

Novice Teacher Recruitment and Retention in a Rural Midwestern State: An Exploration of Contextual Factors

Nicole Schutter, *Northern State University*

Erin Lehmann, *The University of South Dakota*

Teacher recruitment and retention consistently emerged as problematic in research and practice. This was particularly true in difficult-to-staff areas, such as rural school districts in the United States. As the teacher pipeline continued to decrease and various challenges plagued the field, this problem quickly became a crisis. The present study aimed to lift novice teachers' voices in rural and remote rural areas of a Midwestern State better to understand individuals' experiences in a rural setting and contribute to the current knowledge base of rural teacher recruitment and retention. Eleven participants in this qualitative phenomenological study aimed to uncover the specific contextual factors that influenced their experiences as novice teachers in a rural Midwestern State. Interviews revealed the need for direct support from administrators and colleagues to create a sense of belonging, which was imperative to positive novice teacher experiences. The need for appropriate preparedness within their preservice experiences and coursework, as well as solid induction and mentoring programs once hired, surfaced during the interviews. Rural-specific field experiences paired with comprehensive induction and mentoring programs focused on specific feedback prepare preservice teachers and novice teachers for successful rural teaching and living. Intentional recruitment efforts, including grow-your-own programs for future teachers and partnerships between rural school districts and teacher preparation programs, boosted the pipeline of novice teachers for rural areas.

Keywords: rural education, teacher recruitment, teacher retention, induction, mentoring programs

Over the past few decades, teacher retention has been a growing area of concern for educators, school administrators, and policymakers (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; DeAngelis et al., 2013; Ingersoll, 2012; The Holmes Group, 1986; Whalen et al., 2019). Increased attention has been placed on novice teacher attrition and migration in rural areas and the potential recruitment and retention efforts that may be more effective with this population and in these areas (Curtin, 2018; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020; Pietrzak et al., 2011; Price Azano et al., 2020; Zubrzycki, 2017). Additionally, novice teachers' experiences were context-specific and limited in scope compared to veteran teachers; therefore, to better understand and improve these experiences, to increase self-

efficacy among this group, and to retain the novice teachers that have been recruited, we need to look at the contextual factors of their school environment and demographic information that may impact their decision to stay in the profession.

Many factors have previously been identified as why novice teachers move to other schools or districts or leave the profession altogether. These factors included but were not limited to lack of administrator support (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012; Prather-Jones, 2011; Price Azano et al., 2020; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), limited professional development and training opportunities (Boe et al., 2008; Podolsky et al., 2019), low student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Monk, 2007), lower salaries (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Curtin, 2018; Zubrzycki, 2017), and lack of adequate preparation to cope with the challenges facing today's teachers such as increased student behavioral and academic needs, limited resources, and poor working conditions (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Monk, 2007; Podolsky et al., 2019; Zhang & Zeller, 2016; Zubrzycki, 2017). Moving forward to experience higher teacher retention rates within rural areas, it was imperative to discover how to best prepare and recruit novice teachers to these areas. It was important to learn how various contextual factors within their social/professional experiences and the novice teachers perceived self-efficacy influenced attrition and migration rates of novice teachers within these regions.

Teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas and among novice teachers was an increasingly critical area within the field of education as more and more teachers are leaving the profession or their rural districts for other careers or more populated areas (Zubrzycki, 2017). Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) asserted that students within rural districts are disadvantaged due to the continual placement of novice teachers in these classrooms. Novice teachers were less experienced and often inadequately prepared to face the challenges within rural settings.

Teacher mobility and attrition over the past four decades contributed to this concern, as the percentage of teachers leaving the profession grew from 5.6% during the late 1980s to 8% during the 2020-21 to 2021-22 school year transition, with some school years seeing the percentage increase to 8.4% (Taie & Lewis, 2023). This, coupled with increasing K-12 student populations in many areas and decreasing teacher preparation program participants (Zubrzycki, 2017), only compounded the problem in certain areas of the country where difficult-to-staff schools exist. Teacher job openings within this rural Midwestern State reached record highs for the 2022-2023 school year (Associated School Boards of South Dakota, 2023), and school districts began the 2023-2024 school year with just over 180 unfilled teaching positions (Seamer, 2023).

According to Ratcliffe et al. (2016), the U. S. Census Bureau reported a shift in population growth, which has caused the rural population nationwide to decrease dramatically. The decline in rural population has led to a diminishing pool of preservice

teachers available and willing to work in these areas. Furthermore, fewer of these teachers have rural living experiences beneficial for success in such roles (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Zubrzycki, 2017). Teachers living and working in a community assessed how well their values align with those of the community and whether they feel welcomed. This sense of belonging was particularly important for rural educators (Wynhoff Olson et al., 2022).

