

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON FACTORS THAT AFFECT
TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION
IN RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON FACTORS THAT AFFECT TEACHER ATTRITION
AND RETENTION IN RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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Teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools is a matter of concern in North Carolina. The purpose of this mixed method study was to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Ten rural middle schools participated in the study. A group of thirty teachers from these schools completed a survey. Four women and three men were subsequently interviewed. Surveys and interviews were analyzed to identify patterns and themes from the theoretical frameworks of characteristics, conditions and compensations.

Findings revealed three consistent themes for attrition and retention: family, school, and self. Rural middle school teachers placed the needs and well-being of their family before personal job satisfaction and their professional career. Retention was maximized when the needs of the educators' families were met. Attrition increased as the families' needs either changed or were no longer being satisfied. Rural educators made sacrifices to their personal happiness and professional careers for their families.

Implications of the findings of the study are provided as programs and practices that may influence attrition or retention. Programs and practices are recommended by interviewees and the researcher. Findings concerning curriculum, working conditions, and NCLB are included in the study.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Close your eyes and let me set the stage. A young, vibrant, teacher has just finished her fourth year teaching in the mountains of North Carolina. As a rural educator, she is a part of a teaching force working to maximize the quality of education for 788,000 students of the rural districts of North Carolina which represents more than half of the state's students (McCullough & Johnson, 2007). She and her colleagues work in a state which has the second largest rural student population in the nation (McCullough & Johnson, 2007) and is one of the four states in the nation that experienced the largest nonmetropolitan population increase between 2000 and 2005 (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson & Shapley, 2007).

Her experience has been challenging yet rewarding. The anticipation of another end-of-the-year is so intense that she can hardly put into words how she feels. As she begins to long for summer vacation and some time to revitalize, she receives a call from a friend who teaches and lives in a nonrural school district in North Carolina. After a short conversation, the friend asks about her plans for next year. She is slightly bewildered by the question, when her friend then gets right to the point. She tells her there is an opening in the school where she teaches; same grade, same subject, but a different location.

She ponders her future. She remembers recently reading that the North Carolina teacher attrition rate over the last five years has been 12.57% (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2005-2006). She wonders whether she will become a part of that statistic. Will she stay, leave, or move from her rural teaching assignment? The young teacher asks, "What

makes you think I would be interested in leaving my school?" Her colleague/friend slowly begins to pepper her with the following questions:

- Isn't your school in a little mountain town? Are you sure you want to continue to live and work in such a remote and isolated location?
- Doesn't that school district pay its teachers much less than they do here? Are you sure you can continue to support yourself on that salary?
- Can you ever hope for a promotion in that district? I thought you really wanted to become an educational specialist one day.

The questions appear simple and direct. But they are not in the least. They are the kinds of questions that have led many young teachers to migrate from North Carolina's rural schools. The implications of these questions and countless others illustrate the need to address the problems of teacher attrition and retention in rural schools of North Carolina.

Rationale of the Study

North Carolina is a rural state; 85 of its 100 counties are identified as rural by The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/index.asp>). According to McCullough and Johnson (2007), these rural counties are experiencing demographic changes. Counties are either experiencing development or economic downfall. In each situation the rural counties are experiencing demographic changes that impact the profile of the rural community (McCullough & Johnson, 2007). Change in the population demographics of North Carolina suggested the need to address teacher attrition from the viewpoint of rural educators of today. The identification of factors that influence teacher attrition from the

perspective of today's rural educators provide the supporting evidence needed to develop strategies to decrease teacher attrition and enhance teacher retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina.

North Carolina has attempted to address the need to retain teachers with a range of policy initiatives. Strategies implemented by North Carolina such as the mandated three-year teacher induction programs including paid mentoring and support for new teachers have been shown to reduce teacher attrition (Curran & Goldrick, 2002) as has the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program (Darling-Hammond, 2007). In a testimony delivered before the US Senate HELP Committee in August 2007, Darling-Hammond stated that the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program was "one of the most successful teacher recruitment initiatives over two decades." Longitudinal data showed that three out of every four teaching fellows were still in teaching. This implied that hiring well-prepared teachers increased retention rates. Other programs such as NCTEACH (<http://www.ncteach.net/definitions.php>; http://teach4nc.org/alternate_routes/) and Troops to Teachers (<http://www.ed.gov/print/programs/troops/index.html>) are programs in place in North Carolina designed to provide an alternative route into education. Both are recruitment-type strategies designed to reduce attrition and increase retention by heightening job placement. North Carolina even has financial incentive programs such as 12% pay increases for teachers with National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification as well as 10% pay increases for teachers with master's degrees.

In spite of programs and practices instituted by North Carolina designed to reduce teacher attrition and increase teacher retention, rural educators continue to leave their

rural teaching positions. Strategies such as teacher induction programs and NC Teaching Fellows were not specifically designed for rural school districts and do not appear to be effective in rural counties of the state. This is seen in the fact that teacher attrition in rural counties of North Carolina continues to occur at a high rate. Attrition rates vary; the average state rate is 14%; rural counties have an 8-14% rate; and middle schools have a 14-25% rate (<http://www.ncreportcards.org>).

Other programs such as tuition reimbursement and financial recruitment packages are examples of strategies specifically developed for rural counties of North Carolina, but they are not consistently available across the state. For example, the Millennium Teacher Scholarship Program provides prospective North Carolina teachers with financial assistance (McCullough & Johnson, 2007). This program is based on financial need and is administered from three universities that serve rural sectors of the state. The theory is that the program “may be more likely to recruit from rural areas” (p.15) because of the population that it serves. This type of program is region specific and is an example of the lack of consistent statewide strategies specifically designed for rural counties. This inconsistency, in conjunction with the knowledge that North Carolina has instituted strategies to proactively address teacher attrition and teacher retention, raises the question as to why rural educators continue to leave their rural assignments.

According to McCullough and Johnson (2007), North Carolina currently has “no state sponsored rural-specific recruiting programs” (p.16). Data concerning program availability and effectiveness upon rural attrition and retention is not readily available because the programs in question have not been specifically developed to address teacher attrition and retention within rural districts.

The current research study focused upon teacher attrition and retention in the first decade of the 21st century with a particular focus upon rural middle schools of North Carolina. The primary purpose of the current research study was to examine factors that influenced teachers within the rural middle schools of North Carolina to leave the classroom. In addition, the current research study investigated how the educational policy, No Child Left Behind, impacted teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Institutional programs or policies, such as the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act and NCLB of 2001, have been shown to influence teacher attrition on the national level (Corrigan & Moore, 2004; Hargrove, Walker, Huber, Hill & Barth, 2004).

Teacher attrition continues to rise in the North Carolina. This is especially true in rural middle schools of the state. In comparison to other grade levels, middle schools in North Carolina have a consistently higher rate of teacher attrition. If these middle schools are in rural counties, their teacher attrition rate surpasses them all. Programs and policies implemented by the state to address teacher attrition and retention have been ineffective for rural middle schools of North Carolina. Therefore, the purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about the problems of teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. In educational research, teacher voice and perspectives are untapped. Teachers are the issue and tapping their perspectives may lend a fresh look to the problem of teacher retention and attrition.

These reasons support a strong rationale to identify factors that have influenced teacher attrition in rural middle schools in North Carolina from the perspective of current teachers. Hearing the voices of teachers, an authentic perspective can be expected concerning factors and strategies. Strategies should have a central goal to decrease

teacher attrition in rural schools in North Carolina while increasing teacher retention. Minimizing teacher attrition in rural schools will maximize the potential to provide students of rural schools of North Carolina the quality education they deserve—quality education that goes beyond standardized testing measures and into authentic learning. Identifying the factors that contribute to teacher attrition in rural middle schools may shed new light on strategies for retaining teachers.

The Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Specific research questions were:

1. What are teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina?
2. In what ways has No Child Left Behind influenced teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina?

Definition of Terms

Definitions were based upon definitions delineated by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (<http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/glossary.jsp>) and/or The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/index.asp>).

Rural Schools

Rural schools are schools located in a rural county of North Carolina. Rural counties were identified by using the counties map available from The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/>). The NC Rural

Economic Development Center disaggregates statistical data from state sources to determine rural and urban classifications of North Carolina counties. North Carolina has 100 counties, only 15 of which are considered urban, illustrating that it is a largely rural state.

The concept of 'rural' has often been said to be difficult to define (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson & Shapley, 2007). Alternate definitions were examined which were based upon the 2006-2007 NC School Report Card Data. This source identified rural schools as schools located either inside or outside a Consolidated Statistical Area (CSA) of less than 25,000 people and defined as rural by the Census Bureau.

An additional explanation of the 'rural' definition used by the 2006-2007 NC School Report Card Data is to follow. The NC Department of Public Instruction used the Federal classification system which included three systems of defining rural. The Beale codes, the Metro Status codes, and the Locale codes, all of which were developed by the Office of Management and Budget (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/RuralEd/definitions.asp>), were federal classifications in use at the time of the current research study. Beale codes are based upon county size and proximity to a metropolitan area; metro Status codes are based upon the physical location of the superintendent in relation to the central city of a Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA); Locale codes are a combination of proximity to metropolitan areas and population density and size. The Locale codes "... are assigned based on the addresses of the individual schools and are assigned at the school level" (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/RuralEd/definitions.asp>, p.2). The system of Locale codes was the system utilized at the time of the current research study by the NCDPI within the NC School Report Card Data. Based upon recommendations by Navigating Resources for

Rural Schools for choice of codes, the Locale codes "... provide the most accurate characterization of the type of community that students live in"

(<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/RuralEd/definitions.asp>, p. 3). The Locale codes are numeric from #1- 8 and codes 7 and 8 are rural classifications. Code 7 is "Rural, outside CBSA- Any incorporated place, census designated place, or non-place territory not within a CBSA or CSA of a large or mid-size city and defined as rural by the Census Bureau" and code 8 is "Rural, inside CBSA- Any incorporated place, census designated place, or non-place territory not within a CBSA or CSA of a large or mid-size city and defined as rural by the Census Bureau" (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/RuralEd/definitions.asp>, p. 3).

Based upon the idea that "... rapidly changing conditions and growing diversity in rural America make defining rural even more difficult" (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson & Shapley, 2007, p. iii), I used the definition recognized within the field but specifically determined within the state. The working definition of rural schools for the current research study was: rural schools are those schools located within counties designated as rural by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc.

Middle Schools

Schools serving a population that includes only those students enrolled in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades were considered middle schools.

Adequate Yearly Progress

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is an accountability measure of assessment in which school performance can be monitored through student assessments.

Retention

Retention refers to teachers who remain in their rural middle school positions.

Attrition

Attrition refers to teachers who left their rural middle school positions.

Theoretical Framework

In order to address teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina, theories behind reasons that teacher attrition occurs had to be considered. The theoretical framework of the current research study is grounded in the societal model proposed by Sher (1983). This model proposed three C's to explain teacher retention: characteristics, conditions and compensation. Figure 1 represents model specifics. The potential influence of the three C's upon teacher attrition and retention acted as the theoretical framework on which the current research study was based.

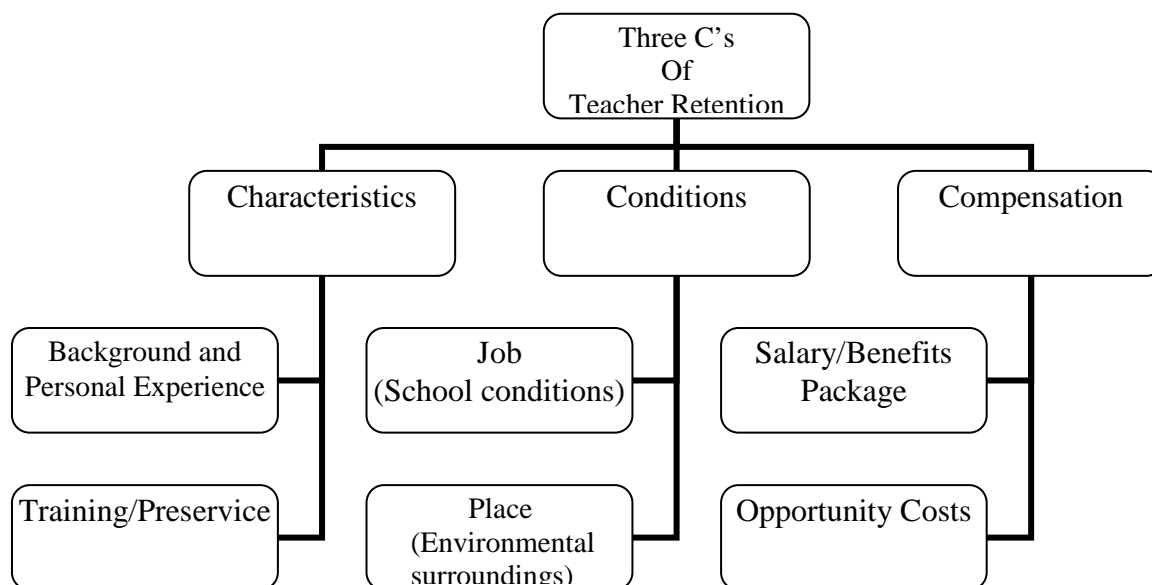


Figure 1. Three C's of Teacher Retention (Sher, 1983)

Characteristics

Sher (1983) proposed that characteristics include background, training, pre-service, and personal experience of a teacher. The theory is that teacher characteristics influence their rate of retention and attrition. Lemke (1994) offers the 'profile of a rural

educator' as a facet to this theory. Hiring the right person for a rural assignment decreases teacher attrition while increasing teacher retention (Lemke, 1994). Gonzalez (1995) supported this theory when reporting that teacher attrition increased among those teachers that were racially different from the majority of their students. Helge (1985) reported that teachers that have the least experience are the most likely to leave a rural setting. This was echoed by Harris (1989) when it was suggested that teacher attrition could be minimized by establishing a pre-service experience for first year teachers in the rural, remote locations. Johnson, Berg and Donaldson (2005) in conjunction with The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers solidified this theory when suggesting that there was a positive relationship between pre-service and competency; competency is noted to reduce attrition. The theory is that the characteristics of persons hired to teach in rural settings influences attrition.

Conditions

Sher (1983) proposed that conditions represent (the job and the place) which refers to school conditions and environmental surroundings, such as cultural venues, recreational opportunities, housing, family, and friends. The theory is that the conditions of the job and the place influence the rate of teacher attrition and retention. Stone (1990) found that rural teachers leave due to isolation; social, cultural, geographic and professional. Cotton (1996) reported that teacher attrition was lower in small schools because teachers' professional attitudes toward their work and their administrators in small schools tend to be more positive. In 2002, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) proposed that teacher shortages were due to difficulties

in finding the right person for the job. The theory is that less attractive working and living conditions increased attrition, decreased retention and increased recruitment difficulties.

Compensation

Sher (1983) proposed that compensation included any financial component such as salary, rewards, benefits, incentives, and opportunity costs such as the ability to make a higher salary in an alternate field. The theory is that the compensation component of a teacher's job influences attrition and retention. Kirby and Grissmer (1993) supported this theory when they reported that teacher salary had a positive correlation to teacher retention. Unfortunately, this translates into teacher shortages in poorer districts due to lower salaries (NCTAF, 2002). This translation supported the 1994 report by the United States Department of Education in a publication entitled, "The Condition of Education in Rural Schools" which noted a decline in: tax bases, school funding, and property values all of which influence the financial component of teacher compensation.

Theories related to characteristics, conditions and compensation provide the theoretical framework for the current research study. The purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Acknowledging the influence that characteristics, conditions and compensation theoretically have upon teacher attrition and teacher retention provided a guiding principle through which understanding and interpreting teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina could be done.

Delimitations of the Study

The focus of the current research study was on perspectives of teachers currently employed in rural middle schools of North Carolina about teacher attrition and retention. In order to capture a range of perspectives from rural middle school teachers from North Carolina, specific criteria were used to identify schools and teachers for the current research study. Criteria for school selection included: traditional school calendar; grades served 6, 7, 8; rural community; and the school Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2006-2007. Teachers were recruited that had four to ten years teaching experience. Due to the research criteria there are several delimitations to the current study.

One is that the findings represent a select group of participants. First the findings are limited to only middle school educators; second, they are limited to only North Carolina educators; and, finally the findings are limited to strictly rural educators. The delimitations to the study are that the findings provide teacher perspectives' specifically from rural middle school educators from North Carolina.

A second delimitation was the fact that teachers may not have had the time to participate. Surveys and interviews may have been viewed as additional work for persons. Perspectives may have only been received from a selected sample of participants which saw value behind the field of study. This selected sample may have had an inherent bias. This in itself may have impacted their perspectives.

A third delimitation was the inherent organizational structure of the public school system. A limitation was therefore the fact that teachers' perspectives were only received from those persons teaching in a rural middle school of North Carolina in which their superintendent and their principal granted permission for them to participate.

The fourth delimitation was the lack of first-hand perspectives from persons who had left a rural middle school. First-hand perspectives might have exposed additional areas of concern; but the use of current rural educators provided insight into retention (their own and others) as well as attrition (others and at times themselves through past experiences) that would not have been revealed by the exclusive use of teachers that are no longer in a rural middle school assignment.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

National Issue

Overview

Teacher attrition is not simply a rural issue. It is an issue for K-12 education across the nation. In 2002, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) in conjunction with NCTAF State Partners addressed the issue of teacher attrition in a paper entitled *Unraveling the "Teacher Shortage" problem: Teacher Retention is the Key*. The paper explored the national teacher shortage as a symptom of teacher attrition and teacher turnover. The authors explained that the national labor market of teachers was sufficient to staff the classrooms of America. The problem was not the pool of teacher graduates. Instead, it was the astounding numbers of teachers who left the classroom. Attrition, as reported by NCTAF, represented three times that of attrition due to retirement. Ingersoll (2002) said that teaching was a "revolving door...occupation in which there are relatively large flows in, through, and out of schools" (p. 42). This 'revolving door' is costly to the nation.

Teacher attrition was reported in 2008 by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) to be at a rate of 17% at the end of the 2003-2004 school year and 16% in 2004-2005. This represented a loss of over 621,000 teachers from the 5.5 million employed to teach in public and private schools across the nation. Statistically speaking, the overall teacher attrition rate for each of these years was equivalent to two-thirds of the total number of middle school teachers employed in the United States. In 2003-2004, fewer than 1 million middle school teachers were teaching middle school. Buchanan (2005) reported that the National Commission of Teaching and America's Future

suggests that the United States will need to hire 200,000 new teachers per year for the next decade. The NCES report entitled *The Condition of Education 2008* reported that attrition was due to a variety of factors: change of position within education, change of career outside of education, pursuit of further education, family reasons, and other reasons. Whatever the reason, teacher attrition, recruitment and retraining costs the nation.

Teacher attrition costs the nation in multiple dimensions, and the costs have been analyzed by numerous studies. These costs are reported to include costs to the school community, costs to physical school conditions, costs to districts, costs to the professional community, and costs to student achievement (Ingersoll, 2001; McCullough & Johnson, 2007; NCTAF, 2002). Ingersoll (2001) used longitudinal data from both the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Followup Survey, which are conducted annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Using these data, Ingersoll proposed various costs of teacher attrition that are not fiscal. Instead, these costs are those that have the capability of impacting not only school performance, but also the sense of community within the school. First, he explained that “high levels of employee turnover are both cause and effect of ineffectiveness and low performance in organizations” (p. 505). Furthermore, Ingersoll says, teacher attrition is an indicator of “underlying problems in how well schools function” (p. 505). In other words, teachers tend to remain in successful schools and leave ineffective or low-performing ones.

These results were supported and extended in 2002 by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF). The NCTAF presented costs of teacher attrition in specific areas of education:

1. Cost to student achievement: Teacher attrition forces administrators to continually fill teaching positions. NCTAF (2002) reported that those hired are often simply “warm bodies to staff the classrooms” (p. 8). Gewertz, as cited by the NCTAF (2002), reports that “more than half of the nation’s middle school students and a quarter of its high school students are learning core academic subjects from teachers who lack certification.....and who did not major in them...” (p. 9). Unqualified instructors have been shown to negatively impact student achievement (Gonzalez, 1995; Hill & Barth, 2004), resulting in a cost to student achievement across the nation.
2. Cost to school conditions: Teacher attrition forces administrators to continually focus upon hiring new staff. Data gathered by NCTAF (2002) indicate that this administrative responsibility reduces the time and energy an administrator can afford “to improve retention and promote quality teaching and learning” (p. 8) as well as proactively supervise maintenance of the school infrastructure.
3. Cost to the district: Teacher attrition has financial implications for school districts. Annual budgets must include monies allocated for teacher recruitment. Statistics reveal that some states, like Texas, have to replace as much as 16% of their teaching staff annually (NCTAF, 2002). This replacement process is reported by NCTAF (2002) to cost Texas approximately \$329 million a year. “Searching for and hiring a new teacher is an expensive proposition” costing the districts between \$6,000 and \$48,000 annually according to Feng (2005, p. 2).
4. Cost to the professional community: Teacher attrition and/or constant turnover of staff negatively impact the “sense of community, continuity and coherence”

(NCTAF, 2002, p.8) of the professional community as a whole. As previously reported by Ingersoll (2001), a positive sense of community is seen as an indicator of school success. Therefore, as teacher attrition increases, the capability of schools to maintain a professional teaching community decreases, thus increasing the skepticism of those directly impacted by daily school affairs—students, parents and teachers.

5. Cost to school reform: Teacher attrition embezzles or takes the training and professional development that are needed to enhance or reform a school. Therefore, schools continually struggle in the development and acquisition of common school reform goals. According to Macdonald (1999), “Discontinuity of staff can be a major inhibitor to the efficacy of schools in promoting student development and attainment” (p. 841).
6. Cost to students: Teacher attrition, as reported by NCTAF (2002), “diminishes teacher quality and student achievement” (p. 9). The costs to students are often cumulative in nature. Continual replacement of teaching staff generates a less experienced staff. Inexperienced teachers, as reported by Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (cited by NCTAF, 2002), are less effective than their counterparts. Research has shown that this ineffectiveness costs students the quality educational experience they deserve.

As described in the previous section, teacher attrition is a national issue. It costs students, schools, districts, professional communities, and the community at large. These costs are financial, academic, personal, and professional in nature. The repercussions of these costs have been seen in inadequate student achievement,

diminished school reform, stagnant improvements to professional teaching and learning communities in schools, and through continual budgetary constraints within districts. Researchers can only begin to project the long-term repercussions associated with the costs of teacher attrition upon the nation. The driving question is then: Why do teachers across the nation leave K-12 classrooms early?

