? If so, how so?
11. Do you think the district presents the characteristics of the community to teachers in an accurate and effective manner?
12. Do administrators' support affect teachers decisions to stay? If so, how so?
13. Do actions of building level administrators influence teachers' decisions to remain in the current school district? If so, how so?
14. What do you think building administrators and district administrators should do to ensure that new teachers remain in the district?

15. Considering everything we have discussed, overall, what keeps teachers here in the current district?
16. Is there anything that the district could do to further impact teachers' decisions to stay?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add to our time today?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEW INVITATION—TEACHERS

October 1, 2015

Dear Teacher:

As I am sure you are aware, rural school districts across the country are experiencing difficulties in retaining quality teachers. After growing up and teaching in Appalachia, I understand the significant impact that a stable cadre of teachers can have on promoting student achievement. According to the 2013 Kentucky TELL Survey, your school had an average satisfaction response at a greater percentage than the average in your district and the Commonwealth. Rural district administrators need to know what they can do to retain satisfied teachers like those in your district. Therefore, I am currently conducting a study to explore factors influencing teachers' decision to remain in your rural school district (name of district). Would you consider being part of my study by participating in a focus-group interview with you and 5-9 of your colleagues regarding the issue of teacher retention in rural school districts? This focus-group interview will last 30-90 minutes during non-instructional time and will be conducted in a location convenient to you that assures privacy. Responses you provide in the study may be utilized to improve and/or revamp policies and programs regarding teacher retention in the Commonwealth and across the country.

Your name will not be identified in a report of the responses, as responses will be reported in aggregated form only.

Again, I truly appreciate your time and consideration for this opportunity. I look forward to analyzing the data, which may make a difference for the next generation of students and teachers to come.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Watts

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APPENDIX E: FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Guide—Teachers

1. Please tell me about yourself and your work.
2. How did you come to work in the current school district?
3. What factors have contributed to teachers' decisions to remain in this district?
4. Did money or other incentives affect teachers' decisions to stay?
5. What helped you adjust and acclimate to the current school district and the community as a whole?
6. Do these efforts affect your decision to stay? If so, how so?
7. How should the district and school socially transition new teachers to the district?
8. How should the district, school, and the community engage teachers socially in order to attract and retain more teachers?
9. What kind of information should district leaders provide prospective teachers, prior to beginning a teaching assignment, regarding conditions outside of the district?
10. Do conditions outside of your district affect your decision to stay? If so, how so?
11. Do you think the district presented characteristics of the community to you in an accurate and effective manner?
12. Does administrator support affect your decision to stay? If so, how so?
13. Did actions of a specific building level administrator influence your decision to remain in the current school district? If so, how so?
14. What do you think building administrators and district administrators should do to ensure that new teachers remain in the district?
15. Considering everything we have discussed, overall, what is keeping you here in the current district?
16. Is there anything that your building administrators or district administration could do to further impact your decision to stay?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add to our time today?

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity
IRB, IACUC, RDRC
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Initial Review

Approval Ends
October 27, 2016

IRB Number
15-0823-P4S

TO: Jeremy Watts
Education
111 Dickey Hall
0017
PI phone #: (304) 634-9637

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson
Non-medical Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol Number 15-0823-P4S

DATE: November 4, 2015

On October 29, 2015, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

An Exploration of Teacher Retention in Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky

Approval is effective from October 29, 2015 until October 27, 2016 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, attached is the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. **[Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.]** Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and returned to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigators responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook web page [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/IRB-Survival-Handbook.html#PIresponsibilities>]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/>]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "N. Van Tuijthof PhD/gh". Below the signature is a horizontal line, and underneath the line is the printed text "Chairperson/Vice Chairperson".

Chairperson/Vice Chairperson

APPENDIX G: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT

An Exploration of Teacher Retention in Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky

Individual Interview Consent—Superintendents and Principals

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about teacher retention in rural school districts. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are an administrator in a rural school district. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 60 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Jeremy Watts, a doctoral candidate student of the University of Kentucky Department of Educational Leadership. He is being guided in this research by Professor Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership Studies at the University of Kentucky.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn about contributing factors of the retention of teachers in rural settings and identify ways that school and district administration shall help increase teacher retention and decrease teacher attrition rates in their schools.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You should not participate in this study if you are not an administrator in a rural school district.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at a convenient location for the participants to ensure safety and privacy (e.g. office, conference room at the school, or classroom at the school, or local library). Each interview session will take approximately 30-90 minutes. The PI may contact you via electronic email or telephone to ask for clarification on something that was said during interviews; you have the right to refuse to participate in any follow-up questions. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 30 minutes to 90 minutes over the next month.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes that include questions about teacher retention and leadership. You will be individually interviewed and the interview will focus on understanding the extent in which social, economic, geographic, and administrative support factors influence teachers' decisions to remain in schools. The interviews will be audio recorded.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society, as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

I will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally

identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private.

I shall make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your comments will be combined with those other participants taking part in this study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private.

I shall make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Comments and mapping diagrams made during the interviews will not be shared with or disclosed to any other participants in the study. All transcriptions and data collected will be kept in my possession under lock and key. Volunteers' identification will remain confidential by use of an assigned code for use in data management.

I will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require me to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you or if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues, according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Jeremy Watts at 304-634-9637 or via electronic mail (jeremywatts@uky.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent

Date

APPENDIX H: FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEW CONSENT

An Exploration of Teacher Retention in Rural School Districts in Eastern Kentucky

Focus-Group Interview Consent—Teachers

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about teacher retention in rural school districts. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a teacher in a rural school district. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 60 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Jeremy Watts, a doctoral candidate student of the University of Kentucky Department of Educational Leadership. He is being guided in this research by Professor Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership Studies at the University of Kentucky.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn about contributing factors of the retention of teachers in rural settings and identify ways that school and district administration shall help increase teacher retention and decrease teacher attrition rates in their schools.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You should not participate in this study if you are a teacher with less than five years experience in the given Kentucky school district.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at a convenient location for the participants to ensure safety and privacy (e.g. office, conference room at the school, or classroom at the school, or local library). Each interview session will take approximately 30-90 minutes. The PI may contact you via electronic email or telephone to ask for clarification on something that was said during interviews; you have the right to refuse to participate in any follow-up questions. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 30-90 minutes over the next month.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in one focus-group interview, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes that include questions about teacher retention and leadership. You will participate in a focus-group interview and the interview will focus on understanding the extent in which social, economic, geographic, and administrative support factors influence teachers' decisions to remain in schools. The interviews will be audio recorded.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society, as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

As a focus group participant your identity will be known to all other subjects participating in the focus-group interview session. Prior to beginning the focus group, I shall ask that everyone present protect the confidentiality of all involved by not disclosing who was present and by not sharing any portion of the comments made.

I shall make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your comments will be combined with those other participants taking part in this study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private.

I shall make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Comments and mapping diagrams made during the interviews will not be shared with or disclosed to any other participants in the study. All transcriptions and data collected will be kept in my possession under lock and key. Volunteers' identification will remain confidential by use of an assigned code for use in data management.

I will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require me to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you or if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues,

according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Jeremy Watts at 304-634-9637 or via electronic mail (jeremywatts@uky.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent

Date

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