By nature of their preparation level, novice teachers had less experience overall. They were not fully prepared for the challenges faced in rural settings, such as increased poverty (Monk, 2007), limited professional and social interactions outside of the school setting (Berry & Gravelle, 2013), and locations far from urbanized areas with more resources (Beesley et al., 2010). Additionally, teachers in rural settings do not often hold advanced degrees (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). This lack of experience and insufficient advanced training and knowledge highlight an equity gap affecting PreK-12 students in rural settings (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). This could mean these students did not have comparative educational experiences with their peers living in areas where novice teachers were more likely to hold advanced degrees (Cardichon et al., 2020; Ingersoll, 1999). Additional equity and student achievement concerns continued to concern rural schools. If these novice teachers lack advanced experiences, their students may not reach their highest potential due to the teachers' lack of confidence in their teaching abilities (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Kaufman & Ireland, 2016).

According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2016), *rural* is defined as an area with less than 2,500 people. The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) described rural fringe areas as those areas less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized area or less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster, while rural, remote areas are defined as areas more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy (1977) emerged from studies in human behavior and behavioral change, particularly within the areas of phobias and social cognitive theories. Bandura first described self-efficacy as how someone may think about their ability to complete tasks based on previous attempts and their successes or failures. According to Bandura's work, there were "four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states" (p. 195) that affected the development of self-efficacy. Because self-efficacy can be manifested in several ways and the fact that self-efficacy is related to the outcome expectations the individual then holds for their success or failure at a given task, the Theory of Self-Efficacy has been used in many academic areas (Artino, 2012). This was also the case for preservice and novice teachers as they developed self-efficacy within their field experiences and early career experiences. When preservice and novice

teachers observed veteran teachers perform teaching tasks successfully, gained valuable insight from these cooperating teachers/colleagues and other school staff, learned from the successes and failures they experienced early on in their own experiences, and obtained feedback in areas such as pedagogy and classroom management from their university supervisors and building administrators they gained additional self-efficacy (Gamborg et al., 2018). Developing a solid level of self-efficacy early on in their careers could affect how these novice teachers find fulfillment in their positions and choose to continue teaching in the field (Kaufman & Ireland, 2016).

Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Rural Areas

Many factors played into the concern regarding teacher recruitment and retention, especially in rural areas. While one of these factors was low pay, which hindered recruitment and retention efforts, another critical factor was the lack of license reciprocity among states (South Dakota Blue Ribbon Task Force, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2001). Lack of license reciprocity posted invisible fences along state lines, making it more difficult for states to recruit teachers from neighboring states. Establishing parameters that allow license reciprocity created a deeper candidate pool for some states and districts, which may provide more high-quality candidates for their students (Podolsky et al., 2019).

In this midwestern rural State, the Blue Ribbon Task Force (2015) explained that one concern in the State is preparing enough teachers to replace those aging out of the profession due to retirements and those leaving the profession altogether. However, as Darling-Hammond (2001) emphasized, the problem does not end when we have enough teachers in the pipeline. According to Darling-Hammond, "keeping the teachers we prepare" (pp. 7-8) was the most significant challenge and has been a continual issue since the 1990s. Gamborg et al. (2018) stated that around 50% of novice teachers leave the profession within the first five years, so keeping these teachers in the profession is a valid concern. Multi-year induction programs that involved mentoring and participation within the school community increased the novice teachers' self-efficacy, thus increasing the likelihood they will stay within the field (Clark, 2012; Gamborg et al., 2018; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Ingersoll, 2012; Voss & Kunter, 2020; Youngs, 2007).

Leadership and Teacher Retention

According to Le Cornu (2013), in schools where principals had developed and nurtured positive, supportive relationships with staff and created a culture of shared vision and responsibility, novice teachers grew and gained resiliency in their teaching practices. When new teachers thrive and feel supported, they are more likely to continue within their careers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Thereby, developing trust with building principals early on within, and even before, their career established the professional relationship as one of growth and development in the best interest of the teachers and their students (Range et al., 2013). Thus, this could be done through participation in teacher preparation programs through observations, learning walks, and engaging in deliberate conversations

with preservice teachers, mainly if these experiences were occurring within intentionally designed professional development, schools, and other school-university partnerships that helped foster these relationships (Ashley, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Tracz et al., 2018).

Building principals and other school leaders hold the responsibility for helping new teachers forge professional and working relationships with other teachers, which in turn offered mentoring and support in the school setting throughout these first few formative years of the novice teachers' careers (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In rural areas, however, this proved to be difficult due to limited numbers of staff members, staff members with similar workloads and fields of study, and distance between districts. Hence, school leaders needed to provide online opportunities for these connections to occur and flourish, as well as allow access to state-sponsored mentoring programs and other opportunities for professional growth and development in the form of attendance to conferences or workshops and membership within professional organizations (Monk, 2007).

The principal's role in teacher retention included providing adequate support with challenging situations, whether it be general workload, student behaviors, and discipline, or parent concerns (Arnett, 2017; Brown & Wynn, 2007; Brown & Wynn, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012; Prather-Jones, 2011). As Hughes et al. (2015) suggested, principals who acknowledge that teaching is difficult work put forth effort in cultivating and maintaining a positive, productive culture through effective communication and retain more teachers for extended periods. This support, coupled with strong instructional leadership and articulated shared vision, not only built individual teacher's self-efficacy levels but also paved the way for collective efficacy within a school (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Providing adequate induction programs is also critical to retaining novice teachers (Youngs, 2007). Comprehensive induction programs for novice teachers include several components such as meetings with mentors, review of district or building routines, procedures, and expectations, and lesson observations followed up with specific feedback regarding instructional strategies, all of which work together to establish a solid support system, continual learning and training opportunities, and multiple avenues through which novice teachers can seek out and receive the support needed to experience success during the first few years of their careers (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Gamborg et al., 2018; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Purpose and Research Questions

Teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas and among novice teachers was an increasingly critical area within the field of education as more and more teachers are leaving the profession or their rural districts for other careers or more populated areas (Ingersoll, 2012; Zubrzycki, 2017). Understanding novice teachers' experiences was critical to understanding the teacher shortage and existing recruitment and retention

issues. Suppose we fail to fully understand these experiences or the contextual factors impacting novice teachers' decisions to stay or leave their current positions or the profession. In that case, we will not resolve the issue. Instead, we will continue to see increased turnover rates among this group of individuals, resulting in more significant problems regarding lost resources due to additional costs in recruiting, hiring, mentoring, and training and other onboarding costs, negatively impacting school culture and student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Brown & Wynn, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012).

This study aimed to explore novice teachers' lived experiences in a Midwestern State and work at articulating the contextual factors that impacted these individuals' migration, retention, and attrition decisions. The guiding questions for this study were:

1. What is the lived experience of novice teachers in a rural state?
2. In what contexts are these experiences situated?

Methodology

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain insight into novice teachers' lived experiences in a rural setting and discover and explain contextual factors and their influence on novice teachers' decisions regarding the future of their careers while describing these teachers' full experiences. This approach provided a perspective allowing others to hear these participants' voices as they tell their experiences in a rural, rural fringe, or rural, remote community and school district, some of which were two or more consolidated communities.

The transcendental phenomenological approach was applied to provide stakeholders with a textural and structural description of these experiences to understand the unique needs of novice teachers better and more fully within a rural state and the distinctive experiences they face. These unique experiences included but were not limited to isolation from colleagues (Ingersoll, 2012) for a variety of reasons, such as being the only or one of few teachers with specific certification areas (DeFeo & Tran, 2019), being a member of a small staff and small community (Monk, 2007), and having minimal access to additional resources for students such as special education services and English language learner services (Monk, 2007).

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews comprised demographic and contextual questions about the novice teachers' experiences and future career plans (specifically those involving migration, retention, or attrition) and the deciding contextual factors for these plans. Questions regarding the novice teachers' reflections on their experiences and the learning they have experienced were also asked.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in the design was established through member checking, which allowed the participants to clarify any data drawn from the interviews (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hycner, 1985). An interview protocol detailing the process by which interviews were conducted can be found in Appendix A. This was a crucial step, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized member checking as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Additionally, field notes were used during data collection and analysis to note contextual information to help create a thick description that allowed the reader to assess transferability. This step aligned with Shenton's (2004) criteria for trustworthiness in a study, ensuring this research's transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability throughout the design process.

After transcribing the interviews, the researchers began the data analysis process by thoroughly reading the transcriptions multiple times to reflect upon the interviews. They explored the participants' words, phrases, and overall themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From this point, the researcher examined the interviews, looking for units of meaning and clusters of these units (Hycner, 1985). As these units and clusters emerged, the researchers discovered themes throughout the interviews and across participants that may have pointed to any contextual factors that played a role in novice teachers' experiences and future career decisions. This led the researchers to develop a textural and structural description of the novice teachers' experiences in their rural teaching positions (Moustakas, 1994). Theme discovery was accomplished using a coding method. The researchers began by creating a digital matrix containing repeated and relevant words and phrases from the participants. Then, they moved toward a frequency chart as themes started to emerge. The frequency chart showed how often statements related to a specific theme were made. Throughout the analysis process, memoing and annotating the transcripts were utilized as a reflective and analytical method where the researchers noted the emerging ideas, phrases, and other concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Population

This study focused on the districts considered rural, rural fringe, and rural remote, and the target population for this study consisted of novice teachers across a Midwestern State within their first five years of teaching. This population contained novice teachers from rural school settings, as well as a variety of other contextual factors, including school size, school type (public or private), level of school (elementary, secondary, or K-12), and the distance of their school site to major urban areas within the State. This Midwestern State housed 150 public K-12 school districts, 47 non-public school systems, 19 tribal/BIE schools, and one state school (Midwestern State Department of Education, 2020).