K-12 Teacher Attrition

Historical perspective. Historically teacher attrition has been a concern in education. Grissmer and Kirby (1997) described an increase in the demand for teachers during the 1960s-1970s due to the enrollment of baby boomers into school. This resulted in a 25% student enrollment increase within the decade. Higher birth rates continued to impact teacher demand throughout the next decade (Gonzalez, 1995). During the 1970s-1980s, as the baby-boomers made their way through schools, the need for teachers declined because enrollment rates declined. Similar findings by Miller and Sidebottom cited an oversupply of teacher graduates in the early 1970s and then a steady decline from 1966-1981. This trend, also reported by Grissmer and Kirby (1997), was reversed in the 1990s as student enrollment rates and then graduation rates once again increased. Projections offered by these researchers, based upon statistical records, forecasted a dramatic increase in the demand for teachers in the next fifteen years (Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005). The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers predicted that teacher demand would continue to escalate as a result of three factors: increased student enrollment due to birth rates and immigration; mandated policies such as class size numbers and NCLB standards for “highly qualified staff”; and decrease supply in the teacher pool due to lack of education graduates, qualified graduates not entering the

profession and staff attrition. Historically, this increase and decrease in teacher demand has influenced the urgency to minimize teacher attrition across the nation.

Teacher attrition rates over the years have continually increased. Statistics reported in 2004 by the National Center for Education Statistics in the report entitled *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000-2001*, reported this increase. The report cites percentages of public school teachers that 'move', 'stay', or 'leave' the classroom in the years 1988-89, 1991-92, 1995-96 and 2000-01. The percentage of 'stayers' declined from 86.5% (1988-89) to 84.9 % (2000-01); and the percentage of 'leavers' increased from 5.6% (1988-89) to 7.4% (2000-01). The percentage that stayed represented a survival rate and those that left represented attrition rates that were similar to statistical data presented by Konanc (1996) in his analysis of employment histories for North Carolina teachers from the years 1980 to 1996. In more recent work by the NCEES, statistics were presented for 'stayers' and 'leavers' for the year 2004/05. In this work by Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, and Morton (2006), the following percentages for 2004-05 were disclosed: 'stayers' showed an additional decrease from 84.9% (2000-01) to 83.5%; and the percentage of 'leavers' showed an increase from 7.4% (2000-01) to 8.4%. These results represented a consistent need to understand and address teacher attrition in the nation.

Influencing factors. Many factors influence teacher attrition according to research. The review of literature identified numerous factors. All factors influencing teacher attrition from K-12 districts were discussed as a part of a framework using the model introduced by Billingsley (1993) and discussed by Gonzalez (1995). This model proposes that teachers' career decisions were influenced by employment, external factors and

personal factors. Table 1 represents the specific factors that influence teacher attrition at the national level.

Table 1

Factors Influencing Teacher Attrition at the National Level

Employment Factors	External Factors	Personal Factors
Professional Qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservice training • Certification in subject specific fields • College credits in education • Traditional teacher-training route 	Economic Trends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recession (budget fluctuations) • Labor market trends Societal Influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth rates • Population shifts • Regional shifts Institutional Influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustments to teacher-preparatory programs • Development of state-funded programs • Educational reform 	Teacher Dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position/career dissatisfaction • Pursuit of alternate career • Continuing education Family Dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy • Child-rearing
Work Conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of school and school district • Characteristics of classroom and students • Characteristics of job assignment 		
Work Rewards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrinsic (salary/benefit package, opportunity costs) • Intrinsic (positive experiences) 		

Employment factors influence teacher attrition and are directly related to the profession itself. Gonzalez (1995) cited Billingsley's model for factors of employment that influence teacher attrition. Billingsley's model proposed these major areas of employment: professional qualifications, work conditions, and work rewards.

Professional qualifications include pre-service training, certification in subject specific fields, college credits in education, and a traditional teacher-training route.

Professional qualifications are reported to either increase or decrease teacher attrition (Hill & Barth, 2004; North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, 1998) depending upon the situation. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, established at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, reported that the next generation of teachers differed from the teaching force of the past in marked ways. According to Baldacci and Johnson (2006) most teachers of the next generation enter the profession mid-career, through nontraditional routes, and with short-term but not casual commitments. Furthermore, according to Baldacci and Johnson (2006), attrition is higher among those entering education through nontraditional routes but lower among those entering mid-career through traditional routes.

Work conditions range from concerns about administration and students to dissatisfaction with job assignment. The paper entitled *Unraveling the "Teacher Shortage" Problem: Teacher Retention is the Key* (NCTAF, 2002) states "teachers' plans to remain in teaching are highly sensitive to their perceptions of their working conditions" (p.11). The report supported the earlier work reported by Johnson (1990) who found that teachers left as the result of issues such as supplies and space (resources and facilities), educational bureaucracy (politics), collegiality or lack of it, and school governance or decision-making. More current research sponsored by the National Retired Teachers Association: AARP's *Educator Community* and Farmers Insurance (2003) as well as Johnson and The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004) propose key barriers to retention of teachers. Aspects such as lack of respect and community support, lack of administrative support, unsupportive and unmotivated colleagues, lack of resources, unmotivated students, pressures of classroom management

and discipline, testing requirements, and lack of parental support were key items revealed from teacher surveys. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) and Johnson, Berg and Donaldson (2005) supported these findings with their findings that teacher mobility and teacher attrition was more greatly influenced by school and student characteristics than it was by salary. Support for these factors was additionally presented by Johnson (2006) who reported that “once teachers are in the classroom, they are more likely to report that they would leave teaching because of poor working conditions than because of low pay” (p. 3). The following work conditions were reported to influence teacher attrition:

- Characteristics of the school and school district influence teacher attrition (Baldacci & Johnson, 2006; Certo, 2002; Hill & Barth, 2004; Ingersoll, 1999; Luekens, Lyter & Fox, 2004). These characteristics included organizational attributes such as the lack of support from staff, administration and parents, the lack of opportunity to engage in policy and decision making on the school and/or district level, and the lack of professional development opportunities. Survey results, presented by Luekens, Lyter, and Fox (2004), reported that 38% of the teachers who left the classroom in 2000-2001 cited dissatisfaction with administrative support and 32% cited dissatisfaction with workplace conditions. Darling-Hammond, as cited by NCTAF (2002), stated that “How teachers feel about the administrative support, resources, and teacher voice and influence over policy in their schools” (p.11) was directly proportional to their intentions of staying in the classroom. As summarized by Johnson, Berg and Donaldson, “If schools fail to offer teachers support and opportunities throughout the teaching career, they risk losing them prematurely” (2005, p. 97).

- Characteristics of the classroom and/or of the students influence teacher attrition (Hill & Barth, 2004; Ingersoll, 1997). These characteristics included classroom attributes such as incidences of student misbehavior, class size or case load, racial and socio-economic makeup and student attributes such as academic performance and test scores. Studies by NCTAF (1996 and 2002) and by Feng (2005) reported that the rate of teacher attrition was directly proportional to attributes of the student populations and school communities in which teachers were employed. Schools serving low-performing, high minority and/or low-income student populations have increased teacher attrition rates. In 1995, Ingersoll and Rossi compiled results from the 1990-1991 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). They reported that teacher turnover or teacher attrition rates were as high as 10% annually in schools that had a student populace in which more than 50% received free or reduced-price lunches.
- Characteristics of one's job assignment influence teacher attrition. Factors such as test stress, multiple teaching preparations, job responsibilities, and subject and grade level taught have been reported to be characteristics of job assignment which influence teacher attrition (Murnane & Olsen, 1990; Stinebrickner, 1998). Grissmer and Kirby (1997) cited their previous work from 1992 concerning teacher attrition in Indiana, and they cited work by Murnane and Olsen from 1989 concerning teacher attrition in North Carolina. It was reported that "early attrition can depend on...the subject and level taught..." (p. 4). Job assignment impacts

job satisfaction. Job satisfaction, in turn, influences teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 1997).

Work rewards are the third area of employment which was reported to impact teacher attrition. Work rewards incorporated two primary components: extrinsic and intrinsic rewards of employment. The type of reward that received the most attention was teacher salary. In the early 1990's salary was given as the "primary motivation" (p.840) behind teacher attrition in work by Hammer, Rohr and Wagner (cited by Macdonald, 1999). This was supported by Murnane and Olsen (1990) using the findings from the longitudinal study of a North Carolina data set in which the employment histories of North Carolina teachers were analyzed. The disaggregated data revealed that teachers who were paid a higher salary and/or teachers who had decreased opportunity costs (the ability to make a higher salary outside education) stay in the classroom longer. Although salary had been reported to be a motivating factor for teacher attrition, research showed that its impact diminished over time. Kirby and Grissmer (1993) referred to research conducted by Murnane, Singer, and Willett. Their analysis indicated that "the more a teacher earns, the more likely he or she is to stay in teaching" (p. 29), but that "the importance of salary in the attrition decision tended to decline and by year eight, disappeared entirely" (p. 29). Certo and Fox (2002) also reported that when teachers were asked their perceptions regarding teacher attrition they cited that "the complete package of pay, benefits, and other incentives was inadequate" (p.5). The complete package in this situation included only those rewards that are monetary or extrinsic. This does not include the intrinsic rewards of employment that influenced teacher attrition.

Intrinsic rewards must be interpreted on a personal level. This creates a challenge in evaluating their impact upon teacher attrition. Research shows that intrinsic rewards such as “positive experiences with students, and recognition and appreciation from colleagues, parents, and principals” (Gonzalez, 1995, p. 3) impact teacher attrition on a varying scale.

External factors are those factors “that are external to the teacher and the employing school district” (Gonzalez, 1995, p. 5). Gonzalez reported three external factors that influence teacher attrition: economic, societal, and institutional. Economic trends include recession and labor market trends; societal factors include birth rates and regional population shifts; institutional trends include the rise and fall of pre-service preparatory programs and state/federal regulatory changes (Gonzalez, 1995).

Economic trends impact teachers. Budgets (district, state and federal) fluctuate in response to economic trends as well as the fiscal condition of the nation. These fluctuations impact teacher salaries, financial incentive programs, and professional development opportunities (Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995; Murnane & Olsen, 1990).

These, in turn, impact labor market trends. Labor market trends indicated an increase or decrease in opportunities to acquire gainful employment. Teacher attrition was shown to have a direct correlation with labor market trends (Certo & Fox, 2002). This idea was supported in the review of literature conducted by Macdonald (1999). He cited the findings from the 1990 report presented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD, as cited by Macdonald (1999), states that teacher attrition is heightened by “attractive openings in other occupations/industries.....” (p. 835) and economic prosperity (p.836). Therefore, an

increase in opportunities for gainful employment results in a corresponding increase in teacher attrition (Miller & Sidebottom, 1985).

Societal influences indirectly impact teacher attrition (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997). For example, ebbs and flows in birth rates generate changes in school enrollments which directly impact teacher demand or teacher attrition. A second way in which society influences teacher attrition is through regional population shifts. As population numbers rise and fall across the communities of the nation, teacher demand and attrition rise and fall. Regional shifts in population stimulate the need for schools to open or close, thus influencing attrition and retention. This often results in attrition in certain areas of the nation and retention in others. Data from the *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000-2001* and the *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey* cited that over 10% (10.4 and 14.6) of the teachers surveyed said that teacher attrition was a result of being “laid off or involuntarily transferred” (p. 16). Neither was a top motivating factor, but together they represented a significant percentage of teacher attrition that affected the nation.

Institutional influences indirectly impact teacher attrition. Changes in society stimulate adjustments to institutional programs such as teacher-preparatory programs or development of state-funded programs. Teacher-preparatory programs and state-funded programs work to accommodate the changes in society by either increasing or decreasing student enrollment/graduation numbers. These adjustments often include changes to enrollment procedures or the development of alternative programs. Programs such as NCTEACH (NCTEACH, <http://www.ncteach.net/definitions.php>; Teach4NC, http://teach4nc.org/alternate_routes/) and Troops to Teachers (Troops-to-Teachers

Program, <http://www.ed.gov/print/programs/troops/index.html>) are programs that were devised to meet the demand for teachers. These non-traditional routes to the classroom are more likely to result in teachers leaving than traditional preparation programs (Harris, 1989; NCTAF, 2002; Orvik, 1970). The need to meet societal demands for teachers extends to the teacher-preparatory institutions and state agencies. Teachers reaching classrooms through a non-traditional route provided by teacher-preparatory institutions or state-funded programs are short-term remedies; however, they have not shown to be a long-term solution. Indirectly, they have increased teacher attrition.

A second way institutional programs or policies impact teacher attrition is through educational reform. A recent policy that affects teacher attrition is No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Hargrove, Walker, Huber, Corrigan & Moore, 2004; Hill & Barth, 2004). NCLB mandates a highly qualified designation for all classroom teachers, requiring all teachers to demonstrate competence in the subjects they are assigned to teach. Exstrom (as cited by Hill and Barth) stated that NCLB “will displace longstanding, experienced teachers” (p.176) if they are required to go back to school for additional certification/college course work, organize portfolios to document proficiency, or if letters are sent home informing parents that their child is being taught by a teacher who is not qualified. These findings have been supported in qualitative studies from the *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000-2001* which cited that 8.9% of teachers left the classroom because they “did not feel prepared to implement or did not agree with new reform measures” (Table 6, p. 16). This was further supported by Bowler’s work (cited by Hill and Barth) in which “75% of secondary and

33% of elementary teachers said that the ‘Highly Qualified’ designation would impact retention” (p. 175).

Research showed that teacher attrition is an issue across the nation and impacted all geographic locations. Research also shows that teacher attrition does not impact the nation and its geographic locations in a consistent manner. Studies show that teacher attrition is greater in locations in which poverty levels are high, resources are limited, and working conditions are difficult (Ingersoll, 2001; NCTAF, 2002).

Personal factors comprise another area of impact upon teacher attrition. These include teacher and family dynamics. Each influences teacher attrition in its own way, and these factors are referred to as “turnover beyond control” (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2005-2006).

In the *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey*, researchers presented the top twelve reasons teachers cited for leaving the classroom. Eleven of the twelve factors are personal factors (Table 6, p.14). Personal factors related to family dynamics included pregnancy or child rearing while position or career dissatisfaction, pursuit of alternate career, and continuing education were personal factors directly linked to the teacher. Personal factors, including teacher and family dynamics impact teacher attrition.

Influencing factors- rural sectors. Teacher attrition occurs in rural schools for many of the same reasons as on the national level (Gonzalez, 1995). However, there are factors that influence rural teacher attrition that are unique to rural locations. Teachers leave rural classrooms for personal and professional reasons.

Personal factors that influence teacher attrition in rural sectors include family, finance, and the future. Factors parallel the national scene, but specifics in regards to family, finance and the future appear to be unique to rural districts.

Family factors, ranging from raising children to retirement, appear to influence teacher attrition in rural schools. One such family factor is relocating to follow a spouse or to change residence (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993; Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2005-2006). These findings were supported by Luekens, Lyter, and Fox (2004). Using results from the *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2000-2001*, Luekens and associates found that between 13% and 31% of teacher attrition from rural school districts is related to family factors. Additional family factors include illness/health of teacher, child-rearing or childcare responsibilities, marriage, and retirement (Horn, 1985; Stinebrickner, 1998). Each influences teachers in their decision to leave rural classrooms.

The needs of individual teachers might not supersede family factors, but they appear to be the driving force among the personal categories of finance and the future. Financial factors that influence teacher attrition in rural schools includes salary/benefits and opportunity costs (Feng, 2005; Ingersoll, 1997). Their studies found a positive correlation between low salaries and/or benefit packages and high teacher attrition. In a review of research concerning teacher attrition by Macdonald (1999), this positive relationship was repeatedly reported as an influencing factor for teacher attrition. The impact of salary upon teacher attrition in rural school districts was also the primary focus of a policy brief written by Jimerson (2003) as a part of the Rural Trust Policy Brief

Series sponsored by The Rural School and Community Trust. The author reported that rural teachers earned less than their counterparts nationwide. This disparity in salary increases rural teacher attrition while decreasing the teacher labor market for rural districts. Jimerson's view is that the most effective means of reducing teacher attrition from rural schools is to create and maintain an equitable salary schedule for all teachers. Even though North Carolina has a state salary schedule, rural educators continue to experience a disparity in finances because salary is only one aspect of the financial factor that influences attrition and retention for a rural educator. There are also benefits such as salary supplements. Jimerson discusses North Carolina supplements which are based on local tax bases. These supplements range from \$0 to \$5500 across the state. The districts that do not offer supplements are all in rural counties. In addition, the five highest supplements are in non-rural counties and the five lowest supplements are in rural counties of the state.

Equitable salaries and benefits for rural educators may reduce teacher attrition, but are not the sole solution (Jimerson, 2003). That is because there is more to finances than just salary and benefits. There are also opportunity costs. Opportunity costs represent the costs that teachers must consider when deciding if they can afford to stay in a rural school district. Rural educators weigh their opportunity costs annually. As the opportunities improve for all individuals in the open workplace, so do the opportunities for teachers. Teachers have had opportunities to accept employment in alternate fields or locations, accomplishing two things. First, they maximize their salary opportunities and, second, they use their content-related background. Teachers of rural school districts are forced to decide between receiving inferior pay in a rural school district and seeking

superior salaries in an alternate location or more often in an alternate profession (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; Helge & Marrs, 1981). Similar findings were revealed in a study done by Certo and Fox (2002). In written surveys and personal interviews teachers revealed that their top reason for leaving rural classrooms was low salary and benefits. However, the second most influential factor dealt with the external employment opportunities that offered less stressful schedules, more flexible schedules, higher salaries/benefits, and more control of the work-setting.

The final category of the personal theme was that of the individual teacher's future and how a rural assignment either enhanced or deterred that future. First was the image of school districts that are remote or in isolated locations. Swift (1984) stated that, "...retaining competent teachers is an ongoing problem ...of small schools that are rural and often isolated by distance and terrain" (p. 1). Remote or isolated locations offer limited social opportunities. When teachers consider their futures, social opportunities come into play. These limitations have been shown to increase teacher attrition in rural school districts (Buchanan, 2005; Lemke, 1994; Stone, 1990).

Indirectly related to social opportunities is the need to fit into one's community. Survey studies have shown that the inability of teachers to 'fit' into the rural community of their school is a leading factor behind teacher attrition in rural school districts (Lemke, 1994; Swift, 1984). Swift and Lemke explain that often teachers are trapped in a mismatch of social or cultural mores. This mismatch decreases teacher involvement and community acceptance. All increase teacher attrition in rural school districts. Research by the Rural School and Community Trust conducted by McCullough and Johnson echoed this scenario. McCullough and Johnson (2007) described "cultural competency" as a key

factor to a rural fit. The authors reported that “children don’t have the ‘best’ teachers if ...teachers cannot relate to and respect the community and its families” (p. 11). When teachers find themselves in a quandary such as mentioned above they often decide to leave the school and community. This decision forces teachers either to move to a different community and school, a different profession, or even back to school to further their education.

Rural communities, given their remote or isolated locations, often provide few opportunities for individuals to pursue higher education. When teachers elect to go back to school to further their education, they frequently leave the rural communities and schools in which they work and live (Luekens, Lyter & Fox, 2004; North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2005-2006). The pursuit of higher education to increase options for their future, often force teachers to leave rural classrooms. This personal pursuit has often been forced due to state and federal mandates. State and federal policies such as NCLB mandate certification standards that rural educators must satisfy. Rural educators who typically teach multiple subjects and multiple grades in which they do not necessarily have a college major are often required to amend their certifications. This means additional coursework and/or professional development in order to meet the highly qualified standards of NCLB. These mandates force rural educators to make personal decisions concerning time, money and commitment. This, then, may act to increase teacher attrition from rural school districts. The capability to enhance one’s self by furthering one’s education is a personal aspect of teacher attrition but represents a significant crossover component into the second umbrella theme, entitled “professional factors.”

Professional factors influence rural teachers. The teaching profession requires education and intellectual skills. Numerous studies have identified factors in teacher attrition that are a result of the nature of the teaching profession. Some studies have focused on attrition in rural school districts. These studies and their results represent three areas of influence: dissatisfaction, demographics, and development. Each includes numerous components.

Job dissatisfaction is a broad category that has been found to be a significant factor leading to attrition. Hill and Barth (2004) noted correlations between job dissatisfaction and teacher attrition in schools. Furthermore, in rural schools, job dissatisfaction included working conditions and lack of administrative support, but also included being ill-prepared to teach in rural schools.

Working conditions that influence teacher attrition in rural schools include multiple teaching assignments/preparations, workload, paperwork, multi-aged classes, limited resources, and class size (Luekens, Lyter & Fox, 2004; MetLife, Inc., 2005). Educators in rural schools are often required to teach multiple subjects, as well as multiple ages, often within the same classroom, the same day, or certainly within the same year. This requires multiple preparations, which generates increased paperwork, accountability, and workload. Tied to these additional stressors are limited resources, class sizes that are often large and diverse. Baldacci and Johnson (2006) stated that “support is often hardest to come by inrural schools, which very often have few institutional resources” (p.21). These rural education conditions contribute to higher rates of attrition.

Teacher attrition in rural school districts frequently results from teachers feeling a lack of support from their administration at the school, district or county levels (Certo & Fox, 2002; Ingersoll, 1997; Stone, 1990). Teachers often overlook working conditions when they feel satisfied with the administration, feel supported, feel heard and appreciated (Kopkowski, 2008). This feeling of validation transcends many areas of job satisfaction. Validation promotes commitment and increases one's willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Not only does lack of administrative support contribute to rural teacher attrition, but also lack of preparation causes many rural teachers to leave. Being unprepared personally, professionally, socially, and/or emotionally for teaching in rural communities creates a "revolving door," as teachers in these situations attempt to adapt to their rural settings (Harris, 1989; Ingersoll, 1995, 1997, 2001; Orvik, 1970). The learning curve or adaptation is difficult for new teachers and often proves to be too much.

Demographics often contribute to teacher attrition in rural school districts. The 1994 publication entitled *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools* (U.S. Department of Education, 1994), the US Department of Education presents a snapshot of the demographics of rural schools and districts. Seven descriptors offer evidence to support how demographics might influence teacher attrition in rural school districts across America: "rural schools and rural school districts usually enroll small numbers of pupils," "rural residents report incomes significantly less than their urban and suburban peers," and "due to the absence of significant trading centers, rural school districts often are nearly exclusively dependent on real property taxation for their local revenue" (p.48). Each descriptor could be transposed into a list of negative impacts. Limited funding and

resources, decreased salaries, supplements, and incentives, as well as, multi-aged classrooms and combined grade levels are examples of various negative impacts. Combined, the above descriptors mirror the scenario previously described as ‘poor working conditions’, which were said to increase job dissatisfaction.

