



An investigation of factors related to teacher retention in small rural school districts in Montana
by Marsha Smith Davis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
in Education

Montana State University

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to identify factors inherent in Montana's smallest elementary schools that attract and retain teachers. Certified elementary teachers in 107 elementary school districts with a student enrollment of 40 students or less (classified as 6E by OPI) were invited to participate (N=147). Respondents (126 teachers) completed a questionnaire indicating the extent of influence that factors related to teacher retention had on their decisions to accept employment and remain teaching in their current schools. Secondly, the factors categorized as the "four spheres of influence," based on the work of Boylan et al. (1993), were analyzed to determine if there were significant differences as to their influence on teachers' decisions to accept employment and remain teaching in these schools.

Individual factors were ranked by their means to identify those that were reported by teachers to have the highest extent of influence on their decisions. Factors were categorized using the "four spheres of influence:" personal/family, within classroom, community and whole-school and analyzed utilizing paired t-tests of dependent means to determine if differences existed between them in their influence on teachers' decisions to accept employment and remain teaching in their present schools.

The factor that had the greatest influence on teachers' decisions to accept employment was "enjoy the rural lifestyle." Other factors reported as having a considerable influence were "challenge of the teaching position," "safe environment," and "family and/or home is close by." "Relationships with students" was the factor having the greatest influence on their decisions to remain teaching in their present school. Three additional factors having considerable influence were "enjoy the rural lifestyle," "support from parents and community," and "safe environment." When individual factors were categorized by the "four spheres of influence," mean scores for each sphere revealed that factors related to the personal/family sphere of influence had the greatest influence on teachers' decisions to accept employment.

Factors related to the community sphere of influence had the greatest influence on teachers' decisions to remain teaching. Factors related to the whole-school sphere of influence had the least influence on teachers' decisions to both accept employment and remain teaching in their present schools.

Statistically significant differences were found between all paired mean scores of the four spheres of influence related to acceptance of employment supporting the hierarchical ranking of influence that each sphere had on teachers' decisions: personal/family, within classroom, community and whole-school. Statistically significant differences were found between three of the four paired mean scores of the four spheres of influence related to teachers' decisions to remain teaching. No significant difference was found between the mean scores of within classroom and personal/family spheres of influence within the population of 6E teachers.

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2002

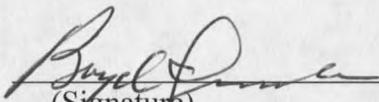
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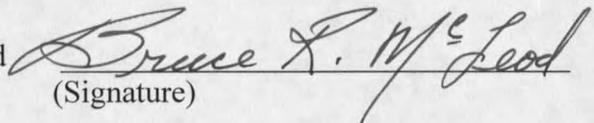
This dissertation has been read by each member of the dissertation committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

Dr. Boyd Dressler  4/16/02
(Signature) (Date)

Approved for the Department of Education

Dr. Robert Carson  4/16/02
(Signature) (Date)

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Bruce McLeod  4-19-02
(Signature) (Date)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher is appreciative of the efforts of many individuals who provided guidance, assistance, support and encouragement on the long journey toward the completion of this endeavor. Included are:

- Dr. Boyd Dressler, committee chair, whose patience and thoughtful feedback were invaluable throughout the dissertation process;
- Drs. Rich Howard, Joanne Erickson, James Doyle, and Priscilla Lund, doctoral committee members, whose time and expertise aided in the successful conclusion of this study;
- Dr. Colin Boylan, Charles Sturt University, whose research inspired me;
- The 126 teachers from Montana's 6E elementary school districts who gave of their time and willingly shared their experiences and opinions;
- My friends at the Office of Public Instruction who cheered me on;
- My loving husband and best friend, Michael, who sustained me through the tears and years;
- My dear parents, Hannah and Forest Smith, who taught me that life is precious and that time spent with family is priceless; and
- My Heavenly Father, who has and continues to bless me in so many ways each day.

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Abstract

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Growing concern about the nationwide teacher shortages has focused considerable attention on education and the teaching profession in the last five years. More than a million teachers are close to retirement, and projections indicate the need for more than two million teachers by 2010 (Education Week's Quality Counts 2000). Several conditions account for this national "crisis" including an increasing student population, attrition rates in teacher preparation programs, and the retention of teachers once they enter the profession (Allen, 2000; Fox & Certo, 1999). Roughly one-third of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Texas Education Agency, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999 as cited in Fox & Certo, 2001; Nielson, 2001).

The retention rate for rural teachers has historically been low (Williams & Cross, 1987). Stone (1990) reports that teacher turnover in rural areas reaches 30% to 50% compared with a national average of 6% annually. Data from the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) examined by Ingersoll and Rossi (1995) found that schools with less than 300 students experienced higher turnover rates than did those sites with the greatest number of students. An observation reported in a Texas Teacher Recruitment and Retention Study completed in 1999 was that greater teacher mobility was experienced in rural districts over both urban and suburban districts.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, "rural" is defined as an area with a population of 2,500 inhabitants or less (Beeson & Strange, 2000). In Montana, using this definition, rural students comprise 32.5% of all its public school students and the schools these students attend make up 63.2% of the school districts in Montana (Beeson & Strange, 2000). In 1999, there were 151 multi-grade independent elementary school districts supervised directly by County Superintendents (Morton, 1999). All of these districts have one school building containing grades K-8. Twenty-one of these school districts have a principal but the vast majority, 130 schools, have one supervising teacher or a supervising teacher with as many as 11 professional staff (Morton, 1999).

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) classifies school districts by the size of student enrollment. "Small elementary districts," defined as those with 40 or fewer students, are classified as 6E. They comprised 110 of the multi-grade independent elementary districts during the 1999-2000 school year (Nielson, 2000) (Appendix A). Of these, 73 are truly one-room schools with only one teacher who is expected to meet the educational and extracurricular needs of all students (Morton, 1999; Nielson, 2001).

In April 2000, Montana Governor Racicot appointed a task force to study the issue of teacher shortages and teacher salaries in Montana. The conclusion of the six-month study was that there is indeed a problem related to the retention of teachers in Montana. The twelve-member task force determined seven factors to be most highly related to the current status of teacher shortages:

- low salary;
- recruitment efforts of other states and districts;
- lack of induction and mentoring programs;

- retirement/post-retirement employment options;
- immense workloads and preparations due to small school settings;
- remoteness of available openings; and
- working conditions and other factors affecting daily teaching (Burke, 2000, p. 5).

The task force felt three of these factors were particularly problematic for the smallest of Montana's rural school districts—low salary, remoteness and immense workloads.

Morton (1999) surveyed county superintendents of 151 school districts (6E schools are a subset of these districts) to gather information concerning salaries and benefits for these districts. She found that full-time teachers' salaries ranged from \$11,565 to \$38,775 during the 1998-99 school year with an average salary of \$23,050. This represents roughly \$9,000 less than the average teacher salary for the state, and \$18,500 less than the national average (Nielson, 2001).

Since there is generally a correlation between general fund budgets and student enrollment, teachers in schools with the lowest student enrollment and lowest general fund budgets tended to be paid less. In general, the lowest paid teachers had little or no health insurance or other benefits such as professional or personal leave. In several cases, these teachers also were responsible for performing janitorial services with little or no additional pay (Morton, 1999).

Janitorial duties, for example, add to an already heavy workload for rural teachers. While single teacher schools may enjoy the benefit of a small class size ranging from 1 to 18 students, the teacher is responsible for instruction in all subject areas for all grades, recess duty, lunch duty, and extracurricular activities with generally no preparation time during the school day. Nielson (2001) reported that during 1999-2000,

there were 73 of these districts and “they are beginning to feel a severe shortage of teachers willing to work in their schools” (p. 10).

The Montana Office of Public Instruction in cooperation with the Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council (CSPAC) gathered information from all districts about teacher shortages through the October 1999 fall report. Major reasons identified for positions described as “hard to fill” in 1999 related to distances/isolation of rural assignments, low salaries and benefits, and part-time or multiple role positions (Nielson, 2000). “Two-thirds of the difficulties hiring elementary teachers are in small elementary districts with 40 or fewer students” (Nielson, 2001, p. 7). These reasons represent the conditions that exist in the population of this study.

Projections indicate that Montana will need approximately 909 new teachers and administrators each year for the next several years (Nielson, 2001). Current school district administrators indicate that the “greatest need for new certified staff will be for elementary teachers—approximately 150 per year” (Nielson, 2000, p. 3). Montana’s smallest rural schools, ever competing with more desirable teacher openings, will be more challenged to acquire teachers when needed.

Two studies conducted in Montana since 1992 by Morton (1999) gathered data about teacher salaries and benefits for these smallest of Montana’s rural school districts. Information from these studies contributes to the knowledge about the compensation of Montana’s rural teachers. Little is known, however, about who these teachers are and how long or why they stay in these schools. This study will strengthen the knowledge base about the characteristics and perspectives of teachers who persevere in teaching in rural schools, why they choose to teach there, and why they stay.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study was the lack of knowledge that exists about the reasons teachers in Montana's smallest elementary school districts accept teaching positions and remain teaching in these schools. If Montana is going to be prepared for projected teacher shortage, it will be necessary to identify and implement strategies to attract and retain teachers for its schools. Reliable knowledge about those who currently teach in the smallest of Montana's rural elementary school districts is essential data in order to determine those strategies that may be most effective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors inherent in Montana's smallest schools that attract and retain teachers. Attracting and retaining quality teachers for Montana's schools is essential to maintain its successful education system. Traditionally, students have demonstrated high levels of academic performance on national measures of assessment such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Good teachers are integral to the excellence Montanans have come to expect from their schools and districts.

Difficulty in securing and retaining well-prepared and well-qualified teachers is theorized by Sher (1983) to be "largely a function of the three C's: characteristics, conditions and compensation" (p. 261). A similar but slightly more specific model of teacher retention was developed by Boylan et al.(1993), using grounded theory methodology that served as a useful framework for this study. He defined the following

four spheres of influence that affect a teacher's decision to remain or leave a teaching position:

1. