

# Teacher Migration from Rural Schools

<https://bit.ly/teachermigration>



SCAN ME

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## OVERVIEW

- ❖ Problem
- ❖ Burning (Research) Questions
- ❖ Theoretical Framework (it's more exciting than it sounds)
- ❖ Study Design
- ❖ Findings
- ❖ So Now What?
- ❖ Future Research Ideas



# Problem

- ❖ Nearly 12% of public school teachers move to a new position or leave the profession annually (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014)
- ❖ Rural schools face teacher vacancies at a rate 4% higher than other districts (Barley, 2009)
- ❖ Research emphasis for teacher retention has been on teachers leaving the profession rather than on teachers migrating from one school or district to another (Ingersoll, 2001).
- ❖ These vacancies “may negatively impact a small or rural school more than a large school” (Beesley, Atwill, Blair, & Barley, 2010)

# Research Questions

1. Why do teachers leave rural school districts to teach in larger school districts?
2. How do these teachers view their experience teaching in a rural school district?
3. What do teachers perceive to be the differences between rural school districts and larger school districts?

# Research Questions

4. What do teachers perceive to be the similarities between rural school districts and larger school districts?
5. How do these teachers view their decision to leave a rural school district for a larger school district?
6. What motivation and hygiene factors do teachers reference when they discuss their experience in a rural school district?



# Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1966)

## Motivators

- ◆ Lead to **job satisfaction** due to a need for growth and self-actualization
- ◆ These factors include the work teachers do and the impact they make

## Hygiene Factors

- ◆ Lead to **job dissatisfaction** due to a need to avoid unpleasantness
- ◆ These factors include the environment in which one works, including pay



# Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1966)

**Motivators** - intrinsic causes of *satisfaction*

- ◆ Achievement
- ◆ Recognition
- ◆ The actual work itself\*
- ◆ Responsibility\*
- ◆ Advancement\*

**Hygiene** - extrinsic causes of *dissatisfaction*

- ◆ Company Policy & Administration
- ◆ Supervision
- ◆ Salary
- ◆ Interpersonal Relations
- ◆ Working Conditions

\* the most important for a lasting change in attitude



## Connections to More Modern Times - Maidani (1991)

- ❖ Public sector employees are higher on extrinsic or hygiene issues (more dissatisfied)
- ❖ Both public and private sector employees value intrinsic motivators
- ❖ Public sector employees tend to stay in a job where they may be both satisfied with the work as well as dissatisfied with the hygiene issues





# Study Design

- ❖ Setting
  - Rural School Districts in MO (enrollment < 700)
- ❖ Participants
  - 17 participants (6 male, 11 female)
  - 5 elementary teachers
  - 9 secondary teachers
  - 3 both elementary and secondary
  - All taught in a small, rural school district and then moved to a large district (enrollment >2000)



# Findings

# RQ 1

## **Why do teachers leave rural school districts to teach in larger school districts?**

- ❖ Money - both short and long term
- ❖ Workload - primarily at the secondary level
- ❖ Family
- ❖ Administration
- ❖ Opportunity to Grow
- ❖ Inevitable

## Money

- ❖ Almost all participants referenced \$ as a reason for leaving
- ❖ “If I had made enough money, I could’ve tried [to stay].” -Ken
- ❖ “I was looking for pay. It was money, just an increase in pay. It was actually going to be less travel time and more money”  
-Whitney

## Workload - Secondary Level

- ❖ “I had 12 preps over the year. Every hour I taught something different.” -*Leann*
- ❖ In addition to something different each class period, “I coached 4 sports” -*Daniel*
- ❖ “I was the only music teacher for the entire school district...It was just too much.” -*Mac*
- ❖ “When I started, I was given no curriculum besides my course title.” -*Molly*

## Family

- ❖ Participants cannot meet the work/life balance as well working in the small districts
- ❖ Starting a family was a catalyst to move for several participants
- ❖ One day when we had a late, late, late basketball game at a tournament at a larger district, so I went home and put [my daughter] to bed and said, Honey, I gotta go, I got a basketball game tonight. She was four at the time, and she said, “You're always leaving me to go to basketball.” I said, nope, not anymore, I’m done ...” -Albie

## Administration & Support

- ❖ It was either good or it was bad
- ❖ Support included administration, school boards, co-workers, and community.
- ❖ Issues with administrators and maternity leave/coaching
- ❖ Regarding the school board: “It seemed like a lot of them had an agenda, and it wasn't quite as comfortable around there as it was before in the small district.” -Cody
- ❖ "Something has to change. I cannot do a second year with this. This is not how I want to be a teacher. I don't want to leave, but for my own sanity, I need to unless we can do something to change things around."  
-Vicki