The final category of the professional factors theme addresses the developmental aspect of the teaching profession. Studies show that the lack of professional development in rural school districts plays a significant role in the decision to stay, move, or leave the rural classroom (Stone, 1990). Lack of opportunities for professional development is part of the reality of rural school districts that are typically remote and isolated, with a limited taxation base, and reduced resources. Professional development within the teacher’s daily life transcends the professional reality of meeting state and federal mandates.

Compounding the lack of professional development opportunities are mandates and institutional programs and policies such as NCLB which mandates requirements for teacher certification and licensure (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/>). The realities of rural education are that teachers in rural classrooms are often forced to teach out of their areas of expertise. The NCLB mandates concerning ‘highly qualified’ status creates “hurdles in implementing the vision” (Jimerson, 2003) of NCLB especially in rural school districts that, due to the very nature of the rural setting, find it “difficult to attract and retain well-qualified new teachers” (Jimerson, 2003). Professionally these mandates propose a challenge for rural educators due to the limitations and isolation of rural settings. Limited availability to professional development or resources needed to amend certifications increases teacher attrition and reduces teacher retention in rural counties. These institutional policies were

enacted to ensure ‘highly qualified’ teachers in all classrooms, but, according to Williams and King (2003), “in many places where providing a good education for all students is already a major challenge, NCLB is a farce” (p. 8). Add to this the findings by Ingersoll (1997) and Gonzalez (1995), in which teachers cited the insufficient input they have into school and district level policy making and decision-making related to professional development, curriculum and more, and once again the professional development of rural teachers is negatively impacted and increases teacher attrition.

In addition to being influenced by NCLB mandates, teacher attrition in rural schools is influenced by personal and professional themes. According to MacDonald (1999) and Mueller (1970), minimizing teacher attrition is a proactive mechanism for improving teacher quality, student achievement, and community cohesiveness. Reducing teacher attrition is also a mechanism for minimizing the various costs associated with teacher attrition (Lawrence, Abramson, Bergsagel, Bingler, Diamond, Greene, Hill, Howley, Stephen & Washor, 2002). Teacher attrition knows no social, racial, geographic, or economic boundaries. Studies addressed the costs associated with teacher attrition. These costs are financial, academic, and social by nature. Studies found that these costs impact certain students and communities to a greater extent. Johnson (2004) expressed the idea that “attrition and transfer most severely affect schools located in ...rural communities...” (p.12). In 2007, The Rural School and Community Trust reported the findings of McCullough and Johnson in a report entitled, *Quality Teachers: Issues, Challenges, and Solutions for NC’s Overlooked Rural Communities*. The report noted that “children in ...rural communities are afforded neither the resources nor the quality teaching they need to overcome their challenges and experience academic and personal

success” (p. 5-6). The report notes a “revolving door of less qualified teachers (and, perhaps, a pattern where the better qualified teachers in these (rural) settings are leaving...” (p. 13). This pattern is supported by the NC Public Schools 2006-2007 personnel profile of highest degree held by all instructional personnel (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/resources/data/>). Statistically, 63% hold a bachelors degree which is consistent in rural and urban counties while 34% hold a masters degree, which varies in rural and urban counties across the state. Thirty-five percent of urban instructional personnel hold masters degrees while 33% of the instructional personnel in rural counties hold masters degrees. Jimerson (2003) captured the essence of the profound ramifications of teacher attrition in rural schools saying, “Geography should not dictate which children obtain an excellent education and which do not” (p. 7).

Teacher attrition in North Carolina

Teacher attrition is monitored by public and private agencies across the nation and within each state. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is one such agency. The NCDPI produces an annual report that quantifies data concerning state wide teacher turnover. The report documents the factors reported each year which impact teacher turnover for the state (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2007-2008).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported a 13% teacher attrition rate for the period of March 2008-March 2009. The rate was down from 2007-2008, in which NCDPI reported teacher attrition at a rate of 14% on the system level. The percentage reflected the loss or relocation of over 13,000 teachers in one school year. There was an increase from the 2006-2007 when the rate was 12% (p.1-2). The

percentage reflected teacher attrition rates for middle school teachers at 24%, elementary rates at 21% and high school rates at 22% (<http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/>). There was a decrease from 2004-2005 data that reported the North Carolina's local school systems' average teacher turnover rate at 13 % which was a slight increase from 12% in 2003-2004. North Carolina's teacher turnover rate was lower than the national data which was reported by NCES at 16% in 2003-2004 and 17% in 2007-2008.

The timeline of 'turnover beyond control' percentages can be analyzed using the data from the System Level Teacher Turnover Report. The table 'Categories of Turnover by Year' (p. 6) displays the percentages of 'turnover beyond control' percentages from 1999-2000 to 2005-2006 on an annual basis. In 1999-2000, 34.09% of teacher attrition in North Carolina was due to 'turnover beyond control' or personal factors. During the six years documented there had been a slight but steady decline, with the lowest point being in 2002-2003 (27.07%). In 2005-2006, the rate was back up to 30.67% (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2005-2006). 'Turnover beyond control' factors included teacher demographics (age, gender, race, and health condition) and family dynamics (child-rearing, childcare, family relocation, and family responsibilities). In 2007-2008, the rate was even higher. The 'Analysis of Turnover' (p.42) displays the percentages of 'turnover beyond control' for 2007-2008. Teacher turnover or teacher attrition for reasons 'beyond control' had increased to 41.24% (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2007-2008, p.42). The percentage that stayed represented a state survival rate and those that left represented attrition rates that were similar to statistical data presented by Konanc (1996) in his analysis of

employment histories for North Carolina teachers from the years 1980 to 1996. Whether teacher attrition is due to personal reasons that are beyond control or due to professional reasons that can be controlled, teacher attrition rates continue to increase in North Carolina.

Teacher attrition in rural schools of North Carolina. Teacher attrition rates are reported by the System Level Teacher Turnover Report annually. The report computes the turnover rates across the state and specifically within 110 Local Education Authorities (LEA's) or counties and the eight regions of the state (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2007-2008). The turnover rates for each of the regions over the past five years are reported on the table entitled 'System Turnover Rate by Region' (p. 29).

According to the report, the teacher attrition rate is at its highest in six of the eight state regions of the state (p.29). These regions include urban, rural, and suburban school districts, because the regions span the state from the mountains through the piedmont to the coastal plains. As noted by The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc., North Carolina includes 100 counties of which 85 are designated rural (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/index.asp>). Hence the majority of the counties included in the eight regions are rural. Using the Five-Year Average System Level Teacher Turnover for 2003-08 (p. 23-25), the specific teacher attrition rates for the rural counties can be determined. The five year average rate of teacher attrition for rural counties involved in the study had a computed mean of 12% with a range between 8% and 14% (p. 23-25). This rate was less than the state wide five year average of 13% but higher than the state wide teacher turnover rate of 9% reported in 2007-2008.

Teacher attrition in middle schools of North Carolina. Teacher attrition has historically proven to occur at the greatest rate in the middle schools of North Carolina (<http://www.ncreportcards.org>). The state teacher turnover rate for middle school teachers in North Carolina has been reported as high as 25% in 2001-2002 to the low of 14% reported in 2008-2009. In spite of the steady decline over the last ten years, the teacher attrition rate for middle school teachers continues to be the highest rate of teacher attrition for teachers of North Carolina (<http://www.ncreportcards.org>).

The 2008 Teachers Working Conditions Survey conducted annually in North Carolina offered an explanation for the rate of attrition at the middle level. An assessment of the results revealed that at the middle school level, teacher attrition and retention was influenced by the role of teachers in making classrooms and county-wide decisions concerning teaching and practices. When middle school teachers play a prominent role in the decision-making within the school, district or county the teacher turnover rate declines. This decline supports other findings that teacher empowerment is an influencing factor for teacher attrition and retention in schools.

Teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Rural school attrition rates in North Carolina are 12% with a range in the last five years of 8%-14% and middle school attrition rates are 14% with a range in the last 10 years of 14%-25%. According to the 2008 Teachers Working Conditions Survey, middle schools with a smaller student enrollment and less student diversity are more likely to have lower teacher turnover. These attributes, small enrollment and less student diversity, typically characterize rural middle schools (Lemke, 1994). This characterization is ever-changing and influences the rate of teacher attrition in the process.

This increasing and varying rate of teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina, as well as reports from NCDPI that 10,000 new teachers are hired each year and have been for the past decade, heightens the need for further research. Add to this the statistics presented in the 2005 report published by The Rural School and Community Trust entitled, "Why Rural Matters." It is reported that North Carolina ranks the highest in the nation in overall size of rural schools and districts. Forty percent of all North Carolina's students attend rural schools, ranking North Carolina ninth in the need to address rural education (2005). Recognition of the issue is half the battle. It is time to examine the reasons behind teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina in order to address them.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to examine perspectives of teachers currently employed in rural middle schools of North Carolina about teacher attrition and retention against the theoretical framework of Sher (1983). The theory is that the three C's: characteristics, conditions, and compensation influence teacher attrition in rural schools. A mixed method was used to gain perspectives from teachers from schools from varying geographic regions of North Carolina through surveys and interviews. Surveys were designed to elicit personal, school and demographic information, and interviews were structured to seek teachers' experiences and attitudes about attrition and retention in rural middle schools.

Setting and Population

I selected schools by reviewing data from the 2006-2007 NC School Report Card (<http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/>), which was available through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). I selected North Carolina schools which met the following characteristics and criteria: traditional school calendar of 180 days; grades served 6, 7, 8; rural community; and meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2006-2007. These criteria established uniformity of rural middle schools.

AYP is the standard used for school effectiveness by federal and state agencies and is based upon student success within designated subgroups within a school. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability standards list membership numbers as n=40 persons for the subgroups of North Carolina. An n=40 has been deemed a rural-sensitive best practice because small subgroup numbers make test results statistically weak. Often these results identify small, rural schools as "failing" (Jimerson, 2004). The rationale for

using schools that have successfully met AYP was supported by Johnson (2006) who suggested that "... the conditions of the school as a workplace can increase the capacity of schools to serve all students" (p. 2) and "the effectiveness of teachers within their classrooms" ...which may then "influence their decisions about whether to remain in teaching" (p.2). The rationale is that teachers stay in schools that are more effective. Thirty North Carolina rural middle schools met the criteria (see Appendix A). Ten were selected due to their teacher turnover rate which was correlated to teacher retention or attrition for each school. Five middle schools with the lowest and five middle schools with the highest teacher turnover rates were selected from the original thirty. These middle schools represented ten different counties of North Carolina as well as each of the three geographic regions of the state. Table 2 depicts the schools and counties involved in the study and the numeric data concerning the participants. Schools and counties are depicted using a pseudonym. Figure 2 depicts the rural counties of the state within three geographic regions and the number of schools per region involved in the current study.

Table 2

Schools/Participants involved in the study

#	County	Geographic Region	School Name	2006 Teacher Turnover %	Survey Participants	Interview Participants
1	Coal	Coastal Plains	Coal Cty. M.S.	10%	2	-
2	Tungsten	Mountains	Tungsten M.S.	10%	1	-
3	Emerald	Mountains	Emerald M.S.	11%	1	1
4	Magnetite	Piedmont	Magnetite M.S.	12%	3	1
5	Sapphire	Coastal Plains	Sapphire M.S.	12%	3	1

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

#	County	Geographic Region	School Name	2006 Teacher Turnover %	Survey Participants	Interview Participants
6	Bauxite	Coastal Plains	Bauxite M.S.	31%	1	-
7	Phyllite	Coastal Plains	Phyllite M.S.	32%	6	1
8	Copper	Mountains	Copper M.S.	33%	2	1
9	Stilbite	Coastal Plains	Stilbite M.S.	38%	4	1
10	Azurite	Mountains	Azurite M.S.	47%	7	1
					30	7



http://www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/rural_county_map.asp

Figure 2. Geographic regions, rural and urban counties of North Carolina and school specifics for the current research study.

Access to Participants

The initial step was to introduce the study to the superintendent of each of the ten selected counties via email, postal mail or phone call and get written permission to conduct external research in a middle school in their respective counties (see Appendix B). Upon receiving permission from each of the ten superintendents or their county designees, correspondence was then sent to the building principals. The purpose of this communication was to introduce the research project to the school principals and seek participants.

This procedure was used to develop a pool of survey candidates who had between 4-10 years teaching experience. The range of experience matched the range used by the NC School Report Card for reporting educational data. According to a review of literature composed by Johnson, Berg and Donaldson (2005) entitled, “Who Stays in Teaching and Why”, teachers with 5-10 years teaching experience “encounter periods of strain and stress” (p. 89) and teachers with 7-15 years of experience are in a “danger zone” (p. 90) in that they are more likely to leave the profession. The range of experience for the current research study is considered a critical period of a teacher’s career in regards to teacher attrition and retention (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). The sample in the current research study also represented teachers from grades 6-8 which, as reported by the NC School Report Cards, demonstrated the highest teacher turnover rate in 2006-2007 (<http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/>).

From this point, principals either gave the study documents to their teaching staff or recruited participants who fit the criteria. Participants either personally contacted me for a survey and consent form or the principal provided a copy of the survey and consent

form to the participants. Methods of distribution differed dependent upon the needs or wishes of the principals and participants. Surveys and consent forms were then mailed, faxed, or emailed back (see Appendixes C and D).

Data Collection

Surveys and Interviews

I developed a 30 item survey using questions adapted from the Teacher Attrition and Mobility surveys conducted annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (Marvel, J., Lyter, D., Peltola, P., Strizek, G., & Morton, B., 2006), the Teachers Working Conditions Initiative (<http://ncteachingconditions.org/>) and the survey conducted by Dr. Vernon Storey of the University of Victoria (1993). I conducted a pilot of the survey with 5 teachers that met the criteria established for the study. Modifications were done following the pilot and included reduction in the number of questions, clarification of wording in various questions, and rearrangement of question order. All modifications were noted by persons involved in the pilot as ones that would increase participation maximizing a common understanding by participants. The final survey questions reflected research, were relevant to the topic at hand and included modifications as a result of the pilot process (see Appendix C).

The final survey asked teachers to respond to forced-choice and open-ended questions about: their intentions to continue in present positions or to change position and their thinking about factors that influence teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools. Retention was based upon current employment of teachers in their particular rural middle schools; whereas attrition was based upon the fact that their colleagues were no longer in their particular rural middle schools.

Demographics (educational background, area of certification, age, teacher experience, gender, family dynamics, etc.) were included in questions 1-7. Questions 8-14 addressed the work history and future work plans of the participant themselves. Questions 15-17 focused upon the participant's perspective concerning the factors that affect teacher attrition/retention within their particular school or district. The impact of NCLB was examined through survey choices such as "not prepared to implement or did not agree with new reform measures" and "teaching out of certification area/not highly qualified."

Strategies for attracting and retaining teachers were addressed in the survey and interview. Both allowed participants to give their ideas concerning current strategies for reducing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention in rural schools of North Carolina. Survey participants were asked to list strategies that they are aware of being used in their school/district to attract/retain teachers. They were also asked their perspectives concerning the impact of these current strategies. Follow-up questions concerning strategies were done in the interview as appropriate.

I sent surveys to thirty teachers all of which were completed and returned which established a purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2002), this purposeful sampling identified participants that "... are 'information rich' and illuminative of interest, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest..." (p. 40). In this situation, the participants were teachers with 4-10 years teaching experience; currently teaching in a traditional, grade 6-8, rural middle school in North Carolina which met AYP in 2006.

I developed an interview guide following the survey pilot. The interview guide was piloted with 2 of the persons that piloted the survey. Modifications to the interview guide included removal of questions that were sufficiently addressed in the survey and elaboration upon questions that allowed participants to have a voice. Sample interview questions included:

- “Describe a rural school”
- “What factors would prompt you to leave your current rural assignment?”
- “Do curriculum concerns among teachers act to increase teacher attrition?
 - Why or why not?”
- “Does your school/district do something to address working conditions in order to reduce teacher attrition?” (See Appendix E for the interview guidelines).

I selected a pool of interviewees which represented seven counties and the three geographic regions of the state. Follow-up phone interviews took place after all surveys had been returned. Participants were asked as a part of the survey if they were willing to participate in phone interviews and have those interviews recorded for transcription purposes. From the pool of survey participants who agreed to interviews, one participant from each school/county was selected. If multiple persons from the same school indicated a willingness to participate in the interview, simple random selection was used so that each participant had an equal probability of being interviewed. Seven of the ten schools were represented in the interview process. Three schools/counties did not have survey participants who agreed to the interview guidelines.

The interviews were audio-taped for transcription purposes and the transcriptions were maintained as printed documents. The interview guide was designed for 30-40

minute phone sessions to promote participation. Confidentiality was maintained by acquiring permission to use names and/or quotes from the respondents or by disguising personal identifiers. Confidentiality was heightened through the use of pseudonyms which were devised for counties, schools and interview participants. Consent forms were obtained from all interviewees documenting their wishes.

Data Analysis

I reviewed data from all surveys received but compiled only the information from those teachers that fit established research criteria. Thirty surveys (n=30) were individually tallied noting responses for each question. Percentage of the sample (%) was determined and results were analyzed. These results were used in identifying commonalities within the sample concerning teacher attrition and teacher retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina from teacher perspectives. They were also used to generate a description of the populace/community engaged in the survey. Additionally, the survey data were used to identify factors and patterns of factors that had influenced teacher attrition and retention in rural middle and schools of North Carolina from the perspective of current teachers.

Interview transcriptions were analyzed with the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, and interrelationships among the participants' perspectives. Responses to each interview question were recorded as the transcriptions were repeatedly read. After all transcriptions were analyzed and responses were recorded, the individual responses were then categorized based upon similarities. Categorized responses yielded patterns, themes, and interrelationships amongst the participants' perspectives. Each participant's responses were categorized and analyzed using an inductive analysis and creative

synthesis method (Patton, 2002). This method allowed for the “immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships” (p. 41). Comparisons were made to findings of the NC Working Conditions Survey which examines teacher working conditions of the schools in North Carolina on an annual basis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Findings from the study are presented in this chapter. The findings represent the ten schools that were selected based upon teacher turnover rates. Survey findings are first presented followed by interview findings. Findings will be presented in narrative form with pertinent findings presented through the use of tables.

Survey Results

The survey developed and implemented in the current research study was designed to examine teacher perspectives about the problems of teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Findings from the survey are presented according to the categories of teacher retention developed by Sher (1983). The categories are characteristics, conditions, and compensation. Characteristics include background, training, pre-service experience, and personal preferences. Conditions, the job and the place, refer to environmental surroundings, cultural venues, recreational opportunities, housing, family and friends. Compensation reflects financial components that influence attrition and retention such as salary, benefits, rewards and incentives.

Survey findings are presented first in reference to the characteristics of the respondents; second in regard to their perspectives upon conditions and compensations that influenced attrition and retention of their colleagues; and the survey results are then compared with results of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey conducted annually by the state of North Carolina through the Teachers Working Conditions Initiative.

Characteristics

The demographic factors (gender, age, education, and teaching experience) of the survey participants are given in Table 3. The sample (n=30) included 25 females and 5 males. The median age group of the participants was 30-39. Two thirds (20) of those responding were equally divided into the age groups of 30-39 and 40-49. All participants held a bachelor's degree while one third (33.33%) held a master's or part of a master's degree. In the schools with high teacher turnover rates one fifth (20%) held a master's degree while in the schools with low teacher turnover rates over half (60%) of the survey participants held a master's or part of a master's degree. Five participants were National Board Certified Teachers, three from schools with high teacher turnover rates and two from schools with low turnover rates. Five others were certified in additional areas but did not necessarily hold a degree in that area. Four of the five were from schools with low teacher turnover rates. About two thirds (63.33%) of the participants had seven or more years of experience (mean experience for teaching of 8.04 years).

Table 3

Distribution of Gender, Age Group, Education/Certification, and Teaching Experience

Biographical Factor		H ^a	L ^b	n	%
Gender	Female	18	7	25	83.33
	Male	2	3	5	16.67
Age Group	Under 30	4	2	6	20
	30-39	6	4	10	33.33
	40-49	8	2	10	33.33

(table continues)

Table 3 (*continued*)

Biographical Factor		H ^a	L ^b	n	%
Age Group	50-59	2	2	4	13.33
	60+	0	0	0	0
Education / Certification	Certified, but not degreed	1	1	2	6.6
	Bachelor's degree	20	10	30	100
	Master's or part	4	6	10	33.33
	NBCT	3	2	5	16.67
	Additional Certification	0	3	3	10
Years Teaching Experience	Mean (years experience)	6.4	9.4	8.04	
	Less than 7 years experience	9	2	11	36.67
	7 or more years experience	10	9	19	63.33

Note. ^aH=Teachers from schools with high teacher turnover rates; ^bL=Teachers from schools with low teacher turnover rates

Information concerning respondents' current teaching assignments is presented in Table 4. The participants were fairly consistently distributed across grade levels. Teachers teaching either sixth, seventh or eighth represented nearly two-thirds (63.27%) of the participants. Of the remaining participants, one-fourth (23.30%) taught 6-8th grades and 4 persons (13.30%) taught either 6-7th or 7-8th grades. The school-based assignments were the following: math/algebra (30.30%), language arts (24.24%), science (15.15%),

special education (9.09), social studies (6.06%), and other (15.15%). Other included physical education, counselor, and keyboarding. Survey results indicated that 17 respondents (62.96%) currently taught a single subject within their teaching schedule where 10 respondents (37.04%) taught multiple subjects on a daily basis.

Table 4

Distribution of Teaching Assignments

Grade Level Taught/Served	n ^a	%
6 th grade	8	26.60
7 th grade	6	20.00
8 th grade	5	16.67
6/7 th grade	1	3.30
7/8 th grade	3	10.00
6-8 th grade	7	23.30
School-based assignment		
Math/Algebra	10	30.30
Language Arts	8	24.24
Other (counselor, physical education, keyboarding, etc.)	5	15.15
Special Education	3	9.09
Social Studies	2	6.06
Teach a single subject	17	62.96
Teach multiple subjects	10	37.04

Note. ^aNumbers reflect respondents teaching multiple subjects.

Participants' prior work experience can be seen in Table 5. Over one-half (56.67%) indicated that they had worked fulltime prior to entering education while twelve (40%) of the participants indicated that they entered teaching immediately out of college, making teaching their first fulltime employment. One participant indicated that he had worked fulltime between teaching jobs. Nearly two-thirds (19) of the participants indicated that teaching was their first career while one third (11) had entered teaching mid-career. Previous careers included: health care, advertisement, banking, and insurance. Of the twenty-one careers specified, four were associated with children or education and two were careers such as landscaping and Christmas tree farming. Over one half (12) were business/retail related.