There were 11 participants in the study—three male and eight female. Most of the participants were white. All participants were in their first five years of teaching and, at the

time of the interviews, were teaching within a rural district within the Midwestern State. The participants' content area and grade levels varied, as did the number of years of teaching experience each participant had. Two participants were special education teachers (one grade 9-12, one grade K-6), two were fine arts teachers (one K-12 art, one 5-12 music), three were middle school teachers, two were high school teachers, and two were elementary teachers. Participants were selected through purposeful criterion sampling, where novice teachers in rural districts were asked to participate. Purposeful criterion sampling was used for sample selection in this study. Each participant met the criteria of having five years or less of teaching experience and, at the time of the study, was teaching in a rural, rural fringe, or rural, remote school district in the Midwestern State.

Findings

Seven predominant themes emerged from the analysis of data obtained from coding and clustering the interviews with rural novice teachers: (a) preparedness for rural teaching and/or living, (b) motivation to stay in or leave the profession or State, (c) sense of belonging in the school and community, (d) impact of administrator support on teacher self-efficacy, (e) impact of colleague support on teacher self-efficacy, (f) impact of mentoring and/or induction program on teacher self-efficacy, and (g) local contextual factors.

Through this study, the participants expressed varying levels of preparedness for rural living and/or teaching, a sense of belonging, support, recruitment efforts, and motivation to remain teaching in the district or State during their first teaching experiences. Informal and formal evaluations and other discussions with administrators and colleagues, structured mentoring and induction programs, and other localized contextual factors are crucial to how novice teachers in the study expressed the varying levels of preparedness, belonging, support, and motivation experienced within their first few years of teaching experience.

Preparedness for Rural Living/Teaching and Motivation to Stay

Prior experiences within rural communities and schools impacted the novice teachers' self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and motivation to stay within their new roles. Participant Seven explained, "I suppose, I mean, I've, I'm from [a rural Midwestern state], so I don't think I would want to move elsewhere." Similarly, Participant Three shared, "I grew up in [a rural Midwestern state], so this is just a place I knew I wanted to be. I don't have an interest in being anywhere bigger." Participant Six took the explanation a step further, including the relationships built within the role as motivation to stay, stating,

You know, I've never really thought about leaving the State because I grew up in [this rural Midwestern State], you know, born and raised here. I love the State and so I can't really imagine teaching anywhere else anyways, but the relationships

I've made here are definitely the ones that make me, make me want to stay with coworkers.

Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging developed as a result and was expressed by Participant Ten, who stated,

I think with everything that's happened and all the parents coming to me, kids coming to me, it's really a positive reinforcement making me want to stay here because I know that I'm appreciated in the area that I'm at.

She then went on to say, "I think the number one factor influencing the decision to stay teaching in [rural Midwestern State] would be the social context. I really love the people here."

While some participants interviewed shared positive experiences that helped them develop a sense of belonging, others, such as Participant Seven, stated,

I feel a lot of my coworkers, they grew up together almost they grew up in this community, so they have past relationships, and they know other members in the community. And, so, they understand this social context, and coming in, I feel like I'm naïve to that.

Participant Seven continued, "I don't know how people are supposed to act or behave." Again, without the intentional support of colleagues and administrators, participants experienced less sense of belonging and motivation to stay within their roles.

This siloed feeling was emphasized by Participant Two who explained,

But also, with them all being pretty close, and they're all quite a bit older, have quite a bit more experience than I do in teaching. So, sometimes it feels like I don't really know where my place is yet, especially since I've only been there half a year and they all have established relationships, and I'm still kind of working on that.

Feeling a sense of belonging within a community significantly influenced one's experience, often bolstered by the impact of administrator and colleague support.