## Opportunity to Grow

- ❖ “I thought that if eventually administration is the field that I want to go into, that I should really go and gather some different experiences, work with different people.” -*Sara*
- ❖ “Getting into a position like that or a curriculum role within a district [would be difficult]. I just knew the small district didn't have something like that. So I started looking.” -*Kelsey*



## Inevitable

- ❖ “It was probably inevitable really based on my family being in the larger district.” -*Sabrina*
- ❖ “Honestly, I would've stayed there if the job had not come open, but I was always wanting to come back to my alma mater eventually.” -*Cody*

## RQ 2

# How do these teachers view their experience teaching in a rural school district?

- ❖ Challenges
  - Small town politics, lack of resources, workload
- ❖ Positive Experiences
  - Relationships and support
- ❖ Negative Experiences
  - Overwhelming, administrative turnover, administration, toxic relationships
- ❖ Would recommend the experience
  - Prepares them for anything

## Challenges

- ❖ Small Town Politics “A lot of people growing up in those communities that never leave and feel like they have a little bit more say than they actually do and exert some of that power and control.” -*Albie*
- ❖ Resources “I spent three years advocating for new government textbooks.” -*Daniel*
- ❖ Workload - I found out the first half of August that I was also going to be teaching chemistry. I didn't have my certificate yet...I'd have to teach myself the stuff the night before and then try to pretend like I know what I'm talking about the next day with it. -*Ken*

## Positive Experiences

- ❖ That was one of the saddest times. The small district was, and it still is home. I talk to everybody there still. And the principal there is the godmother of my daughter. That was home...it was not a fun situation leaving. I was afraid that I had made the wrong decision for a long time. But because I missed that homey feeling and I just missed my people.  
-Cassie

## Negative Experiences

- ❖ Shifting your brain from seniors to kindergartners in the blink of an eye, just any day where I had to do that was like, "I can't do this. This is not something my brain is going to be able to handle. -Mac
- ❖ I mean honestly, that one specific person is what ... and when you work in a small school, you can't get away from it. They're always there. You can't just shut your door and do your own thing because they're always there. -Vicki

## Recommendation for Others

- ❖ I think everybody, everybody should work in a small school district at some point in their career. I don't know, it's almost like if you have not experienced the small school environment, you don't really have any understanding of education -*Mac*
- ❖ Everything I learned there is what I've based my teaching on. -*Annabelle*

## **What do teachers perceive to be the differences between rural school districts and larger school districts?**

- ❖ Hiring Practices and Orientation
- ❖ Demographics
- ❖ Discipline
- ❖ Resources
- ❖ Professional Development
- ❖ Instructional Practices
- ❖ Workload
- ❖ Administration
- ❖ Support - community, parent, & peer

## RQ 3

- ❖ Hiring Practices and Orientation - more formal in larger districts; overwhelming at times
- ❖ Demographics - more varied in larger districts
- ❖ Discipline - more incidents in larger districts
- ❖ Resources - more available in larger districts



❖ Professional Development

- Larger districts tend to bring in more presenters or send small groups and have them come back to present
- Small districts tend to send individuals as long as funds are available

- ❖ Instructional Practices
  - “it’s almost like synchronized teaching in the larger district. She said she “had the freedom to move things around or extend something if the kids weren’t getting it” in the small district. - *Annabelle*
- ❖ Workload
  - Greater workload in small districts at the secondary level
  - More extra duties that are expectations in small districts

- ❖ Administration
  - “In a smaller district, they just seemed to be more available and more visible and more time in the classrooms.” -*Whitney*
  - Positive and Negative comments seemed to be based on specific administrators rather than district size

### ❖ Support

- There were more teachers on grade level and content area teams in the larger districts vs. being a lone wolf

### ❖ Relationships

- “In the small district, I literally knew every kid. In fact, every kid in the high school, and the middle school, and half the elementary kids. [In the larger district] it was a little bit weird because I'm like, ‘I don't even know the kids' names in my own class.’ And that took a couple of weeks. So I felt bad about that.” -*Brandi*

## What do teachers perceive to be the similarities between rural school districts and larger school districts?

- ❖ General Workload
  - specifically at the elementary level
- ❖ Beginning of the year PD - same videos
- ❖ Instructional Practices
  - “Good teaching is good teaching” -Mia
- ❖ Small schools in large districts feel like the small district
- ❖ Both sizes referred to as *home*
- ❖ Administration - Good and Bad in both sized districts
- ❖ CTE Resources similar - when they come from DESE