Table 5

Previous Work Experience

Prior to teaching	Frequency	% (f/30)
NO fulltime employment prior to teaching	12	40.00
YES fulltime employment prior to teaching	17	56.67
YES fulltime employment between teaching jobs	1	3.30
Mid-career (entered teaching following another career)	11	36.67
Teaching is first career (entered teaching after college)	19	63.33

Respondents were asked why they **accepted** their rural assignments. Two reasons that were frequently cited were “characteristic” in nature as seen in Table 6. These reasons are characteristic in that they refer to background, training or pre-service

experience of the participant. First was “I grew up in a rural community and wanted to teach in a similar community, because...” and second was “I wanted to teach students in grades 6-8 in a middle school setting.” Both were noted by participants from the schools with high and low turnover rates as top reasons for job acceptance. Each spoke either to the background of the participants and/or their personal preference, both of which are “characteristic” in nature. Numerous comments were provided in response to why they wanted to teach in a similar community: “I believe in rural education”; “I understand the needs and interests of the community”; “I want to contribute to the success of my hometown”; and “I like a smaller school setting.”

Table 6

Reasons for Accepting Position

Reasons to accept	H ^a	L ^b	Frequency	% (f/58)	Theoretical Framework Category
Spouse/future spouse/companion’s job or job opportunities	8	5	13	22.41	Condition
Other ^c	7	4	11	18.97	Characteristic & Condition
Wanted to live near family or friends	6	4	10	17.24	Condition
Wanted to teach grades 6-8 in a middle school setting	4	3	7	12.07	Characteristic
Grew up rural and wanted to teach in a similar community ^d	2	2	4	6.90	Characteristic
District’s recruiting program or incentives	2	1	3	5.17	Compensation

Note. ^aH=Teachers from schools with high teacher turnover rates; ^bL=Teachers from schools with low teacher turnover rates; ^cOther examples: love the mountains, love the principal volunteered in this school, student taught in the same county, close to alma mater, want children to grow up in a rural setting; ^dQualitative responses were given.

Respondents were subsequently asked about their **future plans**, and the findings are presented in Table 7. Twenty three of the respondents (76.67%) indicated that they intended to remain in their current school/district on a long-term basis while three (10.00%) stated that they intended to stay for a few more years. The thirty respondents represented schools that had been selected due to either high or low teacher turnover rates. Twenty (67%) were from schools with high teacher turnover rates and ten (33%) were from schools with low teacher turnover rates. Of the twenty three that indicated they intended to remain in their current school/district, sixteen were from schools with high teacher turnover rates and the remaining seven were from those schools with low teacher turnover rates. Subsequent questions about the participants' reasons for staying in their current rural assignment provided no responses that were "characteristic" by definition. The four remaining participants who indicated that they intended to leave offered reasons that were not "characteristic."

Table 7

Plans for the Future

Future Plans	H ^a	L ^b	Frequency	% (f/30)
Teach in this school/district long-term	16	7	23	76.67
Teach here a few more years	2	1	3	10.00
Teach in another rural school/district	0	1	1	3.33

(table continues)

Table 7 (*continued*)

Future Plans	H ^a	L ^b	Frequency	% (f/30)
Teach in an urban or suburban school/district	0	0	0	0.00
Leave the field of education	0	0	0	0.00
Move into administration	1	1	2	6.67
Other ^c	1	0	1	3.33
Total	20	7	30	

Note. ^aH=Teachers from schools with high teacher turnover rates; ^bL=Teachers from schools with low teacher turnover rates; ^cQualitative responses were received.

Conditions

Conditions, both job and place, were noted by the respondents when asked about job acceptance. Conditions, such as cultural venues, recreational opportunities, housing, family and friends, were frequently cited. As previously shown in Table 6, conditions were the number one reason that participants accepted their current rural assignment. Specifically, “Spouse/future spouse/companion had a job or had better job opportunities here” was the number one reason cited for job acceptance by participants from schools with high or low turnover rates. This was followed by the “Other” response in which participants provided comments that were frequently “condition” by definition. Of the fourteen reasons listed as “Other,” twelve were condition-type responses: “love the mountains”, “closer to the beach”, “wanted children to grow up in a rural setting”, and “great principal.” Each in itself is a factor in job acceptance related to the job or the place. The third reason indicated was “I want to live near family or friends that live in this area,” which was a condition-related response.

Conditions of job and place were factors in job acceptance and job retention.

Table 8 shows that the most important reasons participants listed for **staying** in their current rural assignment were related to the job or the place. Nearly one-half (40%) of the respondents cited enjoyment of their teaching assignment as the number one reason that they stay in their position. The next three reasons were noted at the same frequency: “My spouse/future spouse/companion has a job here”; “I enjoy my students, because”; and “Other.” Comments listed for the “because” question and the “Other” were all related to the job and the place. Remarks included: “laid back country folk that I can relate to”; “we have a great working relationship”; “tenure”; “teammates”; and “close to home.”

Table 8

Reasons for Staying

Reasons to stay	H ^a	L ^b	Frequency	% (f/55)	Theoretical Framework Category
Enjoy my teaching assignment	15	7	22	40.00	Condition
Spouse/future spouse/companion has a job	5	3	8	14.55	Condition
Enjoy my students ^c	7	1	8	14.55	Condition
Other ^d	6	2	8	14.55	Condition
Want to live near family or friends	3	3	6	10.91	Condition
Grew up rural/continue to enjoy a rural setting as an adult	1	2	3	5.45	Condition

Note. ^aH=Teachers from schools with high teacher turnover rates; ^bL=Teachers from schools with low teacher turnover rates; ^cQualitative responses were given; ^dOther

examples: faculty and staff, close to home, children attend school in this district, hometown.

Future plans previously presented in Table 7 noted that four respondents intended to **leave** their rural assignments. Participants from schools with high or low turnover rates all indicated that they intended to leave their rural assignments due to condition-type responses. Findings presented in Table 9 indicate that all factors noted by respondents as reasons for leaving their rural assignments were related to job or place.

Table 9

Respondent's Reasons for Leaving

Reasons for leaving	H ^a	L ^b	Frequency	% (f/5)	Theoretical Framework Category
Pursue a job in administration	1	1	2	40.00	Condition
Spouse/future spouse/companion moving elsewhere	0	1	1	20.00	Condition
Have no family or close friends in the area	0	1	1	20.00	Condition
Other ^c	1	0	1	20.00	Condition

Note. ^aH=Teachers from schools with high teacher turnover rates; ^bL=Teachers from schools ^cOther example: work at the community college.

Compensation

Teachers did not indicate compensation related reasons for staying or leaving. Results previously shown in Table 8 and Table 9 reflect that the reasons are either “characteristic” or “condition” by definition. Compensation was indicated as an important reason for job acceptance. Findings presented in Table 6 shows that district

recruiting programs or incentives were important reasons for job acceptance but did not influence retention or attrition. This compensation factor was sixth out of the top six and included clarifying comments such as “signing bonuses”; “pay for pursuit of advanced degree”; “county supplement”; and “county scholarship requirement.”

Respondents’ Perspective for Reasons Colleagues Left

The respondents’ perspectives concerning the reasons that **colleagues left** their rural assignments are presented in Table 10 and correspond with Storey’s findings related to Sher’s three “C’s”. From the perspective of the respondents, four of the six reasons colleagues left their rural assignment were conditional, one was characteristic and one was a compensation reason.

Four of the six perceptions cited for reasons for colleague attrition were directly related to job/place, family/friends and/or environmental surroundings. These reasons were indicated by participants from schools with high and low turnover rates. The most frequently cited reason cited by all participants was “accept a position in another school”; followed by “change of residence”; then “dissatisfied with job”; and rounded out by “other.” The “other” response which allowed participants to write in responses included conditionally supporting comments such as: “military family transfer”; “take a job in an adjoining county”; “lack of parental support”; “relocated within the district by the county office”; and “new administration, either at the school or county level.”

“Poor fit,” a characteristic-type reason tied with a compensation reason. They were the final reasons cited by the respondents in regards to their perspectives’ concerning colleagues’ attrition from schools with either high or low turnover rates. The compensation reason, “Better salary or benefits,” was noted the same number of times as

the “poor fit” characteristic-type response. “Poor fit (socially, culturally, etc.) for rural community” was characteristic of colleagues’ preferences, background, as well as training or pre-service experiences. It was the final reason of the top six reasons cited by the respondents and was indicated by participants from schools with high and low turnover rates.

Table 10

Respondent’s Perceptions: Reasons Colleagues Left

Reasons colleagues left	H ^a	L ^b	Frequency	% (f/52)	Theoretical Framework Category
Accept a teaching position in another school	11	9	20	35.09	Condition
Change of residence	10	4	14	24.56	Condition
Dissatisfied with job	5	3	8	14.04	Condition
Other ^c	3	1	4	7.02	Condition
Poor fit (socially, culturally, etc.) for rural community	2	1	3	5.26	Characteristic
Better salary or benefits	2	1	3	5.26	Compensation

Note. ^aH=Teachers from schools with high teacher turnover rates; ^bL=Teachers from schools ^cOther examples: military family transfer, relocated in district by county office, lack of parent support, took job in adjoining county.

Comparison of Results: NC Teacher Working Conditions

The NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (<http://ncteachingconditions.org/>) conducted each spring by the NC Teacher Working Conditions Initiative, is designed for school-based licensed educators. Data from the annual survey is disaggregated for public viewing and district/school use. Components of this survey, specific to classroom

teachers, were modified for use in the survey developed for the current research study. Results of the survey from the current research study were compiled into Table 11 and comparative data were documented in Table 12, entitled “Data Comparison: North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.” Comparisons were made between the data compiled by the NC Teachers Working Conditions Initiative in 2006 to the results provided by the respondents in the current research study.

Respondents in the current research study noted “Leadership” (46%) and “Time” (42%) as the number one and two working conditions in North Carolina Schools that had the greatest impact upon teacher attrition and retention. Ranked first indicated that the working condition was not being addressed within the district/school and was therefore, negatively impacting retention and positively impacting attrition. “Teacher empowerment” ranked a clear third (46%); “professional development” ranked fourth (42%); and “facilities and resources” ranked last (62%). Leadership and time had the most effect upon teacher attrition and retention and facilities and resources had the least affect upon teacher attrition and retention from the perspectives of the survey respondents. These findings were consistent for those schools with high or low teacher turnover rates. See Table 11 for further details concerning each component.

Table 11

Respondent’s Perspective: Components Affect on Attrition and Retention

Rank	NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey Components
1 st Rank	Leadership: administrative support, guidance, professionalism, etc.
2 nd Rank	Time requirements: instructional time, planning time, extra duty time, etc.
3 rd Rank	T. Empowerment: school-based leadership, involved in decision-making, etc.

(table continues)

Table 11 (*continued*)

Rank	NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey Components
4 th Rank	Prof. Development: staff training opportunities, educational opportunities, etc.
5 th Rank	Facilities/Resources: buildings, grounds, materials, technology, etc.

When data concerning the effect of working conditions upon attrition and retention from the 2006 NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey was compared to the perspectives of the respondents from this survey, numerous comparisons were noted. Comparative data compiled in Table 12 indicated that two of the five components (leadership, time, teacher empowerment, professional development and facilities/leadership) ranked in direct comparison. The 2006 NC Teachers Working Conditions survey data and the results from the current research study ranked “teacher empowerment” third; and “facilities and resources” fifth. Data compilation for the NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey is done using a scale score. A scale score of one means that the component is “not being satisfactorily addressed” and a scale score of five means that the component is “being satisfactorily addressed.” The components were ranked for the current research study into a 1st to 5th position based upon their scale score. Lower scale scores equated to a lower ranking position meaning greater impact upon teacher attrition.

Table 12

Data Comparison: Teresa H. Cowan, Western Carolina University, '08-'09; North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, '06

Cowan's Survey Data n=26	NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey Data n= more than 75,000
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(table continues)

Table 12 (*continued*)

Condition	Rank	Rank	Score	Condition
Leadership	1	4	3.60	Leadership
Time	2	1	3.12	Time
Teacher Empowerment	3	3	3.44	Teacher Empowerment
Professional Development	4	2	3.41	Professional Development
Facilities and Resources	5	5	3.65	Facilities and Resources

Note. T. Empowerment = Teacher Empowerment. Scores are based on a scale of 1-5. A score of 1 means the condition is not being addressed satisfactorily. A score of 5 means the condition is being addressed satisfactorily.

Interview Results

The interview developed and implemented in the current research study was designed to examine teacher perspectives about the problems of teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. The initial portion of the interview guide was structured to elicit the perception of each interviewee about what it meant to be rural, a rural school and a rural community. This perspective created a foundation from which interview questions could be altered, amended or omitted based on the interviewee's definition of rural. The interviews were therefore fluid and personalized. This allowed for a casual, low stress phone interview which fostered maximum participation as well as straightforward and thoughtful responses. All interviews were taped and then transcribed.

The interviewees provided a sampling of rural, middle school teachers from North Carolina. Seven interviews were conducted from teachers in seven of the ten counties in the study. Four females and three males, who taught in the fields of science, math,

business, physical education, social studies, and language arts, were interviewed. Teachers represented grades sixth, seventh, and eighth. The interviews were limited to seven, so that each interviewee was from a different school/county of the state. Emily, Mark and Sam were from schools with low teacher turnover rates while Phyllis, Connie, Stella and Amos were from schools with high teacher turnover rates. Personal backgrounds revealed six of the seven had grown up in a rural community; three of the seven grew up in the rural community in which they now teach; and one of the seven grew up in an urban setting but married into a rural community. These rural educators became the voice of the study.

Interview transcriptions were read repeatedly with the purpose of finding patterns, themes, and interrelationships between the participants' perspectives. Using an inductive analysis and creative synthesis method (Patton, 2002) I categorized and analyzed each participant's qualitative responses. Themes were reasoned and synthesized from transcription data from each of the interviews conducted. The order of the themes indicates the frequency in which the theme could be supported through qualitative data from the interview transcripts.

Description of Rural-Community and School

Participants discussed geographic location as their primary descriptor of a rural community. Isolation, terrain, limited access to necessities and lack of privileges, proximity to cities and major highways, and limited traffic were examples of descriptors participants used. Geographic location was followed in order respectively by these themes: economy, population density, sense of community and inhabitants' profile. Supporting data provided in Table 13 lists examples for the economy theme and others.

The economy theme was supported through descriptors such as agriculturally based (agricultural tourism), stagnant or faltering economy and/or employment, and the lack of a large work force central to one place of employment. Population density referred to county location, number of schools in the county and size of the schools in the county. Sense of community was the fourth theme and reflected that “small town”, “close knit” feel to the community. One interviewee voiced that a community was rural when “everybody knows each other and their business.” The final theme was inhabitants’ profile. This theme revealed a conception that a rural community was less transient, had minimal parent education levels, and was a community of low socioeconomic levels.

Table 13

Description of a Rural Community

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Geographic Location	<p>“Well, the community is definitely the location...that has to do with isolation.”</p> <p>“...we are in the mountains and we are not near any big cities so to speak”</p> <p>“...not many things here to do...not a very exciting place as far as excitement...”</p> <p>“...our proximity to major roadways”; “You know small traffic, not a lot...”; “We are two hours from any city...”</p> <p>“We are just not real accessible. It is difficult to get in here. You have to go through some pretty curvy roads to get in, so it is not something where we have just like a four lane highway going all the way through.”</p> <p>“...have to drive to get easy access to businesses and cultural events.”</p>
Economy	<p>“...economy that is either agriculturally based or if it is tourism, its agricultural tourism or natural tourism...I think that if you are rural, I don’t see how you can have any other type of economy to be honest with you.”</p> <p>“Yes, more of like a blue collar count versus a white collar.”</p>

(table continues)

Table 13 (*continued*)

Economy	“So, rural right now, because the economy is where it is stagnant...but it was growing at one point... We are just not seeing it right now.”
Population Density	<p>“I don’t have any numbers off the top of my head... I kind of define rural as population density that is under a certain level...”</p> <p>“...out in the country...”</p> <p>“The population of...is about 2000 people. Our middle school, 3 grades is about 240. Our high school, 4 grades is still about 240.”</p>
Sense of Community	<p>“small town,” “I think they are close knit”, “...our little town”</p> <p>familiarity of inhabitants</p> <p>“...I think a rural community typically is not as transient as a city...”</p> <p>“I suspect there is the little gossip factor where everybody knows everybody and they are related in some form or fashion and knows everybody’s business.”</p>
Inhabitants' Profile	<p>“...we are also rural in that our socioeconomic level is very low.”</p> <p>“...the level of education that parents have actually obtained.”</p>

In conjunction with the description of a rural community, qualitative data compiled in Table 14 reflects the interviewees’ descriptions of a rural school. Comments to support the theme, “impoverished area,” were suggested most often. Comments such as “depressed area,” “high unemployment and disability,” low income families and housing areas, high free/reduced lunch percentages, and low socioeconomic levels were examples of the words participants used to describe their schools. This theme was followed by descriptions of school size, inhabitants’ profile, and then staff/faculty. “Our

local high school is 1A” was stated by one interviewee. Ranking (1A, 2A, etc.), done by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, primarily for interscholastic and athletic competitions, is based upon school population size. Statements describing rural school students such as “challenge to motivate” and “strong sense of familiarity between students in a rural school” were common. One interviewee also stated in reference to the rural school community that there was “a poor sense of value for education.” The final theme in regards to description of a rural school involved characteristics of the staff and faculty. For example, participants mentioned that teachers are required to maintain multiple certifications and to teach multiple courses in their rural schools. This theme was supported further by the statement that “there is a strong sense of familiarity between staff and the students.”

Table 14

Description of a Rural School

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Impoverished Area	<p>“Well, we are sort of a depressed area.”</p> <p>“...very impoverished area and unemployment rate is high. People on disability is very high.”</p> <p>“A lot of low income houses and low income families.”</p> <p>“...we have a socioeconomic status that matches...you know free/reduced lunch percentages and things like that”...“I think we are a Title 1 school.”</p> <p>“All...outside city limits...that would be a rural school.”</p>
School Size	<p>“I don’t know that it has to do with numbers ...we have a little over 300 and the other middle school has ...250 or so.”</p>

(table continues)

Table 14 (*continued*)

School Size	<p>“...we are not dealing with a big population of people.”</p> <p>“...we have only one high school and it is 1A at that.”</p>
Inhabitants	<p>“The value of the education system is not in a lot of our households...”</p> <p>“...just a big challenge to motivate our kids...”</p> <p>“...they (kids) know everybody...”</p>
Staff/Faculty	<p>“Very small, very big challenge just to have the staff to teach all of the different curriculums. So, you have to have multiple certifications.”</p> <p>“Teachers teach different things because you have to. Definitely rural.”</p> <p>“...you know these kids when they graduate...you know everybody...”</p>

Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status.

Staying in a Rural Assignment

Four themes revealed themselves in reference to reasons why the interviewees elected to stay in their rural assignments. Table 15 displays the themes and supporting data for each. Reasons were as follows: personal dynamics (great teammates, strong colleagues, familiarity with staff and community, enjoy the geographic location, etc.); family dynamics either immediate (employment of spouse/companion, children: have started school, are “big fish in a little pond”, less exposure to gangs) or extended (responsible for elderly parents); sense of community (close knit community, hometown feel, personable environment); and lastly, professional dynamics (school population size, reduced class size, limited gang influence or mentality). A quote of particular interest: “It (rural assignment) is very intimate. You know who you work with. I know everybody in this school. I know a lot of people in this county. ...you are known and you are not just

a number which is just a face in the crowd.” This quotation captured all four themes in regards to why the persons involved in the interview had elected to stay in their rural assignments.

Table 15

Staying in a Rural Assignment

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Personal Dynamics	“I have great teammates and a great hall where I teach...that is really valuable.”
	“I consider myself part of the community...”
	“I was born...minutes from the school I am teaching at right now... I know these families.”
	“I just love where it is,” “...close to the beach”
	“But I love ...county. I love my home...it didn’t even cross my mind to go anywhere else to work.”
	“It is a nice little community.”
	“...probably much more so since I have been working...I feel much more so.” (grounded/vested in community)
Family Dynamics	
Immediate Family	Children
	Spouse/companion
	“My child will be starting school next year...”
	“She/He (wife/husband) has a good job....”
	“I have children of my own and they have made friends here...”

(table continues)

Table 15 (*continued*)

Immediate Family	<p>“...we don’t have a lot of the gang influence and that mentality up here...:</p> <p>“My children are big fishes in a small pond”^a</p> <p>“...they don’t have to be this great athlete who just works, works, works. So, that makes them well rounded.”</p>
Extended Family	<p>“I can’t leave my dad. You know I am the oldest of three kids.”</p>
Sense of Community	<p>“There is a close knit relationship outside of school that trickles into school...”</p> <p>“...the home town feeling, it’s nice and personable...”</p> <p>“It is very intimate. You know who you work with. I know everybody in this school. I know a lot of people in this county. ...you are not just a number...”</p> <p>“...everyone keeps an eye on everyone’s kids...”</p>
Professional Dynamics	<p>Based upon the district and/or the school</p> <p>“...we don’t have a lot of the gang influence and a lot of the just that mentality up here...:</p> <p>“Our middle school, 3 grades is 240.”</p> <p>“I think they (county) are doing things pretty well.”</p>

Note. ^a“big fish-little pond” scenario denotes small numbers of student enrollment;

increased opportunities for children to participate in school-sponsored activities

Leaving a Rural Assignment

Teacher attrition was the focus of the next phase of the interview. Table 16 and Table 17 are compiled data which addressed why teachers leave their rural assignments. Table 16 displays hypothetical reasons, in that the interviewees were asked why they would leave. Table 17, displays interviewees' speculations for why colleagues had left their schools. Each table reflects two general themes, personal reasons and professional reasons, which are then divided into sub-themes of greater detail. In either case, personal reasons were given nearly three to one over professional reasons.

Table 16

Reasons for Leaving

Theme	Supporting Data
Personal Reasons	<p>Family</p> <p>“...it could be family...better opportunity for her (wife)...”</p> <p>“...but honestly in ...after my daughter graduates...”</p> <p>“...there are advantages in a big city for the kids...”</p> <p>Interviewee</p> <p>“Well ...I could go back to...”</p> <p>“...when I retire I will...”</p> <p>“...I miss the conveniences of...a more suburban life...”</p> <p>“...money could draw me back...” or “win the lottery”</p>
Professional Reasons	<p>Career change (in the field of education)</p> <p>“...finishing ...my Masters...go into...administration...”</p> <p>“...math curriculum coordinator...not in my county.”</p>

As seen in Table 17, the reasons that teachers may have left their rural assignments, based on the interviewees' speculations, fit personal and professional themes. Personal reasons were subdivided into six sub-themes: family, individual, social isolation, physical isolation, culture shock, and community. The first two sub-themes parallel those of Table 16 but the last four are unique to actual teacher attrition. These sub-themes overlap but were distinctly mentioned by the participants.