Impact of Administrator and Colleague Support

Participants who experienced intentional support from administrators and colleagues reflected upon and applied knowledge from previous rural experiences in their personal or preservice professional lives. Participation in robust mentoring and induction programs expressed a greater sense of belonging, preparedness for rural teaching and/or living, and motivation to stay teaching within the State. All 11 participants discussed the support they receive from their building or district leadership, with many highlighting the positive impact of their administrators' support on their self-efficacy. Participant Three referenced this by sharing,

There are so many days that our superintendent/principal stops down after school, especially right as I was starting. And he would just check in once a week and some days we'd sit there after school for an hour and chat just about anything that I'm experiencing or going on and answering any questions. So that means a lot.

Building on the foundational support from administrators and colleagues, mentoring and induction programs further enhance this supportive framework, offering targeted guidance and development opportunities to new staff members.

Impact of Mentoring and/or Induction Program

In response to retention concerns, many school districts in the State have implemented mentoring or induction programs for their new teachers. Additionally, the State has implemented a statewide mentoring program to pair retired and/or veteran teachers with novice teachers within the State. According to the participants in this study, this had impacted the self-efficacy of those who had been paired with mentor teachers. Participant Eight felt strongly about the mentoring they received and shared,

I would say a mentoring program. The most beneficial aspect to my first two beginning years of teaching was having a mentor there. In my first district, I had a district mentor and a building mentor, and both were extremely beneficial.

Participant Six echoed these feelings, sharing, "My mentor who left the district a couple of years ago, I still talked to her and so it's, it's still very awesome. It's awesome to have her because she knows the district." This participant went on to say,

I was really lucky to be in the mentor program, in the [rural Midwestern state] teacher mentoring program, and my mentor was amazing. Like she was just a phenomenal teacher and like just the students really loved her and staff loved her and it was, it was so, and we had the same prep period and we were in the same building, and it was amazing for me just being around the hall and just vent or talk about like just anything, you know, student behavior and just, it was amazing just having her there. That was key.

While some participants shared the positive influence their mentoring or induction program had on their self-efficacy, others felt that the program wasn't as helpful as it could be. Participant Nine emphasized the need for proper pairing of mentors with novice teachers by sharing,

Well, I know like new teacher mentoring is a thing the State has, but our district is still, I don't feel like it has, I guess the best, because the way, I don't know, my first year, my mentor was also a first year in her position. So, I was just like kind of a hot mess. I would go to her for questions. And she was like, I don't even know the answer. Like, I'll find the answer, but I don't know it.

This insight emphasizes the need for school leadership to intentionally pair mentor teachers and their mentees and ensure adequate training for the mentor teachers occurs before implementing the program. Transitioning from the impact of mentoring and/or induction programs, it's crucial to explore how contextual factors like teacher pay and affordable housing intersect with and influence the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Local Contextual Factors

Localized contextual factors, such as teacher pay, available, affordable, and adequate housing, and specific recruitment efforts experienced by novice teachers, were also expressed as factors playing a role in the novice teachers' experiences within their rural settings. When a lack of affordable or available housing exists, novice teachers have difficulty moving to rural areas to teach and live. If salaries do not allow for it or the school is in a rural, remote community, commuting to the district to teach may also not be an option. Participant 11 explained her situation regarding housing by contributing,

Also for like, housing, here it is kind of limited, so I had a friend from [*a different university*] who is the, one of the music teachers here, and so he accepted a position. So, I kind of knew, like I had a built-in kind of roommate, friend, whatever.

In line with Boyd et al. (2003) and Monk (2007) regarding the proximity of novice teachers to their hometowns or college campuses, this study found that many novice teachers taught in areas close to or similar to their hometowns. Familiar with the Midwestern State's school districts and cultures from growing up there, many chose to continue their careers within the State. Some of these novice teachers were staying close to home or college towns, even if located in rural fringe areas, where support systems and daily living resources exist nearby. However, in some instances, novice teachers in the Midwestern State moved to rural, remote areas to teach and live, where access to necessities such as groceries, medical services, banking services, and other provisions was hours away. This, in addition to the social isolation from same-aged peers in these locales, profoundly affected novice teachers' sense of belonging and level of support, affecting their willingness to stay in these rural settings. Additionally, the level of support received from colleagues and administrators significantly impacted novice teachers' self-efficacy when encountering classroom management and discipline issues, difficult parent or student situations, and other challenges that arise throughout the school year. Table 1 displays the frequency of the predominant themes.

Table 1

Predominant Themes	Frequency
Preparedness for Rural Teaching and/or Living	11
Sense of Belonging in the School and Community	14
Motivation to Stay in or Leave the Profession or State	18
Impact of Administrator Support on Teacher Self-efficacy	17
Impact of Colleague Support on Teacher Self-efficacy	23
Impact of Mentoring and/or Induction Program on Teacher Self-efficacy	10
Local Contextual Factors	10

Discussion of Implications for Rural Education and Practice

Working with teacher preparation programs to provide deeper and more frequent rural-based field experiences, involving opportunities for reflection and comparison to preservice teachers' personal experiences, would benefit novice teachers as they seek employment and their teaching experiences within rural areas (Quesenberry et al., 2018). These experiences would increase the degree of preparedness novice teachers immediately felt when entering teaching positions in the Midwestern State.

School leaders who are purposeful in intentional relationship building and establishing positive and productive school cultures would create the sense of belonging and levels of support novice teachers have expressed as a need (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Le Cornu, 2013; Tracz et al., 2018). Additionally, principals who provided specific and effective instructional feedback to their staff based on information from formal evaluations and informal walk-throughs and based on school-wide goals and student needs developed high expectations among their staff (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Gamborg et al., 2018; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Implementing intentional recruitment efforts across the State, high school internships, and other grow-your-own programs would be helpful in building the teacher pipeline for rural, remote, and rural fringe areas (Painter et al., 2013). We were developing community-based pipeline apprenticeship-based programs like those referenced by Barley (2009), where community members who showed interest or paraprofessionals already staffing K-12 schools engaged in coursework and field experiences to earn certification. Once teachers are recruited, districts in rural areas will benefit from comprehensive onboarding or induction programs for all new teachers to their schools or buildings to move toward retaining these teachers. Novice teachers feel best supported by ongoing, intensive, and individualized support within their schools.

Future Research

Additional research is necessary to determine specific challenges our novice teachers, especially those in rural areas, face in their roles. Intentionally clarifying with preservice and novice teachers what administrative and colleague support looks and sounds like to them may assist in creating more effective, robust, personalized induction, mentoring, and onboarding programs that will allow them to consider long-term employment in their current district.

Broad-scoped surveys were sent to novice teachers across the State and region to discover more specific information regarding their experiences and perceptions regarding preparedness for rural living and teaching, belonging in their school and community, leader and colleague support, State and district-level mentoring and induction programs, and recruitment efforts they experienced upon entering the profession and how these experiences and preparedness have impacted their first year of teaching would be beneficial to teacher preparation programs and school districts. Surveying novice teachers in the Midwestern States to learn more about the local contextual factors such as teacher pay and affordable, adequate housing accessibility that may influence their decision to continue teaching within the State would be beneficial in understanding the needs and desires of this group and how these factors play a role in recruitment and retention. Further qualitative studies with novice teachers in rural areas of Midwestern states will continually add to the knowledge base regarding these experiences and the best ways to support these teachers. Asking more specific questions regarding the themes that emerged from this study, specifically the intentional support received, the induction and mentoring programs provided, and the overall sense of belonging developed during the first few years within the role, will be beneficial to issues surrounding novice rural teacher support. Additional research regarding which recruitment and retention efforts have successfully recruited and retained teachers in these rural districts across Midwestern States may also help rural school districts make effective programmatic decisions regarding support for novice teachers.

Conclusion

Novice teachers in this Midwestern State had various experiences and needs based on the challenges presented in their school districts and communities. These needs ranged from building adequate and appropriate relationships with those individuals within and outside the school community to not knowing what they do not know or who to turn to for help and support. These needs affected the novice teachers' self-efficacy to some degree, which impacted their overall experience. While most of the novice teachers interviewed shared their intentions to stay in the Midwestern State and the positive experiences they encountered, some novice teachers still expressed concern regarding the lack of administrative support they experienced, the limited induction or mentoring programs offered them, and the loneliness associated with being new and inexperienced

in a world of veteran and well-versed colleagues. These were issues principals could work to address by building intentional support within the school and community settings to assist novice teachers in becoming more comfortable within the community and help these individuals access needed resources for successful rural teaching and living.

If given the opportunity, principals could play a vital role in pairing preservice and novice teachers together to provide the opportunity for preservice and novice teachers to discuss challenges faced within the first few years of rural teaching and living, which may help preservice teachers understand the needs of rural communities and schools while providing novice teachers the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. Building principals can serve as more than a liaison between the wealth of knowledge and experience within their staff and the needed placements of the teacher education programs, where they can observe, interact with, and provide feedback to preservice teachers to provide an additional layer of support. Supporting preservice teachers and establishing a constructive relationship with these individuals benefits the preservice teacher by providing additional feedback on instructional strategies, communication with parents and colleagues, and classroom management strategies from an administrator's perspective. Principals must be more active in developing and cultivating professional relationships among their staff while providing opportunities for preservice and novice teachers to share experiences and ideas. They need to give feedback to these individuals and establish a school culture that encourages collaboration and builds trust.