**RQ  
5**

**How do these teachers view their decision to leave a rural school district for a larger school district?**

- ❖ Regrets? 12 participants said NO
  - “I think it's been a good move. I think it opened my eyes to different cultures, different teaching practices, different teaching methods. I know that I would not have access to some of the resources that I have access to now, had I stayed in the small district.” -*Mia*
  - “I have no regrets. I love this place, I love the other places I was at, but one of the big things that helps me here is the freedom.” -*Albie*

- ❖ Regrets? 2 participants said YES
  - I do regret leaving, I really had a great experience in the small district at the middle school, and I regret leaving for more money. It seems to be my primary reason for leaving, more money. I do regret that in some ways because I know that I would be much happier there.  
*-Whitney*



- ❖ Looking back
  - “Once you do learn to cope with that level of crap that comes from being at a small district and having six preps your first year, well, [you can do anything].” -Ken
  - “If you could just move the small school to the larger district, I would stay, and that was the truth, there was nothing that I dislike about that experience...[my reason for leaving was] coming back to my hometown, my family's here, [even though it was] the best experience teaching I've ever had.” -Sabrina
  - Several teachers would consider going back to the small districts if the pay was better



**RQ  
6**

**What motivation and hygiene factors do teachers reference when they discuss their experience in a rural school district?**

*Motivation and Hygiene Factors Referenced by Participants/*

Factor	Type of Factor	Referenced by Participants
Achievement	Motivation	Yes
Recognition	Motivation	No
Work Itself <sup>a</sup>	Motivation	Yes
Responsibility	Motivation	Yes
Advancement	Motivation	Yes
Company Policy and Administration <sup>a</sup>	Hygiene	Yes
Supervision	Hygiene	Yes
Salary <sup>a</sup>	Hygiene	Yes
Interpersonal Relations	Hygiene	Yes
Working Conditions <sup>a</sup>	Hygiene	Yes

<sup>a</sup> Most commonly referenced factors.



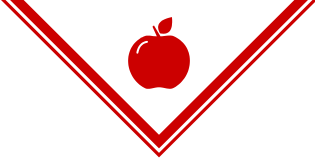
# Overview

- ❖ Teachers are satisfied in the work they do as teachers in both sizes of districts
- ❖ Teachers cite dissatisfaction in working conditions as reasons for leaving positions in rural districts



# Overview

- ❖ Teachers look back on their time in small, rural districts with fondness
- ❖ Teachers would recommend new teachers take the opportunity to work in small, rural districts



## So now what?

- ❖ Address factors that increase dissatisfaction to hire & retain the right people (teachers, staff, and admin)
- ❖ Build relationships with teacher education programs
  - ◇ Partner with others to build GYO programs
  - ◇ Be creative to find win-win opportunities
    - ◆ Dual Credit/Enrollment (Innovation Track)
    - ◆ Advocate to connect early and often with preservice teachers



## So now what?

- ❖ Build strong orientation and induction programs
  - ◇ Begin EARLY - summer opportunities
    - ◆ Good onboarding takes time for hires to process information
  - ◇ Connect new hires to the community
  - ◇ Ongoing mentoring that is more than surface level
- ❖ Work to improve salary schedules
  - ◇ Look at those of the districts to which you lose teachers



## So now what?

- ❖ Address workload disparity
  - ◇ TIME to do work is needed
  - ◇ Creative staffing
    - ◆ Oriole Success Center
      - ◆ Designed for all students (at-risk/high fliers)
      - ◆ Protected time for meetings/cancelations = found time
  - ◇ When adding tasks, take something away
  - ◇ Keep the WHY in mind - is what you are asking mission critical?





## So now what?

- ❖ Support teachers
  - ◇ Create systems that keep admin in the know so it is easy to back them up (win-win)
  - ◇ Autonomy
    - ◆ Create a safe to fail environment for them to try new things
  - ◇ Provide resources and materials more than the minimum
  - ◇ Get creative with collaboration
    - ◆ Partner with other districts if necessary



## So now what?

- ❖ Advocate for rural schools!
  - ◇ Connect with legislators (not just Superintendents)
  - ◇ Community presence/involvement
- ❖ Tell your story!
  - ◆ If you don't, someone else will, and it may not paint your district in the best light.



# Ideas for future Research

- ❖ Quantitative research on this topic
- ❖ Workload disparity between small and large districts at the secondary level
- ❖ Explore if the practice of “getting your feet wet” in a small district is a widespread recommendation by large districts
- ❖ Explore partnerships between teacher education programs and rural districts



# Questions?

[Dissertation: Is the grass really greener? A qualitative study of teacher reflections on their decision to migrate from small rural districts to larger school districts](#)

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