Teachers left, according to their colleagues, for personal reasons more often than for professional reasons. Each of the six sub-themes was mentioned in some regard in all interviews. Family reasons such as spouse/companion transfer, emotional well-being of spouse/companion, marriage, divorce, childbirth or rearing were mentioned most often as the reasons teachers may have left. This reason was followed by social isolation. Limited social opportunities (nothing to offer young, single persons) and accustomed to lifestyles and/or conveniences of the city were two examples of social isolation. Closely related to social isolation was community connectedness. The community theme overlaps social isolation in reference to geography but included items that related to the lack of connectedness to the community.

I noticed, and I hate to use the word 'outsider', but when someone comes in from the outside...This is a very close knit community and it is a lot of who you are and who your parents areAnd if you have a tie, like I had through my husband...But a lot of times when people come in...he likes his job, but his wife is miserable because she can't find her niche to fit in...But that is what I typically see is when people are not from here and don't have children, they don't typically last. (Connie)

The final personal themes: physical isolation, culture shock, and individual isolation, were described as influences on retention. For example, Connie said: “I think we see a lot of that in the movies where people see these little picturesque small towns and they are happy, and they are wonderful and they get there and they are like my goodness what have I done?”

In spite of the fact that personal reasons, noted in Table 17, were claimed twice as often as professional reasons for teacher attrition, professional reasons were noted within each interview. They included reasons that were school-based or county-level based in nature. Some school-based reasons were: change in administration, student discipline, change of school (content, age, certification, comfort factor, etc.), lack of support for teacher development, and inability to transition into education mid-career. County-level based reasons included funding cuts and lack of support for teacher development.

Table 17

Respondent’s Perspective: Reasons Colleagues have Left

Theme	Reasons Given – Supporting Quotes
Personal Reasons	Family Spouse/companion: “...they are moving with their husbands because they are military” or “...wife is miserable because she can’t find her niche...” “...the man she was engaged to lived in...” “Another teacher had a baby...and decided to stay home.”
	Colleague "It is not the same profession I came into."
	Social Isolation

(table continues)

Table 17 (*continued*)

	<p>Social Isolation</p> <p>“So, a lot of young people who are not from here do not stay.”</p> <p>“...there is not a lot down here ...for the single atmosphere.”</p> <p>“They had come from...a larger city and ...things that they had been used to that obviously were not provided here. ...used to a faster lifestyle or more things being at hands reach...”</p>
	<p>Physical Isolation</p> <p>“...very good teachers, but they were commuting every day.”</p>
	<p>Culture Shock</p> <p>“There are a lot of African Americans down here and Indian population than there was...”</p>
	<p>Community</p> <p>“I noticed, and I hate to use the word – outsider- but when someone comes in from the outside...”</p> <p>“And if you have a tie, like I had in through my husband...she (colleagues’ wife) has not found her groove, I guess.”</p> <p>“...when people are not from here and don’t have children, they don’t typically last...”^a</p>
Professional Reasons	<p>School</p> <p>“People got gone with a new principal” or “...transition period... There is a feeling of mistrust.”</p> <p>“A lot of discipline problems... We have to put up with a lot of stuff.”</p> <p>“There was a couple who have gone up to the high school...”</p> <p>“...she had difficulty just making that switch in teaching.”</p>

Table 17 (*continued*)

School
<p>“Administration doesn’t do much about it (discipline) because it makes them look bad to have a lot of discipline problems.”</p> <p>“We have had several transitions from middle school to high school.”</p>
County
<p>“...they had to let them go because of funding or whatever.”</p> <p>“...I would like to have seen a little bit more positive support rather than just saying, Oh, you do not have it in you (new teachers).”</p>

Note. ^aChildren were noted within the interview as often being a means of bonding in a rural community

Whether they were reflecting on reasons they might leave or why their colleagues might have left, teachers focused on personal and professional reasons. Personal reasons covered the gamut from family to isolation. Professional reasons centered upon change either at the school level or change at the county level.

Attrition Factors: Curriculum, Working Conditions, and NCLB

In addition to teacher perceptions about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina, teachers responded to questions related to curriculum, working conditions and No Child Left Behind. Each component was specifically questioned and Table 18-19 provides the comments.

Curriculum. Interview participants were asked if they had examples in which curriculum concerns had influenced teacher attrition. Two themes emerged content and pedagogy. Each was mentioned in all interviews, as illustrated in Table 18.

Table 18

Curriculum Influences on Teacher Attrition

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Content	<p>Change to curriculum</p> <p>“I am 100% sure...people...left ...because of it (new math curriculum).”^a</p> <p>“They just don’t teach that unit (not suited to teach)...they are evading.”</p> <p>“...adopted a new science...more energy, matter and she (colleague) does not like it at all.”^b</p> <p>“Some of the material I don’t think ...kids need to get in middle school.”</p>
Pedagogy	<p>Grade level preferences</p> <p>“It is just a matter of the level of children you want to teach and compared to the subject matter you know...”</p> <p>Curriculum issues</p> <p>“But it (curriculum) also restricts you some, too. Especially...pacing guides.”</p> <p>“...take care of teachable moments...”</p> <p>“...just the normal complaints...not enough time...to cover standards...”</p>

Note. ^aAdoption of Connected Math/Investigations Program; ^bStandard Course of Study (SCOS) mandated new units in 6th grade science.

Curriculum influence upon teacher attrition was most often related to content or change to content area. Examples such as adoption of a new math program at the county level or the need for change due to curriculum that did not meet teachers’ needs (did not feel suited to teach, did not enjoy the concept, or did not think content was age appropriate) were mentioned by participants. In each case, teacher attrition is influenced. Interviewees said they thought colleagues left because of this content-driven theme. One

teacher stated, “I guarantee you, I am a 100% sure that there have been people who have left Magnetite County schools because of it [newly adopted math program].”

Paralleling the content-driven theme was personal preference for grade level assignments or curricular content. Grade level preference was most frequently mentioned in the interviews in regards to grade level changes driven by personal preference. It was stated that colleagues left their current rural middle school assignments to teach either elementary or high school for strictly personal reasons. These personal and professional reasons mirrored preferences to teach a particular age group and/or a content area. One of the interviewees offered this example: “There were a couple who have gone up to the high school actually who were certified six through twelve, who have been just more comfortable with the content area...you know (more comfortable) themselves.”

Restrictiveness of curriculum, as seen in Table 18, was also stated as a pedagogy-driven influence to teacher attrition. Several teachers said they thought that restrictive pacing guides and curriculum guides influenced teacher attrition. Pacing guides restrict “teachable moments” and are often “curriculum state mandates that teachers do not agree with.” The restrictive nature of curriculum was mentioned as a factor of teacher attrition.

The final component in reference to curriculum pedagogy was the idea of curriculum depth versus instructional time. Teacher attrition was influenced because “there is not enough time...to cover the standards...Not so much that they do not like the curriculum.” This was mentioned as a reason for teacher attrition.

Working Conditions. The NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey conducted by the NC Department of Public Instruction assesses five areas: time requirements, facilities and resources, school leadership, teacher empowerment, and professional development.

Questions related to these conditions were asked in the survey and interview phase of the current research study. Participants were asked to rank the conditions (in the survey) in reference to their impact upon teacher attrition or retention. The results as seen in Table 11 were then used in the interview phase to allow for clarification and explanation.

Within the interview phase, interviewees were asked to elaborate on their responses to the survey question and encouraged to provide examples to support their ranking of working conditions. Supporting data for each component can be seen in Table 19.

Table 19

Working Conditions and Attrition

Component	Supporting Quotes
Time Requirements	<p>“...instructional time...compromised...trying to do too many things that get in the way ...what we are here to do....”</p> <p>“...the simple fact that I feel like I’ve got too much going on other than teaching...”</p> <p>“...an issue with IT meetings, team meetings, meetings with administration...”</p>
Facilities and Resources	<p>“...it was an old building...one of the main reasons they left... they were going to another school that had better facilities...”</p> <p>“...strong North Carolina Virtual Public School Support” or “...involved in an Impact Grant...brought a lot of technology to our school...”</p>
School Leadership	<p>“The other thing is administration; they are so supportive and so flexible. They want us to try new things.”</p> <p>“We have a very nice program (ILT). They have really, really great teachers with a lot of experience and support...”</p> <p>“Our principals here have an open door policy ...”</p>

(table continues)

Table 19 (*continued*)

Component	Supporting Quotes
Teacher Empowerment	“...when we are doing textbook adoptions it is from the classroom teachers...we decide and come to an agreement...”
Professional Development	<p>“...it needs to be an issue...nobody is happy...”</p> <p>“...workshops are being mandated from above”</p> <p>“They put up various workshops...I feel like we don’t really have any control of the things we have to sit through...”</p> <p>“...I think standardized testing...driving force of what we are going through...”</p>

Time requirements were cited as they influenced teacher attrition. Compromise of instructional time due to interruptions or distractions and schedule demands (meetings, workshops, conferences, extra duties, etc) were time requirements of the working conditions of rural middle schools that impacted teacher attrition.

Facilities and resources were mentioned as impacting teacher attrition as well as teacher retention. As one teacher explained:

It was a very old building and there were, you know, a few teachers that expressed to me, as I understood it, one of the main reasons that they left was because they were going to another school that had better facilities and they felt it was more, it wasn’t so discouraging, you know you could see things coming down.

In comparison, advanced technology resources, within rural settings, were cited as a working condition which impacted teacher retention. Facilities that had technology resources through grants or collaborative programs fostered a sense of pride in the

facility, the school and its resources. This sense of pride was mentioned as having a positive impact upon teacher retention. Phyllis said, “We had a group of teaching fellows that came a couple of weeks ago that even commented on how much more technology we have than any school in other places. So we have been fortunate in that aspect to have some of the technology in our school, but I think that (lack of resources) would be very frustrating.”

School leadership, when discussed by the interviewee, was discussed in the affirmative; in that school leadership impacted teacher retention. Administration that is “so supportive and so flexible...they want us to try new things. And they are going to check and see what works and if it is working, great. And if not, they are there to help you...” This type of school-based leadership was echoed as well through effective Initial Licensure Training (ILT) programs and “open door” policies between administrators and their staff/faculty. Each was indicated to impact teacher retention.

The working condition that addressed teacher empowerment elicited an array of responses. The interview results noted in Table 19 were synthesized from points of discussion from multiple participants. Each cited example was discussed at some point in an interview but not in detail. Interviewees that had experienced situations which they viewed as “empowering” provided examples and others made no mention of its impact either on attrition or retention. Amos best captured how teacher empowerment positively impacted teacher retention while reducing teacher attrition:

...the empowerment we have as teachers and the flexibility that we have and the level of trust that the administrators have with the teachers themselves kind of contributes to that (teacher retention)...I mean honestly when we go around and

talk about it (leaving or staying) with no supervisors in the room, they (colleagues) say that they can't think of another place that they would rather be.

The teacher from a school where textbook and curriculum decisions were made on the teacher level discussed this as an example of teacher empowerment, which was seen to impact teacher retention at their school, as opposed to the teacher who discussed a recent change in administration which altered the "level of trust" between administration and staff. This reduction in trust was seen to negate teacher empowerment while impacting teacher attrition.

Professional development was the working condition consistently mentioned as a part of the interviews with a negative connotation. Interviewees, Phyllis and Stella, both from schools with high teacher turnover rates, captured the negative feeling toward professional development in their own words: "...I feel like we don't really have any control of the things that we have to sit through ...I felt like I was just bored to tears (recent workshop). It just was not beneficial at all ...I have been kind of disappointed in the professional development"; and "...I do know that they (the district) are trying to be supportive in professional development in the sense that they are trying to really listen to our feedback...but really in a county our size (extremely small) it really takes a lot of time for things to trickle down and feel like you're being heard..." Professional development was noted by interviewees to have an impact upon teacher attrition.

NCLB Policy. The impact of NCLB upon teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina was one of the areas of focus of the current study. Therefore, the interview included a line of questions related to the impact of the NCLB policy. Interviewees were asked their thoughts about NCLB and its impact upon teacher

attrition. They were also asked to share situations in which they thought the NCLB policy mandates had impacted teacher attrition at their particular rural middle school. Their responses fell into themes which addressed teacher attrition or teacher retention.

The majority of the impact discussed about NCLB was toward teacher attrition. The policy was cited as a reason that colleagues left their rural middle school assignments. Specifically, the interviewees discussed four areas of impact: teacher morale, personal options, professional issues, and recruitment. Interview results were received from each participant and all mentioned at some point how the policy mandates had impacted teacher morale. Teachers were said to have felt pressured to amend licenses or maintain multiple licenses. The policy mandates forced numerous personnel to add licenses, take additional coursework, prepare for and take Praxis exams. The interviewees established that the NCLB policy led to negative teacher morale as a result of pressures felt to meet licensure mandates. The interviewees also stated that teachers felt intense demands of high stakes testing. Connie from Copper County stated that "...No Child Left Behind is all accountability to the testings we have. I think it has caused some people to go." These demands included: "teaching to the test," "dumbing down of America," and the overwhelming feeling of pressure of "irrational and unattainable standards." Sam from Sapphire Middle said, "Well, we treat the kids more like herds of cattle than they are children anymore, because we got this mandate that these kids have to pass the EOG tests, Blah, blah, blah." Each interview quote addressed the impact of NCLB upon teacher morale.

Personal options that stemmed from the NCLB policy also impacted teacher attrition from the perspectives of the interviewees. Early retirement for those electing not

to amend licenses or those teachers who did not want to be a part of the changing educational system of today increased teacher attrition. “I think that I can probably say that No Child Left Behind has retired a few teachers that would probably still be around.” Either way teachers left.

Teachers that elected to stay and attempt to meet NCLB policy mandates were often faced with professional issues. Teachers did not always pass a Praxis exam or did not meet the highly qualified standards which are a part of the policy. Teachers also found themselves with college credits that would not apply to their current teaching position and were therefore ineligible for the highly qualified status based on documentation verification. They would therefore not meet the highly qualified standards set within the NCLB policy. One such situation was mentioned by Amos:

Yes, and I am thinking of two examples that I can think of since I have been at Azurite Middle School ...where somebody's credits from their college days fifteen years ago did not transfer correctly and they actually ended up, they are in construction now, but it was not from their choice it was because of No Child Left Behind regulations.

In both of these situations, the failure to pass a Praxis exam or the lack of appropriate college credits, teacher attrition was impacted.

Recruitment was also discussed in more than one interview. Comments were implied that the NCLB policy negatively impacted recruitment of lateral entry candidates and/or potential educators. In Emerald County, it was noted that, “We do not accept any lateral entries. You have to be highly qualified period and if you are not you are not considered.” Interviewees stated that persons in the rural communities did not pursue

employment in education because they knew that meeting the highly qualified standards was not possible or that pursuing the highly qualified standard would require additional coursework.

Interview comments indicate that teachers believe additional NCLB policies also impacted teacher retention. Examples were provided but with less frequency than the previously discussed teacher attrition examples. The interviewees stated that teacher retention happened through schedule changes and professional issues. Mark from Magnetite County said, "...the principal is having to reassign the grade levels" to guarantee a highly qualified staff person for each classroom. Schedule changes were done to accommodate teachers who did not meet the highly qualified status or a licensure mandate. This was often done to preserve teachers' jobs thus retaining teachers. Professionally, teachers elected to use the grace period within the NCLB policy to amend their licensure. This allowed teachers to maintain their positions. The interview provided examples in which the NCLB policy may have affected teacher attrition as well as teacher retention in rural middle schools.

District and School Policies and Practices to Reduce Attrition and Maximize Retention

The results previously discussed provided examples and supporting data which suggest that teacher attrition and teacher retention are both factors of concern in the rural middle schools across North Carolina. Therefore, the interviewees were asked about current programs and practices in their school or district that they thought had an influence upon teacher attrition or teacher retention. An analysis of the interview comments revealed four categories: facilities/resources, teacher support, teacher recognition, and recruitment.

Facilities and resources were most frequently cited by the interviewees about minimizing teacher attrition and maximizing teacher retention. The interviewees did not comment that facilities and resources were a program or practice implemented by their school or district to address attrition or retention but examples for facilities and resources were repeatedly mentioned during the interview sessions as influential factors on teacher attrition and teacher retention. The following quote describes how one county uses facilities and resources to minimize teacher attrition and maximize teacher retention:

“Magnetite County is growing. They are building new schools and they try to do the right things for the children. ..The district or the county seems to try their best to supplement us in terms of our salaries in competition with the big cities. They try to keep us here. They know money is an issue, so overall, they seem to be doing a lot of things well...”

Resources ranged from signing bonuses to virtual schools technology while facilities focused upon the building of new schools to accommodate state of the art technology. Interviewees noted that all influenced teachers to remain in their schools.

Teacher support, like facilities and resources, was frequently mentioned by the interviewees. Facilitators and mentors were mentioned as being influential in regards to teacher attrition and teacher retention. Facilitators, school-based and at the county level, were mentioned in their role as supporting teachers with lesson plans, class management and student engagement. Mentors, once again, site-based or at the county level, were noted as supporting units. The county level mentor programs were cited for their support in the efforts to reduce teacher attrition and increase teacher retention. From the perspective of the interviewees, successful county level mentor programs acted primarily in three ways in their efforts to maximize teacher retention: Sam said that mentor

programs encouraged “us older teachers “to act as site-based mentors for others; Connie noted that “wonderful mentor programs” maintained rigorous accountability standards where “they (mentors) are not just given that money and they don’t do their job. They are held accountable to do their jobs,” and mentor programs implemented Initial Licensure Teacher (ILT) programs that were structured, efficient and therefore, effective.

In conjunction with teacher support was the factor of professional development. Professional development, as previously discussed, was cited as having an influence upon teacher attrition and teacher retention. Professional development from the perspective of one interviewee was offered as a program or practice by their particular county. The county and this participant saw professional development opportunities as a means of reducing attrition and increasing retention. The interviewee stated that professional development provided for staff that was based upon teacher input, feedback or teacher request acted as a positive agent toward the county’s efforts to maintain teacher numbers as well as quality while the opposite was said to impact attrition.

The only program or practice mentioned by an interviewee that could be considered teacher recognition was the typical Teacher of the Year program. This program implemented by the majority of schools/districts across the United States was stated as a possible program which reduced teacher attrition and increased teacher retention. Having ones’ accomplishments, recognized by others, was stated as having a positive influence upon teacher’s willingness to stay in their current assignment.

The final theme was recruitment. This theme was discussed as often as others as a program or practice that influenced teacher attrition and teacher retention. Specifically, there was the concept of “growing your own” and the idea of “hiring the right candidate.”

The first concept, “grow your own,” included numerous practices, from the interviewee’s perspective, that impacted teacher attrition and retention. One practice cited was the implementation of the teaching fellows programs in local rural high schools. A second practice was that current rural educators were encouraged to watch, recognize, and then recruit appropriate rural students to consider education as a career. The third practice was that counties supported current rural teacher assistants to pursue teaching licenses. Lastly, was the practice of providing financial assistance to rural students who wish to further their education, which is then contingent upon returning to the county to teach. Connie noted:

We (Copper County) are very strong in positioning teachers for teacher fellows for our graduates to try to encourage them into teaching, and a lot of kids here end up going into teaching because the ones that want to come back, they can come back to this area. They have a job...I hate to say it, but they are going to be here regardless of the school atmosphere...That is where they want to be.

These were all aspects of the “grow your own” program/practice voiced by the interviewees as having an influence upon reducing attrition and increasing retention in their rural schools.

The concept of “growing your own” teachers for rural schools was followed by the idea that it was integral to hire the right candidates. Hiring the right candidates from the perspectives of the interviewees was one means in which their schools/districts had reduced attrition and increased retention. One person stated that “Most of the young teachers that are here that are staying are from this area. There are very few that are coming in that are not from this area that stay.” Candidates who had a rural background,

candidates who appreciated minimal social distractions, and candidates who were seeking an assignment where they could develop their teaching skills were stated as the “right candidates” for rural schools. Candidates such as these were mentioned as the type of candidates who were hired and had lasted at the rural middle schools of the interviewees. Persons that were hired that did not fit these characteristics were noted by the interviewees to be teachers that left the schools.

The interview comments reflect the programs and practices currently implemented in rural middle schools/districts across the state. From the perspectives of the interviewees, each was reducing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention directly or indirectly within their school or district.

Changing a Rural Assignment – Waving the Magic Wand

The final component of the interview was an open-ended question. The participants were given the opportunity to “wave their magic wand and change one aspect of their rural assignment.” Participants reflected upon their personal and professional situations before a suggestion was presented. Transcriptions were analyzed and responses were recorded for this particular interview question. The individual responses were categorized based upon similarities. The areas of change were case specific but upon the use of inductive analysis and creative synthesis interrelationships developed amongst the participants’ perspectives. Two umbrella themes, school and community, were the aspects that the interviewees would change if they had the “magic wand” capability.

The “school” theme was further refined into the following categories: personnel, finance and policies. Personnel issues were an aspect that more than one interviewee would change in their rural middle school assignments. It was discussed that in their rural

schools there was a need for additional staff in non-content areas. Specifically, it was stated that personnel were needed for physical education and electives in order to “offer another option for the children ...and get our class sizes down.” In conjunction with personnel shortages was the aspect of finance. Finance included salary increases, on an individual level, and school funding at the state level. For example, Connie waved her magic wand to ensure “small school funding” (<http://www.nces.ed.gov/edfin/pdf/StFinance/NorthCa.pdf>) for her small rural school. She noted this aspect of change because they were under the impression that these funds were in jeopardy of being cut from their school. These budget quandaries coincided with the aspect of change that addressed policies, local, state and/or federal. One change noted by Sam addressed a local policy or standard that was in place but was not followed or enforced. He said he would recognize and enforce current local achievement standards. This was in direct relationship with a second policy change mentioned. That was the aspect of change that empowered teachers to be heard in reference to pass or fail decisions. These two aspects were mentioned hand-in-hand as areas that the interviewees would change about their rural schools on the local level. The last policy-related change was more on the state and federal level. Participants voiced that they would eliminate End of Grade (EOG) testing for their rural schools. Sam waved his magic wand to “Uh, get rid of EOG testing. Give the power to pass or fail back to the teacher and you will fix a lot of problems.” All of the above mentioned are school-related aspects that subjects would change if granted the magic wand.

The school theme mandated changes that were directly related to the facilitation of a school; whereas the community aspects of change involved just that the surrounding

community. These aspects of change related primarily to parental involvement, either physical or emotional involvement. Amos noted that “the kids we seem to have the least amount of trouble with are the ones that we have the most parent contact with.” The interviewees noted that they would create a forum to promote open, seamless communication between school and home; foster situations where parents are in and on the school grounds more often; heighten parental awareness of their students’ day to day school regiment; motivate vested parties to do their best in order to achieve a better future for all involved; and, alter attitudes in order to maximize the concept of the value of education. The only other community related aspect of change was case specific but addressed school and community concerns; that was the idea that district boundaries needed to be enforced.

District boundaries, in one particular rural setting, are currently in place within the district but they are just not enforced. Parents, grandparents and guardians are allowed to select the middle school of their choice. Selections, based upon family necessities, physical location, demeanor of school personnel or test scores are often strictly preference-based and fluctuate yearly. This lack of enforcement by the district of a set policy impacts the student/teacher/facility ratio within the schools of this community. For example, Emily discussed the fact that there are two middle schools in her community. The district boundaries for enrollment in the two middle schools are clearly in place but are not enforced. Enrollment numbers in middle school A increase while numbers in middle school B decrease as district boundaries are not enforced. With the increase in student numbers, classrooms are overcrowded; personnel restraints are heightened, facilities demands are increased. The problem discussed by the participant was the fact

that within his/her small rural county all funding, allocations are made equally between school A and B. Therefore, school A is overcrowded, understaffed and dealing with fiscal constraints while school B has a low enrollment, surplus staff and adequate resources. For Emily if her magic wand could be waved, the policy mandated district boundaries would be enforced. This would act to maintain appropriate student/teacher/facility ratios within the community.

The interview comments addressed aspects that the individuals involved deemed worthy of change. When asked if any of these needed changes would prompt the subjects to leave their rural assignments, the answer was consistently no. Instead of teacher attrition in this case, the need for change was seen by these interviewees as reasons to stay. In the words of Amos from Azurite Middle School, a school with a high teacher turnover rate: "...it just kind of immobilized me. I mean, if you bale out...because you know the parents aren't doing the way you want them to. What are you doing to that kid by leaving yourself? I mean you are just one more person that is giving up on them, so ...I can't see myself doing that." Teacher retention was maintained in these situations as the participants not only acknowledged the need for change but then made a professional decision to stay in their rural middle school assignments in order to strive for change.

The findings of the survey and the interview revealed that teacher attrition and teacher retention is an issue in rural middle schools of North Carolina. From the perspective of those who participated in the survey there are factors that influence teacher attrition which range from spouse job transfer to childbearing and factors that influence teacher retention which range from financial incentives to love of the geographic location. This range of factors was reflected as well in the findings from the interviews.

The findings from the current research study and interview revealed numerous factors that current rural educators believe are influencing teacher attrition and teacher retention across the state from both schools with high or low teacher turnover rates. Many of these factors were personal, some professional but all were noted to impact either teacher attrition or teacher retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. The implications of the findings presented in Chapter 4 will be discussed in regards to the established theoretical framework of the three C's: characteristics, conditions and compensation. The results from the survey will be discussed first. This will be followed by an analysis and discussion of the implications and explanations of the qualitative results from the interview phase of the research.

Survey and Interview Analysis and Discussion

Job Acceptance, Teacher Retention and Attrition

The current research study revealed that teachers accept, remain and leave a rural middle school assignment for personal and professional reasons. Similar data was reported from participants representing rural middle schools with either high or low teacher turnover rates. These two broad themes coincide with the work conducted by Storey in 1993 in the rural schools of Canada which supported the theoretical framework established by Sher (1983). Storey's purpose was to develop a profile of a rural educator in regards to job acceptance, retention and attrition in conjunction with their involvement with a government loan forgiveness program. His findings represent the perspective of rural educators from Canada. Comparisons are noted for discussion throughout this chapter.

The categories: characteristics, conditions, and compensation can be folded into personal or professional themes. Personal and professional reasons can be elicited as

characteristic, conditional or compensation-based. Further implications of the survey and interview findings are that the majority of the reasons that teachers accept, remain or leave a rural middle school assignment can be identified as condition type reasons.

Condition type reasons refer to job and place and include environmental surroundings, such as cultural venues, recreational opportunities, housing, family and friends. These reasons are personal or professional in nature.

Family Dynamics

The survey data revealed that teachers accept, remain or leave positions in rural middle schools based primarily upon the conditions that surround the job or the place. The primary condition that surrounded the job or the place was that of family, specifically family dynamics. Family dynamics, especially the occupational pursuit of the spouse or partner, played a major role in the decision-making process of teachers about acceptance, retention or attrition in their rural middle school assignments. This was supported through the interview findings in which the participants indicated that they accept, remain or leave their current rural middle school assignments due to personal or family dynamics. The interview findings implied that family dynamics such as spouse or partner's employment followed by the well-being of their children had a direct influence upon position acceptance and teacher attrition or retention. These results paralleled Storey's data (1993) which indicated that participants were concerned with "a perceived quality of life" for their families and their children.

During the interview phase Mark (representing a school with low teacher turnover rates) was asked directly about his acceptance, retention or attrition at his current rural middle school assignment. His response centered upon his wife and child. Later in the

interview when discussing the possibility of leaving his current rural assignment, his response once again focused upon his immediate and extended family.

This data implied that job acceptance as well as teacher attrition and/or teacher retention, for this particular educator, was solely based upon the needs of the educator's family; in this case, his spouse and/or their children. The decision focused upon the needs of his/her family (spouse and children) and there was never any mention of his/her professional career. These findings were similar to prior research and previous literature concerning teacher attrition in rural and nonrural locations spanning over thirty years (Public Schools of North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction: System Level Teacher Turnover Report, 2005-2006; Storey, 1993; Horn, 1985). Horn cited five primary reasons for rural teacher attrition. All are reasons which reflected the condition of job and place. The top three: family (child-bearing or child care); spouse relocation and seeking a reduced employment commitment in order to maximize family engagement are followed by lack of administrative support and inadequate financial remuneration (Horn, 1985). These compare with the findings of this research. These findings were echoed by Connie (representing a school with high teacher turnover rates) from Copper County who considers family quality of life or the influence of personal and family dynamics upon job acceptance, retention or attrition.

Her statements supported the results that teachers accept, remain or leave their rural assignments primarily due to conditions of the job or place that are most frequently based upon family dynamics or family quality of life. Connie also hinted that conditions of the job or place are often related to the rural assignment itself. Once again these ideas paralleled Storey (1993), Jimerson (2003), and McCullough and Johnson (2007). Storey's

data revealed job-related factors such as smaller-class sizes and the absence of negative urban social influences as conditional reasons for acceptance and teacher retention in rural assignments. All merge with the model proposed by Sher (1983). These responses are manifestations of the allure of rural assignments.

Allure of Rural Assignments

The allure of rural assignments as noted by Connie (smaller school sizes, smaller class sizes, less gang mentality, etc.) is indirectly mentioned in each of the interviews of this research. The interviewees captured the allure of rural assignments and its impact upon job acceptance and teacher retention through their words. Their comments included words of admiration, appreciation and high praise for their rural communities and schools. It was clear that they love their communities, they enjoy their schools, and they feel they have found the perfect balance of location and employment that is right for their quality of life. Many of them expressed the fact that they never considered living or working anywhere else. This was their home. As previously noted these reasons were similar to prior research and previous literature (Lemke, 1994; Storey, 1993; Stone, 1990) but that was not always the case.

There were points at which the findings of this research diverged from prior research and previous literature concerning the allure of rural assignments. It is noted in prior research and previous literature that job acceptance and teacher retention are negatively impacted by the realities and perceptions of rural assignments; therefore, positively impacting teacher attrition. Research cited rural realities such as: rural teachers make less and have less potential to make more, rural districts are challenging work places (fewer resources, multiple teaching assignments, fewer support personnel,

community/student poverty and geographic isolation), and class sizes are not generally smaller than urban or suburban counterparts (Gonzalez, 1995; Jimerson, 2003; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Over twenty five years ago research noted that the stereotype of rural education or the perceived negative aspects of rural assignments decreased job acceptance and heightened teacher attrition (Horn, 1985).

The current research study included teachers both in the survey and interview phase which are current rural middle school educators. The fact that they are a part of the teacher retention statistics representing rural school districts of the state implies that they are either satisfied or tolerant of their rural assignments. They have remained in schools that have reported rates of teacher turnover that are either the highest or lowest in the state. That implication can be noted as an explanation for the divergence from prior research and previous literature. Their satisfaction or tolerance may have tempered their responses in regards to the realities of rural assignments.

Personal

This does not imply that the participants of the current research study did not voice concerns about their rural assignments. Those concerns were simply counterbalanced by attributes of their rural assignments that they deemed more important or were viewed as secondary issues in regards to teacher retention and attrition. For example, in the survey data, respondents listed “other” (poverty of students was noted by one respondent) and poor fit (socially, culturally, etc for the rural community) as the fourth and fifth reasons of the top six reasons their colleagues had left their rural assignments. Similar data was received from survey participants representing the rural

middle schools with high teacher turnover rates as well as those rural middle schools with low teacher turnover rates. This was supported in the interview phase of the study when a personal theme was derived from the synthesis of the interview data. The personal theme included six subcategories of which four were indirectly related to the nature of rural assignments themselves. Social and physical isolation as well as community and culture shock were specifically noted by the interviewees. Small schools, limited staff and curriculum options, multiple certifications, and narrow-minded views upon outsiders were also noted by interviewees. These comments reinforce the idea that the realities of rural assignments were of concern to the participants of the current research study but not to a level of significance as seen in prior research or previous literature. Level of significance in the current research study was determined by the frequency of which comments were made. Significant or not, rural realities like other reasons were noted to heighten teacher attrition from rural assignments.

In one instance statements manifested the allure of a rural assignment and were then quickly followed by statements to the contrary. The findings from the current research study at times agreed and disagreed with prior research and previous literature in regards to the allure of a rural assignment.

When interviewees were asked about leaving their current rural assignment numerous answers were once again grounded in personal and family dynamics but ventured toward the conditions that surround the job or the place which include the rural school atmosphere itself. One interviewee explicitly stated that as soon as her daughter graduated from high school that she would choose to leave her current rural assignment for the conveniences of urban life. She was quick to clarify though that her relocation

would be ideal if she could take a teaching assignment in another rural location but one that was not so remote. Interviewee, Connie, managed to accentuate the role of the family in her decision-making while offering a glimpse into the professional and personal allure of a rural assignment. These findings supported the research by Storey (1993). Storey reported that teachers in rural Canadian schools accepted, remained and/or left their rural assignments based upon the rural job assignment itself followed by family dynamics such as spouse/companion employment or lack of family/friends in the area. The findings in the current research study consistently paralleled previous literature provided by Storey (1993).

The survey results implied that teachers made decisions first and foremost based upon the needs of their families (immediate or extended). These survey implications were supported throughout the interviews. A case in point was Phyllis (representing a school with high teacher turnover rates). When asked about why she accepted a rural assignment, she was quick to provide background information to explain her decision. It was as if she needed to offer an explanation to validate her current rural assignment. The explanation implied that the acceptance of a rural assignment was due to the needs of the family and that retention in the rural assignment was equally based upon the needs of the family. Once again, as with Connie there was an underlying implication that retention was also due to the allure of a rural setting. Phyllis explained how her mother's illness brought her from an urban location "back home" to her current rural assignment. She further explained that now as the eldest of three children, she feels obligated to stay for her elderly father. Her life has naturally evolved in this rural location as she is now married, has her own children, and a solid career in a great school. She is vested

personally and professionally to this rural assignment. Retention for her at this stage is not a question.

This information captured the conditionally based reasons for why teachers accept, remain or leave rural assignments. The findings implied that decisions were made due to conditions that surround the job and the place; first and foremost decisions are grounded in the needs of the family and those needs are followed by the conditions of the rural assignment itself.

These results diverged from the findings generated by Luekens, Lyter and Fox (2004) from the National Center for Education for Statistics. They used results from *The Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2000-2001*, stated that rural teacher attrition was primarily due to professional reasons such as: retirement, salary benefits, career choice, further education and job dissatisfaction. The top five reasons cited were professional reasons which were either conditional and/or compensational in nature. Reasons cited that were conditional and based upon family dynamics were pregnancy/childrearing and change of residence. This divergence from previous research and discrepancy from prior findings may be based upon the fact that The Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-Up Survey was a national survey of rural/small towns (definition of rural/small town was not provided) as opposed to North Carolina rural school districts, which are countywide districts in a geographically specific location; or that the reasons cited by the participants were ranked from indicators provided by the survey. There were no allowances for open-ended type responses in the survey conducted by the NCES. Participants ranked reasons that were cited in the survey whereas in the current research study and in that which was conducted by Storey (1993) there were

accommodations for qualitative type responses from participants. This allowed for a wider array of reasons which could therefore include those which were personal and professional in nature.

The findings from the current study consistently compared to prior research that was designed to reveal personal and professional reasons for job acceptance, teacher attrition and retention from the rural schools of the US. Divergence occurred when prior research and previous literature accentuated professional reasons while making no allowances for personal reasons. This was repeatedly demonstrated as the findings from the current research study concerning job acceptance, teacher retention and attrition of rural middle school assignments were compared to prior research and previous literature.

Curriculum

The current research study questioned if curriculum affected teacher retention or attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina. It has been cited in prior research and previous literature that curriculum concerns increase teacher attrition especially in the teachers of this generation (Johnson, 2006, 2004; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). Johnson and colleagues of the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004) reported that teachers left their teaching assignments when the following curriculum concerns occurred: not enough professional support, too rigid, unclear expectations, structured without flexibility, guidance without freedom, too broad, mandated from the state/district; and unreasonable allotments of time to teach concepts. In the interview phase of the current research study, participants were asked if curriculum concerns had caused teacher attrition within their schools. The results from the interviews aligned with previously discussed data and prior literature.

The interview participants fell into two groups concerning curriculum. They either had examples that were due to professional fit or they had examples that were related to curriculum itself. Either way when examples were discussed in the interviews they were done with conviction. Whether the curriculum concerns were content or pedagogy related, there was total alignment of the interview results and prior research and previous literature in establishing a link between curriculum and teacher attrition. This was consistent in the survey and interview data from the participants representing rural middle schools with high and low teacher turnover rates. Participants stated examples that aligned with work by Johnson and the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004). The first interview laid the groundwork for the link between curriculum and teacher attrition. Mark discussed a new math program that Magnetite County had adopted. The program mirrored various curriculum concerns reported above. The program was mandated from above and did not come with enough professional support in his opinion. It was also not what the teachers in the department wanted...their collective voice had not been heard. Overall, the curriculum adoption increased teacher attrition as it weakened teacher empowerment. Mark explained how this curriculum adoption drove him from his math classroom into physical education. He also adamantly proclaimed that he was 100% sure that his county had lost teachers due to the adoption of this particular math curriculum.

Future interviews provided additional data which corresponded with prior research and previous literature in regards to restrictive curriculum. Sam (representing a school with low teacher turnover rates) from Sapphire County discussed curriculum and pacing guides. He first explained his understanding of the role of curriculum and pacing

guides in education. But he quickly noted that he found areas of his curriculum to be inappropriate for middle school students and that pacing guides were restrictive to the point of dimensioning flexibility and creativity of teachers. These words echoed the curriculum concerns previously discussed. These words implied that there were curriculum concerns in this rural middle school assignment. The curriculum was rigid, structured without flexibility, mandated from above and did not acknowledge the professionalism of those which had been hired to teach it. All were curriculum concerns that reduced teacher empowerment. This reduction in teacher empowerment can increase teacher attrition.

When making decisions in reference to job assignment, teachers are faced with decisions that are often linked to curriculum. Prior research and previous literature report that teacher attrition increased when teachers found a curriculum too broad or that there was too much depth and not enough allotted instructional time. These findings as do the findings from the current study implied that teachers left or stayed in teaching assignments based upon their comfort with the curriculum. Comfort or professional fit with the curriculum is in the eyes of the beholder. Amos (representing a school with high teacher turnover rates), from Azurite, described this curriculum quandary in regards to his rural middle school. He noted colleagues that had moved to alternate teaching locations to find the right personal and professional fit for them. This fit was either due to preference of age-level or content knowledge. These statements implied a link between teacher attrition and/or teacher retention and curriculum.

The implications of these findings are that curriculum increased both teacher retention and attrition in the rural middle schools of North Carolina. The findings also

implied that the attrition statistics due to curriculum concerns were not significant across the state. They also implied that when curriculum was the attributing factor, teachers and district personnel were aware of it; and that the curriculum concerns were not been addressed in order to minimize their impact.

NC Teachers Working Conditions

In addition to exploring the link between curriculum and teacher attrition, the current research study probed teacher working conditions from rural middle schools with high teacher turnover rates and low teacher turnover rates in order to pursue a link between teacher attrition from rural middle school assignments and working conditions. It has been cited in prior research and previous literature that teachers are "...more likely toleave teaching because of poor working conditions than because of low pay" (Johnson, 2006, p.3) and that dissatisfaction with workplace conditions caused teacher attrition (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). There was little to no departure from the prior research and previous literature with the findings of the current study. Findings from this research indicated that time and leadership are the top two components that were not being addressed satisfactorily. This "lack of satisfaction" implied that the participants of the current study viewed time and leadership as two aspects of their rural working conditions that impacted attrition. The participants of the survey ranked time and leadership as first or second interchangeably while teacher empowerment, professional development, and facilities/resources ranked respectively in regards to their impact upon teacher attrition. These findings were supported by the interview data. These findings were consistent among schools that had high or low teacher turnover rates. Interview participants were asked to clarify information provided in their surveys or from the

surveys in general. Examples were presented in the interview phase which supported the findings from the survey and compared at various points with the data received from the NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey Data conducted in 2006.

Time. Specifically, time and time requirements were viewed by the participants of the survey and the interview as a number one concern about working conditions in schools with high or low teacher turnover rates. This supported findings by Macdonald (1999) and the 2006 survey data that represented the working conditions survey for the state of North Carolina. This came as no surprise. The findings from this research presented an honest glimpse at the reality of time constraints in the world of education. Extra duties, meetings, workshops, conferences are but some examples. Teachers are faced on a daily basis with demands of the job that go beyond the delivery of lessons. The findings of the current research study indicated that rural educators are no different than educators across the state or nation.

These findings compared to the research conducted by Johnson and the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. Johnson and colleagues cited that teacher attrition occurs for various reasons; one including working conditions (Johnson, 2004). These working conditions included but were not limited to: extra duties, overwhelming demands and stress. The interview with Mark provided support to the findings of the current study and matched the work by Johnson. He noted that his school had recently discussed this exact topic. They were distressed about interruptions and distractions to their instructional time. One point of interest was that he said that his school was so focused upon trying to make the school stand out in the community that his instructional time was being compromised. In his words there were too many other things occupying

his time other than teaching. Teachers in the current study offered responses through their surveys and through the personal interviews. They felt secure in providing their responses concerning time and time requirements because this component of education is common knowledge and no particular person or persons can be held responsible for rectifying the situation. The concern of time in regards to working conditions was presented in a matter-of-fact way neither affirmative nor negative. That was not necessarily true for the other components: leadership, teacher empowerment, professional development and facilities/resources.

Leadership. Leadership was interchangeably cited with time in the survey data as having the most impact upon teacher attrition and retention. Leadership, when further probed in the interview phase, was viewed in the affirmative; in that leadership on the administrative or school-based level impacts teacher retention and attrition. Interview participants provided examples in which leadership had either influenced retention or attrition from their experience. A case in point was Sam from Sapphire Middle School who discussed how changes in administration at his school had impacted teacher attrition as well as retention. He explained that with a change in administration there were changes in protocols. This change was not popular with numerous teachers, so many of them left. Interestingly, he noted that within one year of the change in administration and an increase in teacher attrition, a new principal was assigned to his school. This was supported by Stella (representing a school with high teacher turnover rates) from Stilbite County who discussed a change in principal that took place before her arrival. She described her first year as a transition period for the school in which a few teachers left instead of adapting to the change in administration. This data was analogous with prior

research and previous literature in acknowledging the fact that leadership impacts teacher retention and attrition. Leadership starts at the top; and, these findings consistently cited that leadership, good or bad, created a working environment in which teachers felt either support or the lack thereof. A supportive working environment fostered by the administration and guided by the teacher leaders of the school enabled teacher success and this perceived or realized success promoted teacher retention and reduced teacher attrition (Gonzalez, 1995; Johnson, 2006, 2004, 1990; NRTA: AARP's Educator Community and Farmers' Insurance, 2003).

Interestingly enough, these findings diverged from the data from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey conducted in 2006. Leadership was ranked by the respondents across the state as fourth of the five components in regards to teacher attrition. This ranking implied that leadership was being addressed satisfactorily on the state level and that it had a minimal impact upon teacher attrition in the state of North Carolina. Possible explanations for this divergence from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey Data include: age of study, population involved, and administrators of the study. This data for the North Carolina survey was from 2006 and included feedback from schools across the state. All schools, rural, suburban, urban, elementary, middle, and high were represented. The differences in time and population involved could explain the departure from the research findings of the current research study. One further explanation could also be the fact that the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey was created, administered and disaggregated by the state. Surveys of this type are often required, and often are not realistic. Teachers temper their responses to these types of surveys because they fear repercussions or feel that their input has no authentic value.

Either way these feelings alter the validity of the results and could explain the divergence of findings from the current research study.

Teacher Empowerment. Leadership on either the administrative and/or teacher level creates a working environment in which teachers feel support. Supportive environments foster teacher empowerment (Buchanan, 2005). Teacher empowerment was indicated by the findings in the survey of the current research study and that conducted by the NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey (2006) as the third of the five working conditions components. It ranked consistently in the middle. This ranking implied that teacher empowerment in rural schools and on the state level was either an issue or it was not. Therefore, in the realm of the current study, teacher empowerment was a concern in some but not all of the rural assignments. The same could be said for the NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey data from across North Carolina. In the interview phase, there were examples provided that implied that teacher empowerment promoted both teacher retention and teacher attrition. Rural schools or districts which empowered teachers to have a voice or influence in decision-making tasks (curriculum selection, schedule design, textbook adoption, etc) or were encouraged to explore pedagogy options were those schools where teacher retention was high and attrition due to teacher empowerment was not cited as a concern. The opposite was revealed in one particular rural setting in which the teachers felt a level of mistrust from the administration when new policy mandates were instituted for monitoring teacher performance. These findings resembled the prior research and previous literature which reported that teacher empowerment increased teacher retention and decreased teacher attrition (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Ingersoll, 1997).

There were numerous quotations through the interviews of the current research study that insinuated the role of teacher empowerment but the words from Amos best captured how teacher empowerment positively impacted teacher retention while reducing teacher attrition. He said empowerment at his school meant flexibility, trust and open communication. These components of empowerment were acting to reducing teacher attrition in the eyes of Amos.

Professional Development. The working condition coined professional development was an umbrella term used in the survey phase of the current research study. Explanation provided on the survey in regards to this working condition included: staff training opportunities, educational advancements, etc. The participants of the survey were asked to rank the five working conditions from least to greatest in regards to impact upon teacher attrition. The survey findings indicated that professional development had minimal impact upon teacher attrition at the rural middle schools in question. It ranked fourth out of the five. For the sake of comparison, this minimal impact implied that professional development was being addressed satisfactorily in regards to working conditions. These findings not only diverged from prior research conducted by the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (2006) but it was in direct contradiction to the interview findings of this research. The interview findings depicted a state of frustration in relation to professional development in the same rural middle schools in which the interviewees and survey respondents were employed. Every interviewee provided a negative response when discussing professional development within their school or district. The overall gist from the interview phase was that professional development was a working condition of rural middle schools that in the words of Emily (representing a

school with low teacher turnover rates); "... no one was happy with." Interview participants noted that workshops or trainings were mandated from above; driven by high stakes testing; and were not based upon teacher request, input, or feedback. Interviewees, Phyllis and Stella captured the pessimistic gist in their own words when they noted professional development that they had no control over; workshops that they felt were of no benefit, and the lack of input into professional development opportunities which were offered. These findings paralleled the 2006 data from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey. The 2006 data ranked professional development as the number two working condition in the state that was not being addressed satisfactorily; second only to time.

The divergence between the survey and interview findings can be explained as an anomaly of sorts due to the variance in questioning style and the thinking of respondents that this was a working condition in which they had no control. The survey respondents had no opportunity to expand or explain their rankings of the working components. They were instructed within the question framework to rank the working conditions in regards to their impact upon teacher attrition at their school. Their rankings reflected value or significance in relation to the other working conditions in question. The survey respondents were forced of sorts to prioritize the working conditions where the interview participants were allowed an open-ended opportunity to discuss the working condition, professional development, independently of the others. There was no prioritizing of their significance; it was simply a working condition of their rural assignments which they had each experienced and then had an opportunity to discuss. Their discussion was not directly related to increasing or decreasing teacher attrition; the interview feedback

provided a glimpse into the reality of rural professional development from the eyes' of those currently involved.

The working condition, professional development, has been cited to increase teacher retention and decrease teacher attrition (McCullough & Johnson, 2007). The findings of the current research study implied that current teachers of rural middle schools acknowledge professional development as a concern but it was one of which they can not change or which was less significant in the overall realm of rural working conditions. There was no clear implication in the findings of the current study that professional development impacted teacher retention and/or teacher attrition.

Facilities and Resources. "Schools...ill prepared to help them (teachers) succeed in their work....School structures and practices forged in a bygone era are no longer adequate to support either teacher development or students' learning" (Johnson, 2004, p. 8) laid the groundwork for exploring the impact of facilities and resources upon teacher retention and teacher attrition.

Facilities and resources was the fifth component of the NC Teachers Working Conditions Survey (2006). The state survey data implied that facilities and resources were being addressed satisfactorily on the state level. When ranked with time, leadership, teacher empowerment, and professional development, facilities and resources ranked fifth. The fifth place ranking implied satisfaction on the state level with facilities and resources. Satisfaction inferred minimal impact upon teacher attrition. The findings from the current research study were similar to the previously stated 2006 data. The survey data from the current research study implied that facilities and resources had the least impact upon teacher attrition in the rural middle schools in question. The interview

results supported this minimal impact but did so through their absence within the discussions. Facilities and resources were mentioned rarely in the interview phase; once in a negative connotation and once to the contrary. One particular interviewee, Stella, presented information from a previous work assignment that tainted her view of working conditions in regards to facilities and resources. She mentioned how old buildings and poor facilities created a discouraging setting in a prior school out of state. She knew that this had caused teacher attrition amongst her colleagues. This example was out of state, was not rural and was not a middle school assignment. It was provided here in discussion to support the fact that facilities and resources appeared to be insignificant in the schools in question.

Facilities and resources were discussed in a positive connotation in only one interview as well. Phyllis voiced how top of the line technology fostered a sense of pride in the facility and in the school. This sense of pride coincided with job satisfaction which has been cited in prior research and previous literature as an aspect of one's working conditions that has direct impact upon teacher retention or teacher attrition (Balducci & Johnson, 2006; Gonzalez, 1995). Once again the example provided by Phyllis was cited in discussion to support the fact that facilities and resources appeared to be insignificant in the schools in question.

The findings of the current research study implied that the facilities and resources of the rural middle schools in questions were satisfactory. Satisfactory status insinuated that they had not caused attrition but could improve retention; neither of which had been commonly experienced by those involved in the survey or the interview. These findings diverged from prior research and previous literature in regards to rural schools and their

facilities and resources. Facilities and resources of rural schools have been cited over the past thirty years as being a reason for teacher attrition (MetLife, 2005; National Commission of Teaching and America's Future, 2002; US Department of Education, 1994; Helge, 1981). Implications of the findings of the current research study provide an explanation of the divergence from prior research and previous literature as well. The findings of the current research study imply that facilities and resources in the rural middle schools of North Carolina are no longer a significant factor in regards to teacher attrition. Instead, findings of the current research study insinuated that facilities and resources, in the past five years, had become an attribute of teacher working conditions that increased teacher retention while acting to decrease teacher attrition. The change in status explains the divergence in findings between the current research study and prior research.

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

Current educational policy, specifically the No Child Left Behind policy (NCLB, 2002), was instituted as an accountability reform intended to close the achievement gaps amongst the student populations of the nation. Developing an accountability policy in order to close achievement gaps was an admirable mission but it has been reported that in the efforts to attain this mission there has been fall-out (McCullough & Johnson, 2007; Hill & Barth, 2004; Williams & King, 2003). The findings from the current research study implied that the fall-out has included impacts upon teacher attrition and teacher retention. Teacher attrition was affected due to teacher morale, personal options, professional issues and even recruitment. Teacher retention was affected through schedule changes as well as professional issues. Either way the findings from the current

research study, specifically discovered in the interview phase, implied that the NCLB educational policy influenced teacher retention and teacher attrition in the rural middle schools in question.

The implications of these findings are that rural educators have often found themselves in a precarious situation as a result of NCLB due to the very nature of rural schools. The implication corresponded with prior research and previous literature which reported that rural schools have difficulty staffing positions and frequently have open positions throughout the school year (Hill & Barth, 2004; Jimerson, 2003). Findings from the current research study noted specifically that teacher attrition was increased because the NCLB policy most often damaged teacher morale which directly links to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction; both which were previously noted as having an impact upon teacher retention and attrition. Interviewees of the current research study mentioned that teachers felt additional job stress due to NCLB. They felt pressured to meet certification mandates and they felt stressed due to high-stakes testing demands. Participant statements implied a reduction in job satisfaction which implied a direct link to teacher attrition. Stressors were compounded by personal options which included early retirement or career changes. Professionally, these changes might have been due to the inability of teachers to meet the NCLB mandates in regards to certification. Whether they left due to stress, personal choice or professional shortcomings, the findings from the current research study implied simply that they left. The current research study was similar to prior research and previous literature in finding that teacher attrition was increased due to educational policy, specifically NCLB.

An interesting convergence of data occurred when multiple interviewees mentioned the fact that NCLB minimized the number of persons that were being recruited into teaching (Jimerson, 2003). Positions that had often been filled by personnel hired through lateral entry or by talented educators out of their certification or degree area were not being filled. Teacher attrition was indirectly being impacted on the front-end of employment. Potential educators were not even considered for employment or talented candidates were not pursuing education due to NCLB mandates concerning highly qualified standards of certification.

The findings from the current research study would lead one to believe that the NCLB policy had only impacted teacher attrition. But upon further analysis of the interview transcriptions, that assumption can not be substantiated. To the contrary, there were glimpses throughout the interviews in which the adjustments to the NCLB policy had indirectly impacted teacher retention in the rural middle schools in question. Hill and Barth (2004) reported that there were key adjustments to NCLB for rural school teachers; and, the findings of the current research study implied that rural middle schools across the state were taking advantage of these adjustments whenever possible. Adjustments included the following: creative scheduling to accommodate certification mandates; position reassignments to maintain certification qualifications; and the use of extended time to allow educators to comply with mandates. Each in its own way decreased teacher attrition and increased teacher retention, indirectly due to the NCLB policy mandates.

Teachers in the current research study, both in the survey and in the interviews, were allowed the opportunity to reflect and respond in a manner in which they were assured that their responses could not be held against them in any way. Whether

discussing job acceptance, teacher retention, teacher attrition, curriculum, working conditions, or educational policy, they were secure in their anonymity. This process prompted responses that often state mandated reports/surveys do not. Teachers are frequently asked to complete surveys that are often created, administered and disaggregated by the very agencies or personnel to which the surveys refer. These types of surveys are quite often completed with a tempered view because teachers, as do most, naturally fear repercussions. I believe that points of divergence or convergence with prior research and previous literature especially about working conditions (time, leadership, teacher empowerment, professional development and facilities/resources) may be grounded in research methodology and/or research purpose.

Addressing Teacher Attrition

The interview participants in the current research study were asked to explore means in which their current rural middle schools, school districts or counties were addressing teacher attrition. Throughout the interviews, responses were conveyed in an indecisive manner. The responses implied that the interviewees that were, of course, still employed within the system in question could not specifically name programs or projects that had been implemented with the intention of reducing teacher attrition. Probing and eliciting questions allowed for indirect feedback concerning strategies in the counties in question. After careful analysis of the interviews, programs, projects, and routine procedures evolved. They were determined to be tactics that were attributing to the reduction of teacher attrition and the increase of teacher retention in the rural counties of the current research study.

The findings of the current research study aligned with prior research and previous literature concerning strategies for reducing teacher attrition in rural schools. Whether the strategies were a program, a project or a procedure all were noted in the literature review of the current research study. The findings of the current research study implied that the broadest strategy currently in place in rural counties addressed facilities and resources. The current research study utilized this theme (facilities and resources) to include an array of strategies that evolved from the interviews. One of which was a financial element. The financial element included signing bonuses, supplemental salaries for extra duties, and annual or biannual supplements. Each has been reported to increase job acceptance, increase teacher retention and decrease teacher attrition in rural schools (McCullough & Johnson, 2007; Jimerson, 2003; Lemke, 1994; Stone, 1990). The findings of the current research study and their convergence with prior research and previous literature implied that financial compensations reduced teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina. But the findings also implied that financial compensation was not the only component of facilities and resources that reduced teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina.

The interview data revealed that technology reduced teacher attrition in rural middle schools of the state. The availability of technology through grant participation; the acquisition of technology through grant involvement; and the advancement of educational opportunities through technology support reduced teacher attrition in the rural middle schools in which the interviewees were employed. Their views resembled work by McCullough and Johnson (2007) where they reported that the use of technology helped to “bridge the isolation gap” (p. 14) because it created opportunities for professional

development, advanced education, mentoring blogs and additional support. This concept of support was echoed in the findings of the current research study; support for rural classroom teachers through specific programs that counties had in place.

The theme of teacher support in regards to combating teacher attrition was discussed in numerous interviews. The interviewees elaborated on the use of county and school-based facilitators that worked to support rural educators with the day to day routines of teaching in a rural school; they explained how county and school-based mentor programs worked to support rural educators through the intricacies of teaching in a rural school and living in a rural community; and they noted how teachers felt supported through professional development that met their needs. These findings were similar to work by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2002), Lemke (1994) and countless others that reported that teacher attrition in rural schools can be reduced by increasing the means in which teachers feel and receive support in their role as rural educators. Understanding the role of a rural educator was alluded to as a part of the final theme in regards to reducing teacher attrition. That strategy was recruitment.

This theme included two distinct components. First was the idea of "grow your own" rural educators and the second was the idea of "hire the right candidates." When an interview participant discussed either component they offered clear and concise examples of how each had reduced teacher attrition and increased teacher retention. Their examples corresponded with research completed over the last thirty years which reported that a key component to teacher retention in rural schools was finding the right candidate for the rural assignment (McCullough & Johnson, 2007; Gonzalez, 1995; Lemke, 1994; Stone, 1990; Helge and Marrs, 1981).

A recruitment strategy, referred to as “grow your own” was implied during the interview with Connie when she discussed her school’s teaching fellows program. During elaboration, it was stated that her school works to encourage students to pursue teaching. The teaching fellows program aligns teaching fellows and teachers who then encourage future teachers through positive role modeling. Her county taps into its rural resource of young people. Connie notes that those are the same persons that accept a rural assignment and tend to remain over time. As this interview continued the ‘grow your own’ transitioned into ‘hiring the right candidate.’ The interview continued as she noted that rural students often want to be in a rural community as adults. Hiring a candidate that understands the nature of a rural lifestyle was noted by Connie as one way in which her county has worked to reduce teacher attrition and increase teacher retention. This interview implied what prior research and previous literature had reported; teacher attrition in rural counties can be reduced by hiring the right candidates for the rural assignment. These findings implied that counties which had actively recruited candidates that fit the established profile for a rural educator (Lemke, 1994; Horn, 1985) had reduced teacher attrition and increased teacher retention.

Strategies to combat teacher attrition ranged from facilities to recruitment, from finances to teaching fellows, from technology to mentors; but all impacted teaching in rural schools. Interviewees representing rural middle schools with high or low teacher turnover rates noted similar programs or practices which had been implemented in their counties. Teacher attrition was reduced and teacher retention was increased when the strategies were effectively in place and the opposite was true when it was to the contrary. The findings of the current research study implied that in order to minimize teacher

attrition and maximize teacher retention the rural schools of the state implemented programs, practices and procedures which addressed facilities, resources, teacher support, and teacher recruitment.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the current research study was two-fold. First, the purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about the problems of teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. The second purpose was to examine teacher perspectives about the influence of No Child Left Behind on teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina.

The research surveyed rural middle school educators with 4-10 years teaching experience from across North Carolina. The schools had a traditional school calendar (180 days); served grades 6, 7, 8; were classified as rural by the state; and met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2006-2007. The survey results were individually and collectively quantified in order to develop an overview of the population. From the population of survey participants, interviewees were selected to represent a range of the population from across the state. The interview results were analyzed with the purpose of identifying themes and interrelationships within the interview data concerning job acceptance, retention, attrition, programs and practices in the rural middle schools represented by those involved.

The current research study was based upon the theoretical framework that characteristics, conditions, and compensation, Sher's (1983) three C's, effect teacher attrition and retention. Characteristics include background, training, pre-service experience, and personal preferences. Conditions, the job and the place, refer to environmental surroundings, cultural venues, recreational opportunities, housing, family

and friends. Compensation reflects financial components that influence attrition and retention such as salary, rewards and incentives.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of the research project revealed a consistent pattern about job acceptance, retention and attrition in rural state middle schools. The findings indicated that teachers of rural middle schools accept their assignments, remain in their assignments and/or leave their rural assignments for reasons that are conditionally based. Conditional factors were either personal or professional, but in each situation they were based upon the condition of the job or the place surrounding the job. Two primary conditional factors developed from the current research study: family dynamics and elements of the rural assignment itself.

Teachers believed that they and their colleagues made employment decisions based first upon personal reasons, followed by professional preferences. The personal needs of their families (children, spouse, and extended family) surpassed their professional situations (working conditions, curriculum, and educational policy) in reference to acceptance, retention and attrition. Professional decisions were driven by personal dynamics.

Acceptance, retention and attrition occurred as a result of professional decision-making based upon factors that emanated from the needs of the family. The needs of their spouses/companions/future spouses, children and extended family (elderly parents, etc.) were the driving force behind the teachers' decisions concerning rural assignments. Personal needs, more specifically, family dynamics were priorities in the minds of rural

educators. These priorities triumphed when teachers were forced to make professional decisions concerning their rural assignments.

When family dynamics were satisfied, teachers then made their decisions based upon professional reasons. Professional reasons that were related to the rural assignment itself became the deciding factors. Teachers made professional decisions concerning their rural assignments due to working conditions, curriculum and educational policy. The positives and negatives associated with the working conditions of rural assignments impacted acceptance, retention and attrition. Working conditions such as time constraints, insufficient leadership, minimal teacher empowerment, inadequate professional development, and unsatisfactory facilities/resources increased attrition while the opposite increased job acceptance and teacher retention in rural middle school assignments. Curriculum that was restrictive, inflexible and policy-mandated was found to increase attrition as did the mandates of NCLB.

The findings of the current research study revealed that rural educators had a tendency to dismiss negative aspects of the rural assignment if the rural assignment accommodated the needs of their family. Similarities between the responses from the survey participants from rural middle schools with high or low teacher turnover rates supported these findings. Interview data equally reinforced these findings as interviewees from the rural middle schools with high or low teacher turnover rates consistently offered similar responses. The findings also lead me to believe that acceptance and retention in rural middle schools was increased when teachers perceived that they were of value in their rural assignments. This is demonstrated by teacher empowerment through professionalism, acknowledgement, appreciation and encouragement.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of the current research study was to examine teacher perspectives about the problems of teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. In addition to examining teacher perspectives about the problems of teacher attrition and retention, the current research study investigated the role of NCLB upon attrition and retention in rural middle schools of the state. As a result, factors concerning curriculum, working conditions, programs and practices were revealed.

The findings of the current research study are best represented through the use of a geometric metaphor. A scalene triangle is a geometric figure with three sides of unequal lengths. The longest side, the hypotenuse, is the dominant side of the triangle. Architecturally, triangles have incredible strength and are used in constructing the foundations of countless structures due to their stability and strength. Picture, if you will, a scalene triangle, as shown in Figure 3, with three sides of varying lengths: family, school, and self. These legs create the geometric form and in doing so build the foundation of rural middle schools. The conclusion of the current study is that when the shape is correctly formed geometrically, the foundation will be in place for maximizing teacher retention in rural middle schools. A structurally solid foundation maximizes teacher retention and minimizes teacher attrition.

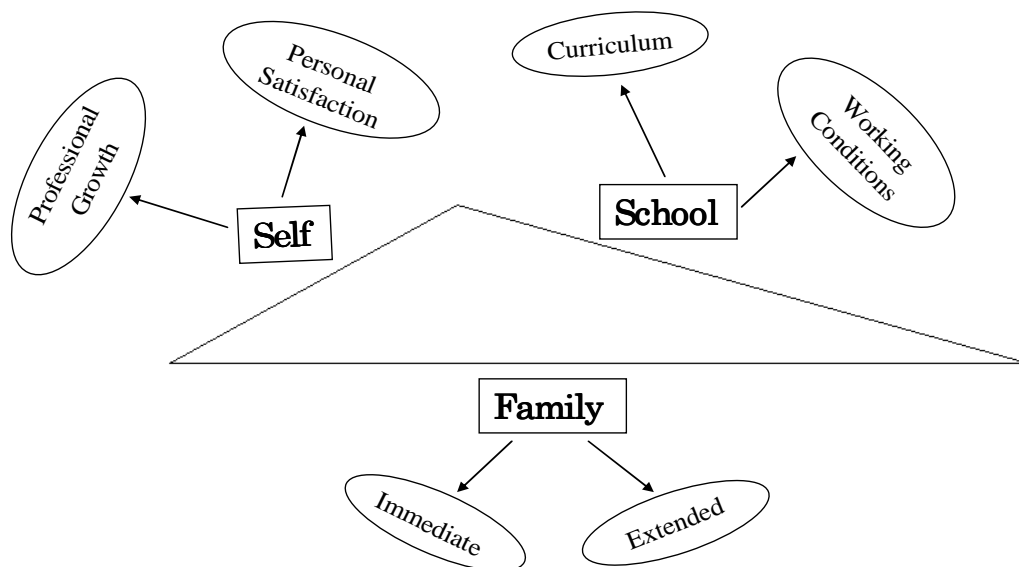


Figure 3. Pictorial representation of the current foundation of rural education.

Metaphorically, in rural middle schools the hypotenuse is represented by the educator's family. It is the conclusion of the current research study that the needs of a rural educators' family are the dominant factor in retention and attrition for rural, middle school educators of North Carolina. The other sides, represented by school and self, follow respectively in order of impact upon retention and attrition. Curriculum and working conditions are examples of components related to school, and professional development and career advancement are examples of components related to self. The rural middle school teachers placed the needs and well-being of their *family* (spouse, children, parents, etc.) before their job satisfaction at *school* (curriculum, working conditions, etc.) and before personal/professional career fulfillment (contentment, professional development, career advancement, etc) for *themselves*.

Teacher retention was maximized in rural middle schools across North Carolina when the needs of the educators' families were met. Teacher attrition increased as the

families' needs either changed or were no longer being satisfied. Rural, middle school educators sacrificed for their families. They sacrificed by often staying in rural assignments that did not promote their personal happiness and their professional growth or leaving a rural assignment that was meeting their personal and professional needs. These 'sides of the triangle' were part of the structural foundation of their rural assignments but played secondary and tertiary roles in decision-making for the rural, middle school educators in regards to retention or attrition.

The concluding point of the current research study is that vested parties (policy makers, professional educators, administrators, etc.) must recognize that there are aspects of rural education concerning retention and attrition that are not under the control of the educational establishment. Vested parties must acknowledge those aspects in order to face and overcome those aspects that are under the control of the educational establishment.

The current research study suggests that rural education stands on a three-sided foundation: family, school and self. The educational establishment may not directly regulate family dynamics but it can act to stabilize the rural foundation through strengthening the rural school environments and supporting the rural educators themselves. Schools are part of communities and communities help address family priorities. Supportive communities can create a climate that helps teachers balance family, work, and personal/professional aspirations. The conclusion of the current research study is that in order to maximize teacher retention and minimize teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina the educational establishment must work to stabilize the foundation of rural education by addressing the sides of the

foundation. The educational establishment must strive to strengthen the rural school environment and empower the rural educator professionally while promoting a community dynamic in which the needs of the families of rural educators can be met. In doing so, the three sided foundation could evolve from a scalene triangle into an isosceles triangle (two sides the same length) or even an equilateral triangle (all sides the same length) with time.

Recommendations

If the objective of the educational establishment is to maximize teacher retention and minimize teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina, then efforts must unite to strengthen the rural school environment, empower the rural educator professionally and promote a community dynamic in which the needs of the families of rural educators can be met.