References

- Arnett, A. (2017). To develop teachers, look to other teachers. *Education Digest*, 83(1), 50–53.
- Artino, A. R. (2012). Academic self-efficacy: From educational theory to instructional practice. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 1(2), 76–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/S40037-012-0012-5>
- Associated School Boards of South Dakota. (2023, January 17). *Teacher openings exceeding record levels*. <https://asbsd.org/teacher-open-exceed-record-level/>
- Ashley, J. (2016). Teachers' opinions on teacher preparation: A gap between college and classroom. *Journal of Inquiry and Action in Education*, 7(1), 50–63.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>

- Barley, Z. A. (2009). Preparing teachers for rural appointments: Lessons from the mid-continent. *The Rural Educator*, 30(3), 10–15.
<https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v30i3.444>
- Beesley, A. D., Atwill, K., Blair, P., & Barley, Z. A. (2010). Strategies for recruitment and retention of secondary teachers in central U. S. rural schools. *The Rural Educator*, 31(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v31i2.937>
- Berry, A. B., & Gravelle, M. (2013). The benefits and challenges of special education positions in rural settings: Listening to the teachers. *The Rural Educator*, 34(2).
<https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v34i2.400>
- Boe, E. E., Cooke, L. H., & Sunderland, R. J. (2008). Teacher turnover: Examining exit attrition, teaching area transfer, and school migration. *Exceptional Children*, 75(1), 7–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290807500101>
- Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2003). *The draw of home: How teachers' preferences for proximity disadvantage urban schools*. Working Paper 9953: NBER Working Paper Series; National Bureau of Economic Research.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20072>
- Brown, K. M., & Wynn, S. (2007). Teacher retention issues: How some principals are supporting and keeping new teachers. *Journal of School Leadership*, 17, 664–698. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460701700601>
- Brown, K. M., & Wynn, S. (2009). Finding, supporting, and keeping: The role of the principal in teacher retention issues. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8, 37–63.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760701817371>
- Cardichon, J., Darling-Hammond, L., Yang, M., Scott, C., Shields, P. M., & Burns, D. (2020). *Inequitable opportunity to learn: Student access to certified and experienced teachers*. Learning Policy Institute.
- Clark, S. (2012). The plight of the novice teacher. *The Clearing House*, 85, 197–200.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2012.689783>
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. M. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Curtin, S. J. (2018). Teacher recruitment and retention in the rural Midwest: Academic leaders' perceptions. *Voices of Reform*, 1(1), 57–75.
<https://doi.org/10.32623/1.00006>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keep good teachers: Why it matters, what good leaders can do. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 6–13.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). Teacher education and the American future. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(2), 35–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109348024>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher prep: How well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(4), 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053004002>
- DeAngelis, K. J., Wall, A. F., & Che, J. (2013). The impact of preservice preparation and early career support on novice teachers' career intentions and decisions. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(4), 338–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487113488945>
- DeFeo, D. J., & Tran, T. C. (2019). Recruiting, hiring, and training Alaska's rural teachers: How superintendents practice place-conscious leadership. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 35(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.26209/jrre3502>
- Gagnon, D. J., & Mattingly, M. J. (2015). State policy responses to ensuring excellent educators in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 30(13), 1–14.
- Gamborg, L., Webb, A. W., Smith, A., & Baumgartner, J. J. (2018). Understanding self-efficacy of novice teachers during induction. *Research Issues in Contemporary Education*, 3(2), 16–26.
- Greenlee, B., & Brown, Jr., J. J. (2009). Retaining teachers in challenging schools. *Education*, 130(1), 96–109.
- The Holmes Group. (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers: A report of the Holmes Group*.
- Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(4), 343–356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.01.007>
- Hughes, A. L., Matt, J. J., & O'Reilly, F. L. (2015). Principal support is imperative to the retention of teachers in hard-to-staff schools. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 3(1), 129–134. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v3i1.622>
- Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies*, 8, 279–303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00142995>
- Ingersoll, R. (1999). *Teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and the organization of schools*. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy Work Paper. CTP-W-99-1. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038003499>
- Ingersoll, R. (2012). Beginning teacher induction: What the data tells us. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93, 47–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171209300811>
- Ingersoll, R., Sirinides, P., & Dougherty, P. (2018). Leadership matters: Teachers' roles in school decision making and school performance. *American Educator*, 42(1), 13–17, 39.
-

- Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201–233. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323>
- Kaufman, D., & Ireland., A. (2016). Enhancing teacher education with simulations. *TechTrends*, 60, 260–267. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-016-0049-0>
- Le Cornu, R. (2013). Building early career teacher resilience: The role of relationships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n4.4>
- Lincoln Y. S., & Guba E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Midwestern State Department of Education. (2020). *School Directory Information*.
- Monk, D. (2007). Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in rural areas. *The Future of Children*, 17(1), 155–174. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2007.0009>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest of education statistics*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Education Division, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Oyen, K., & Schweinle, A. (2020). Addressing teacher shortages in rural America: What factors encourage teachers to consider teaching in rural settings? *The Rural Educator*, 41(3), 12–25 <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v41i3.923>
- Painter, S., Haladyna, T., & Hurwitz, S. (2013). Attracting beginning teachers: The incentives and organizational characteristics that matter. *Planning and Changing*, 38(1–2), 108–127.
- Pietrzak, D., Engelking, J. E., Reed, K. M., Gapp, S., & Bosse, S. (2011). Motivations and deterrents for entering the teaching field in a rural state. *Journal for Inquiry & Action in Education*, 4(2), 18–33.
- Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bishop, J. (2019). Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say? *Education Policy Analysis Archive*, 27(38), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3722>
- Prather-Jones, B. (2011). How school administrators influence the retention of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 84(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2010.489387>

- Price Azano, A., Brenner, D., Downey, J., Eppley, K., & Schulte, A. K. (2020). *Becoming a rural teacher: Thriving in classrooms, schools, and communities*. Routledge.
- Quesenberry, A. C., Hamann, K., Sanden, S., Bates, A., & Hartle, L. (2018). Examining the impact of a year-long university-school partnership. *Action in Teacher Education*, 40(3), 288–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2018.1486752>
- Range, B., Duncan, H., & Hvidston, D. (2013). How faculty supervise and mentor preservice teachers: Implications for principal supervision of novice teachers. *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 8(2), 43–58.
- Ratcliffe, M., Burd, C., Holder, K., & Fields, A. (2016). *Defining rural at the U. S. Census Bureau: American community survey and geography brief*. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/acs/acsgeo-1.pdf>
- Seamer, C. (2023, August 7). *Over 180 open teaching positions stateside, down from last year*. *Dakota News Now*. <https://www.dakotane.wsnow.com/2023/08/07/over-180-open-teaching-positions-statewide-down-last-year/>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research project. *Education for Information*, 22, 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>
- South Dakota Blue Ribbon Task Force. (2015). Final Report. <https://blueribbon.sd.gov/Blue%20Ribbon%20Report%20-%20Final.pdf>
- Taie, S., & Lewis, L. (2023). *Teacher Attrition and Mobility. Results From the 2021–22 Teacher Follow-up Survey to the National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NCES 2024-039). U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2024039>
- Tracz, S. M., Beare, P., & Torgerson, C. (2018). A longitudinal case study of a school-university partnership for training teachers. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, 3(1), 42–56. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jsard.v3i1.1931>
- Voss, T., & Kunter, M. (2020). "Reality shock" of beginning teachers? Changes in teacher candidates' emotional exhaustion and constructivist-oriented beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(3), 292–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119839700>
- Whalen, C., Majocho, E., & Van Nuland, S. (2019). Novice teacher challenges and promoting novice teacher retention in Canada. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(5), 591–607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1652906>
-

- Wynhoff Olsen, A., Fassbender, W., Long, D., & Olsen, K. (2022). Schools, communities, and teachers: How rural sense of belonging holds impact for English teachers in place. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 32(2), 108–125.
- Youngs, P. (2007). How elementary principals' beliefs and actions influence new teachers' experiences. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(1), 101–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X06293629>
- Zhang, G., & Zeller, N. (2016). A longitudinal investigation of the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 43(2), 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.47381/ajire.v32i2.330>
- Zubrzycki, J. (2017, Spring/Summer). The teacher crisis in rural Colorado. *University of Northern Colorado Magazine*, 18–22. <https://www.unco.edu/education-behavioral-sciences/pdf/unc-magazine-Sp17-teachers.pdf>

About the Author

Nicole Schutter, EdD, is an Assistant Professor of Education and Principal Preparation, Teacher Education Department Chair, and Program Coordinator of Leadership and Administration at Northern State University. Her research focuses on teacher recruitment and retention, school leader recruitment and retention, school leader mental health, and rural teaching and leading experiences. Prior to her move to higher education, she worked for approximately 20 years as an elementary and middle school teacher and elementary school principal.

Erin Lehmann, EdD, is an Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of the Educational Doctorate in the School of Education at the University of South Dakota. Her research focuses on leading instructional improvement, mathematics leadership, and educator wellness. She has authored *Teaching Mathematics Today, 2nd ed.*, and co-authored *Instructional Leadership in Mathematics Education*, in addition to numerous articles. Before transitioning to higher education, she spent over 20 years in the public sector as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, curriculum specialist, and principal.