

Dissertation Executive Summary



Doctor of Education: Leadership, Learning and Community OR Doctor of Education: Higher Education

Why Rural Teachers Stay: Examining Teacher Retention and Attrition in New Hampshire's Rural Schools

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Introduction: The purpose of this study was to examine teacher retention and attrition in rural New Hampshire schools and to that end better understand why teachers choose to stay employed in rural New Hampshire schools. This study focused on New Hampshire rural schools because of the uniqueness of the state's rural contexts.

Problem of Practice: The literature suggests that rural schools are most at risk for retaining highly qualified teachers (Guha, Heally & Adams, 2016; Hyler & Darling-Hamond, 2017; Kaden, Patterson, Malloy, & Allen, 2007). The problem of practice was to better understand why teachers choose to stay employed in rural New Hampshire schools, and how the state's different rural contexts influence teacher retention. To thoroughly answer this question, the following sub-questions served to drive data collection and analysis in this study.

- How do New Hampshire's rural contexts influence teacher retention in relation to working conditions?
- How do New Hampshire's rural contexts influence teacher retention in relation to job satisfaction?
- How do New Hampshire's rural contexts influence teacher retention in relation to community engagement?

Research Method: This qualitative multi case study was conducted to better understand why teachers choose to stay employed in rural New Hampshire schools, and how the state's different rural contexts influence teacher retention. The study included three schools, located in the three most rural regions of New Hampshire. Each was considered through sampling procedures to best represent their specific rural context. A cross case analysis was conducted to account for generalizations across all contexts. Data was collected for this qualitative study using pertinent document reviews, administrative interviews, and teacher focus groups. The data was analyzed and coded utilizing Corbin and Strauss's Thematic Analysis process (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014). A total of 15 teachers and 3 administrators were interviewed for this study.

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Summary of Findings: Results from this study revealed insights into why teachers choose to stay employed in rural New Hampshire Schools. This study illuminated the unique sense of place of each school and how each rural context is affected by and addresses teacher retention. The findings of this study suggest teachers will forgo working conditions for strong levels of job satisfaction and community engagement, retaining supportive school leaders supports overall teacher job satisfaction necessary for teacher retention, engagement does not occur in isolation, and personal considerations both draw and remove teachers to and from rural communities.

Limitation(s) of Study: This study was limited by virtue of sample size and researcher bias. While rural communities are in abundance across the state of New Hampshire this study only focused on the three most rural regions of the seven regions classified by the state's travel and tourism department (New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs, 2018).

Implications/Significance of Study: The conclusions of this study identify areas in which rural schools can effectively maintain a highly competent and consistent teaching staff. This could prove advantageous for the continued sustainability of rural schools, rural communities, as well as the state of New Hampshire in general.