The current research study included an interview question that was asked with the intention of allowing the participants the opportunity to have a voice. It was the objective of that particular question for participants to voice their wishes in regards to rural education. I recommend that as parties unite efforts toward reducing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention in their rural communities they should listen to the voice of the teachers. Teachers are part of the vested interest; they are on the frontlines of sorts; they are directly involved on a day-to-day basis with the very aspects which need to be addressed. Policymakers should stop and listen to the voices of the teachers of the rural middle school students of North Carolina. They have been hired as professionals to fulfill a niche; I recommend that we heed their ideas and acknowledge their professionalism.

Magic Educational Wand

Recommendations were gathered from the interview question that asked participants to wave their magic educational wand. They were asked if they could wave their magic educational wand and change or fix one aspect of their rural assignment what would it be. Their input is similar to that which could be documented through the use of exit interviews or exit surveys. The responses were as varied as the participants themselves and the rural communities they represented. Bearing in mind the three sided foundation proposed by the current research study, the recommendations either addressed strengthening of the rural school environment, empowering the rural educator professionally or promoting a community dynamic in which the needs of the families of rural educators are met.

Recommendations for change in regards to school-related issues included three components: personnel, finance, and policies. From the perspective of current rural middle school educators, teacher retention and attrition could be addressed in their rural middle school assignments by hiring additional staff in non-core content areas, by working to increase funding for schools and staff, and by focusing on the three E's of policy – elimination of EOG testing, empowering teachers with pass or fail options for students based on grades, and enforcing local achievement standards (example: failing two subjects constituents automatic failure for the year). Each was discussed as means by which the rural school environment could increase retention and decrease attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina. These were points at which the educational establishment could act to stabilize two of the three sides to the triangular foundation of

rural education. These recommendations would act to strengthen the rural school environment while empowering the rural educator professionally.

In addition to recommendations that directly related to the school, the participants offered areas of concern that are indirectly related to the school but are directly related to the rural community. The participants voiced recommendations that addressed their rural communities in relation to population dynamics - enrollment and involvement. One recommendation was to maintain appropriate student/teacher/facility ratios by enforcing district enrollment boundaries. Boundaries that are in place were intended to maintain fair and equitable ratios, but with local leniency and community changes these boundaries are ineffective. The recommendation was to either adhere to the boundaries or to amend them to ensure fair and equitable ratios of students/teachers/facilities. This recommendation addressed a school enrollment issue that emanated from the community. Enforcing district boundaries would ensure fair and equitable ratios within the rural schools which would act to increase retention and decrease attrition. Once again educational decision-makers could act to stabilize two of the three sides to the triangular foundation of rural education. These recommendations would act to strengthen the rural school environment while empowering the rural educator professionally.

The final recommendations from the interview participants directly related to the involvement of the community at-large in the school environment itself. The recommendations are designed to mesh vested parties of the rural community with vested parties within the school community. The objective of these recommendations is to build unity in order to strengthen the rural school environment, empower the rural educator and promote a community dynamic in which the needs of *all* families are met. The

recommendations included communication opportunities, on-site opportunities for parents, and developing a common mindset for all involved. One recommendation was to design venues in which parents, schools, students and teachers could have a more open, seamless form of communication. Communication that was open and multifaceted would allow teachers to feel a professional connection with their students and parents. This connection could improve community awareness, heighten teacher professionalism and enhance the public image of the rural school itself. The benefits of this recommendation were best captured through the words of an interviewee. In his/her words, parents and families would have the opportunity to “be in the know.” This connection between community and school builds unity. It is the observation of this researcher that unity promotes teacher retention and reduces teacher attrition.

In addition to opportunities for communication, it was recommended that opportunities be created to draw parents into the middle school environment. Parent nights, classroom visits, content-area nights, performances, workshops or trainings were options mentioned that would bring parents into the rural middle school. The recommendation once again is designed to get the community at-large into the school community itself, in order to promote unity. The motive is to strengthen the rural school environment, empower the rural educator and promote a community dynamic, in which the needs of *all* families are met; all of which will reduce attrition and improve retention.

Recommendations designed to promote unity, strengthen the rural school environment, empower the educator, and fulfill the needs of families could also generate a peripheral result of developing a common mindset. The interview participants recommended that there was a need for an attitude adjustment (change of mindset) within

the rural community. The need was noted in the community at-large and the school community itself. Vested parties need to be motivated to do their best in order to achieve an optimal future for all involved. The recommendation is not simply for students and families, but for educators and administrators as well. In order to maximize the concept of the value of an education, attitudes concerning the role of education in rural communities must be altered. It is recommended that all parties reevaluate their views of rural education and education in general in order to convince themselves and others that education is the key to a better future for rural students, rural educators, and rural communities.

The recommendations provide a perspective that is fresh and current but that is case specific. The perspective came from high-quality, professional educators dedicated to their rural schools and communities. Their professionalism and dedication was apparent as they spoke passionately, selecting each word carefully, ensuring that their voice was heard and clearly understood. Their comments and recommendations were not personally driven but driven by the needs of their students, their schools, and their communities. Upon further analysis and comparison of previous research the recommendations discussed in the current research study appeared to be appropriate for rural middle schools of North Carolina and maybe for schools in general. All schools have the need to address school and community situations that may have directly or indirectly impacted teacher retention or attrition. Personnel, finance, policies, student enrollment, and community/parent involvement are areas of concern across all educational arenas. Therefore, the recommendations from the interview participants may have been generated based upon personal situations but they were far-reaching in regards

to reducing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention. Whether their implementation and execution would impact retention and attrition in rural middle schools is yet to be seen but it is the recommendation of this researcher that they are a place to start.

Successful Programs

Recommendations previously discussed were just those recommendations that coincided with the wishes of the rural middle school educators involved in the current research study. I would like to recommend that those persons directly involved in rural middle school education heed recommendations provided by current teachers as well as pursuing programs, practices, and policies that are already in place which were shown in the current research study to positively influence teacher retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina.

The unique element to the current research study is the recommendation of the use of recruitment strategies in order to reduce teacher attrition while maximizing teacher retention. All rural North Carolina school systems should develop a program designed to “grow your own” rural educators. These “grow your own” programs were shown in the current research study and in prior literature to be effective programs in increasing teacher retention and decreasing teacher attrition in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Grow your own programs are designed to recruit the right person for a rural assignment; groom them for future employment in the community; and enable their pursuit of higher education through financial support or enticements. The benefits of these programs have been substantiated in prior research and in the current research study. The objective is to hire the right person in order to maximize the likelihood that

they will accept a rural position, remain in that rural position, and strive to promote rural education through their personal and professional life.

Future Studies

Future studies of interest are based upon the “magic educational wand” recommendations previously discussed. Future studies related to the implementation and influence of school (personnel, finance and policy) and community (enrollment and involvement) are recommended as a result of the current research study. Monitoring teacher retention or attrition rates due to an increase in non-core personnel; the increase in school funding; or the focus upon the three E’s (eliminating EOG’s, empowering teachers with pass or fail, and enforcing local achievement standards) are topics worthy of future research. The use of exit interviews or exit surveys to gather information in order to implement change is an additional topic of future research in the efforts toward reducing attrition and maximizing retention.

Additional studies are equally warranted on the ‘grow your own’ programs. Longitudinal case studies of high school students involved in the programs could prove advantageous in regards to long-term benefits upon teacher attrition and teacher retention in rural schools. These studies should be conducted on age-groups, subject/content as well as community/location. These are all areas in which the current research study presented results that proposed further questions about how they each influence teacher retention and teacher attrition in rural middle schools of the state.

Future studies could act to reduce the costs of attrition. It costs students, schools, districts, professional communities, and the community at large. These costs are financial, academic, personal, and professional in nature. In these economic times it is

important that the educational establishment work diligently to get teacher attrition in rural middle schools under control. Actions must be taken to reduce the costs of attrition by heightening teacher retention rates.

In closing, the final thought from the current research study is that teachers are human. They are compilations of their personal situations, their professional conditions and their independent characteristics. When all is said and done, they are, for the most part, natural nurturers. The attributes that make educators the talented professionals that they are, are the same attributes that prompt them to place the needs of their families above their personal or professional aspirations. Those persons charged with finding the solution to teacher attrition are advised to maintain the knowledge that the persons they are most likely to hire as rural educators based upon their character as people are the same persons who are most likely to sacrifice their rural position for betterment of their family. It is therefore the role of the educational establishment to support, strengthen and stabilize the rural educational foundation by strengthening the rural school environment, empowering the rural educator professionally and promoting a community dynamic in which the needs of *all* families are met.

Lee Iacocca once said, “In a rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have” (Hill & Barth, 2004). As the current research study comes to a close, that phrase has taken on a whole new meaning. I would amend that phrase with this closing thought; “In a rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization

along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have other than being part of a family.” Speaking as an educator, I think most teachers have a hard time separating the two.

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Appendix A

Schools Meeting Current Study Criteria

<u>County</u>	<u>School Name</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>
Yancey	Cane River	273	4%	28%	3.50	3.23	2.92	2.96	3.04
Carteret	Broad Creek	545	10%	35%	4.28	4.13	4.11	4.27	4.08
Davidson	N. Davidson	1212	10%	31%	2.86	3.25	3.22	3.07	3.19
Wilkes	E. Wilkes	441	10%	27%	3.82	4.28	3.96	4.13	3.66
Yancey	East Yancey	349	11%	17%	3.45	3.77	3.59	3.95	3.55
Moore	West Pine	776	12%	28%	3.38	4.12	3.57	3.98	3.66
Scotland	Carver	476	12%	12%	3.78	3.78	3.65	4.11	3.60
Transylvania	Rosman	301	12%	42%	3.18	2.73	3.56	3.42	2.96
Burke	Table Rock	704	13%	17%	3.12	3.99	3.26	3.38	3.33
Burke	Liberty	575	14%	40%	3.16	3.49	3.34	3.54	3.32
Wilson	Elm City	488	16%	33%	3.56	3.98	4.16	4.29	3.78
Brunswick	S. Brunswick	876	18%	24%	3.46	3.11	3.61	3.57	3.30
Sampson	Hobbton	396	20%	45%	4.01	4.21	4.23	4.40	4.08
Surry	Pilot Mtn.	478	20%	29%	3.07	3.73	3.16	3.09	3.48
Wake	Wakefield	1287	22%	36%	3.28	3.78	3.96	3.98	3.61
Pitt	Farmville	636	24%	26%	2.89	2.86	3.38	3.29	2.98
Randolph	Uwharrie	430	27%	38%	3.97	4.21	3.43	3.43	3.76
Duplin	Charity	490	28%	36%	3.18	3.03	3.48	3.64	3.08
Northampton	Gaston	231	29%	5%	3.60	4.00	3.87	4.02	3.92

County	School Name	Size	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Alam-Burl.	Woodlawn	574	30%	29%	2.95	3.36	3.32	3.46	3.28
Lincoln	West Lincoln	727	30%	33%	3.48	3.89	3.52	3.76	3.70
Beaufort	S.W. Snowden	89	31%	7%	4.01	4.01	3.99	4.37	4.05
Bertie	C.G. White	209	31%	47%	3.14	3.22	3.41	3.37	2.90
Union	Weddington	1117	31%	31%	3.57	3.93	3.74	3.98	3.70
Pamlico	Pamlico Cty.	301	32%	39%	3.66	3.87	3.48	3.50	3.55
Cherokee	Andrews	240	33%	12%	3.83	3.57	3.94	4.16	3.62
Northampton	Conway	395	37%	32%	3.13	3.83	3.31	3.46	3.56
Wilson	Speight	482	38%	37%	3.49	3.99	3.79	3.97	3.50
Avery	Cranberry	171	47%	41%	3.68	3.34	3.32	3.62	3.15
Pender	West Pender	233	59%	25%	3.55	4.05	4.04	3.99	3.81

Note. A= 2006 Teacher Turnover Rate; B= % Teaching Staff with 4-10 years experience; Data for letters C-G from 2006-07 NC Working Conditions Report Card: 0.00 (low) -5.00 (high); C=Time; D=Facilities/Resources; E=Empowerment; F=Leadership; G=Professional Development.

Appendix B

External Research Consent Form

Cover Letter/Permission for External Research– School/District

My name is Teresa H. Cowan. I am a Doctoral Candidate at Western Carolina University.

I am currently working to complete my doctoral requirements. In this attempt, I am conducting research to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural North Carolina middle schools.

Your school (name of the school) has been selected based upon information available from the Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the NC Schools Report Card.

I am writing this letter first to inform you of the research and second to obtain your permission to solicit teacher participants from your school/district and conduct external research in your school district.

The research calls for participants who have 4-10 years teaching experience and are willing to share their perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Their participation includes a survey and a possible follow-up interview; nothing that would take them away from their classroom responsibilities.

If you have any questions or you would like to discuss this research, you should contact me at 828-230-5034 or Dr. Mary Jean Herzog (Dissertation Chair) at 828-227-3327.

Please complete the portion of the consent form below:

I give permission for you to solicit teacher participants from (said school/district) and conduct external research within (said school/district).

Date: _____ Name: _____
Print name

Name: _____ Title: _____
Signature

Name of School/District: _____

Name of Investigator: _____

Appendix C

Survey

Teacher Retention in Rural Middle Schools of NC

Complete the survey below using your knowledge and experience as a teacher within a rural school of North Carolina. Your school is recognized as a “rural school” within the 2006-2007 NC School Report Card system. Teacher attrition, for the purpose of this survey, is defined as “leaving the classroom before retirement.” Focus upon factors other than retirement that influence teacher attrition in your particular rural school.

1. Gender: _____ female _____ male
2. Age group: _____ under 30 _____ 30-39 _____ 40-49 _____ 50-59 _____ 60+
3. Please indicate your education and certification information. Mark all that apply.
 - a. _____ Certified, but not degreed: area of certification _____
 - b. _____ Bachelor’s degree(s); major/minor area(s): _____
 - c. _____ Master’s degree completed; major/minor area(s): _____
 - d. _____ Master’s degree in progress; major/minor area(s): _____
 - e. _____ National Board Certified Teacher; area of certification: _____
 - f. _____ Additional educational degrees and/or areas of certification: _____
4. I have taught for (to the nearest full year):

_____ year(s) in this school.

_____ year(s) in this district, but not in this school.

_____ year(s), in school district(s) other than this district.

_____ years total.
5. Current assignment: grade level(s) - _____ subject(s): _____

Other- (Spec. Ed., media specialists, etc.) _____

6. Have you ever worked fulltime in a field other than education?

_____ No

_____ Yes, prior to teaching, I worked in _____

_____ Yes, between years of teaching, I worked in _____

7. Would you describe yourself as a person who joined the field of education “mid-career”? In that you entered the field of education as a second or third career.

_____ Yes, because: _____

_____ No, because: _____

8. What were your reasons for accepting your current position in this community?

Mark all that apply.

_____ a) Spouse/future spouse/companion had a job or better job opportunity here.

_____ b) I wanted to live near family or friends that live in this area.

_____ c) I grew up in the city. I wanted to experience a rural setting as an adult.

_____ d) I applied only to rural districts and this was my first or best offer.

_____ e) I applied to urban, suburban and rural districts, this was my first or best offer.

_____ f) I wanted to teach students grades 6-8 in a middle school setting.

_____ g) I saw an opportunity to save money, because _____.

_____ h) The district’s recruiting program attracted me, because _____.

_____ i) The district offered particular incentives, such as _____.

_____ j) I grew up in a rural community and wanted teach in a similar community, because _____.

Other reasons:

k) _____.

l) _____.

9. Of the items marked in question #8, which were the most important factors in your decision to teach in this district?

Print the item letter for your 1st and 2nd choice.

Item _____ was the most important factor.

Item _____ was the second most important factor.

10. What are your current plans in regards to teaching? I plan to.....

_____ teach in this school/district on a long-term basis.

Move to #11- #12 and then move to #15.

_____ teach here for a few more years. Move to #11- #12 and then to #15

_____ teach in another rural school/district in the next year or so. Move to #13

_____ teach in an urban or suburban school/district in the next year or so.

Move to #13

_____ leave the field of education in the next year or so. Move to #13

_____ move into administration. Move to #13

_____ Other: _____.

STAY

11. If you plan to stay in this school for the next few years, what reasons influenced that decision?

Mark all that apply.

_____ a) My spouse/future spouse/companion has a job here.

- _____ b) I want to live near family or friends that live in this area.
- _____ c) I grew up in the city but found I enjoy a rural setting as an adult.
- _____ d) I enjoy my teaching assignment.
- _____ e) I grew up in a rural community and continue to enjoy a rural setting as an adult.
- _____ f) I am saving money more quickly than might be possible elsewhere.
- _____ g) The district continues to offer particular incentives, such as _____.
- _____ h) I enjoy my students, because _____.

Please list other factors which were also important:

- i) _____.
- j) _____.

12. Of the items marked in question #11, what are the top two reasons that have influenced you to stay in your current school?

Print the item letter for your 1st and 2nd choice.

Item _____ is the most important reason.

Item _____ is the second most important reason. (Skip to # 15)

LEAVE

13. If you indicated that you plan to leave this school/district or leave teaching in the next year or so, what are the reasons which influenced that decision? Mark all that apply.

- _____ a) Spouse/future spouse/companion will be moving elsewhere.
- _____ b) I have no family or close friends in the area.

- _____ c) I am finding it difficult to “go back home”.
- _____ d) Working conditions of my school are not satisfactory.
- _____ e) Lifestyle in a rural community is not what I expected.
- _____ f) Cost of living is too high.
- _____ g) I do not enjoy my teaching assignment.
- _____ h) Social or recreational opportunities are limited in this area.
- _____ i) Pursue a job in administration.

Please list other factors which were also important:

j) _____.

k) _____.

14. Of the items marked in question #13, what are the top two reasons that have influenced you to leave your current school/district?

Print the item letter for your 1st and 2nd choice.

Item _____ is the most important reason.

Item _____ is the second most important reason.

15. Why do you think fellow teachers have left your school? Mark all that apply.

- _____ a) Accept a teaching position in another school
- _____ b) Teaching out of certification area/not highly qualified
- _____ c) Back to school/take courses to improve career opportunities
- _____ d) Dissatisfied with job
- _____ e) Curriculum concerns
- _____ f) Better salary or benefits
- _____ g) Change in residence

_____ h) Pursue another career outside of education

_____ i) Not prepared to implement or did not agree with new reform
measures

_____ j) Poor fit (socially, culturally, etc.) for rural community

Please list other reasons that teachers have left your school:

k) _____.

l) _____.

16. Of the items marked in question #15, what are the top two reasons that teachers have left your school?

Print the item letter for your 1st and 2nd choice.

Item _____ is the first reason that teachers have left my school.

Item _____ is the second reason that teachers have left my school.

17. Rank these factors from greatest (1st) to least (5th) in regards to their impact upon teacher attrition at your school.

_____ Time requirements: instruction time, planning time, extra duty time, etc.

_____ Facilities and resources: building, grounds, materials, technology, etc.

_____ School leadership: administrative support, guidance, professionalism, etc.

_____ Teacher empowerment: school-based leadership, involvement in decision-making, etc.

_____ Professional development: staff training opportunities, educational advancements, etc.

Participants will be needed for interviews. If you are willing to participate in an interview (face-to-face, phone, or on-line chats) please provide the following information:

Name: _____ School: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Best time/means in which to contact you: _____

Thank you very much for taking time from your hectic schedule to complete this survey.

Please return the survey in the enclosed stamped, self addressed envelope by

_____ to: Teresa H. Cowan, 26 Wolf Rd., Asheville, NC 28805 or email

to: thembree@bellsouth.net or fax to: 828-298-1240.

Appendix D

Cover Letter/Consent Form – Participants

My name is Teresa H. Cowan. I am a Doctoral Candidate at Western Carolina University.

I am currently working to complete my doctoral requirements. In this attempt, I am conducting research to examine teacher perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural North Carolina middle schools.

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I am writing this letter first to inform you of the research and second to invite you to participate as a representative from your school/district.

The research calls for teachers who have 4-10 years teaching experience and are willing to share their perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina. Your participation would include a survey and a possible follow-up interview; nothing that would take you away from your classroom responsibilities.

If you have any questions or you would like to discuss this research, you should contact me at 828-230-5034 or Dr. Mary Jean Herzog (Dissertation Chair) at 828-227-3327.

Please complete the portion of the consent form below:

I have 4-10 years teaching experience and would like to share my perspectives about teacher attrition and retention in rural North Carolina middle schools.

Date: _____ Name of School/District: _____

Name: _____ Name: _____
 Print name Signature

I do or do not give my permission to the investigator to use my responses/quotes in her research for her dissertation.

I do or do not give my permission to the investigator to use my first name (quotations, etc.) in her research for her dissertation.

The investigator may or may not digitally record interviews.

Recording will be maintained by researcher for the duration of the dissertation process and/or until they can be transcribed. Researcher will be the only person with access to the recordings.

Appendix E

Interview

Probe/Extend for the description of “rural”.

1. Describe a rural community. Follow-up: Describe a rural school.
2. In what ways does your current position fit your description of a rural school?
3. From your perspective, why does the state categorize your school as “rural”?
 - a. Follow-up: Community attributes?...if needed

Probe/Extend for personal background/work experience.

4. Why do you stay in this assignment?
 1. Follow-up: describe your family dynamics (marital status, children, etc.):
 2. Would you say that you have had a “rural background” prior?
 3. How would you explain or characterize your “rural background”?
5. What factors would prompt you to leave your current rural assignment?
6. If current assignment does not reflect “typical” work assignment, explain:

Probe/Extend for teaching attrition among colleagues.

7. Probe related to attrition factors. Talk to me about a situation in which a colleague left your school. Explore the circumstances if needed.
8. Probe related to working conditions. You mentioned that _____ (one of the five factors from the Teachers Working Conditions) influenced teacher attrition at your school. Explain your interpretation of _____.
9. Probe related to curriculum. Do curriculum concerns among teachers act to increase teacher attrition? Why or why not?

Probe/Extend for reducing teacher attrition in rural schools.

10. Probe related to attrition factors. When you hear teachers discuss leaving your school, are there factors that consistently are mentioned? Tell me about them.
11. Probe related to working conditions. Does your school/district do something to address working conditions in order to reduce teacher attrition?
12. Probe related to curriculum. What are your thoughts about curriculum within your school? Do you have ideas related to curriculum that might reduce teacher attrition?

Probe/Extend for the future.

13. If you could wave your magic education wand and change/fix one aspect of your rural assignment, what would it be?
14. Change or not....would it prompt you to leave your rural school?

Probe/Extend for NCLB concerns if results deem appropriate.

15. What are your thoughts about NCLB’s impact upon teacher attrition?
16. Can you tell me about a situation in which policy mandates impacted teacher attrition at your rural school?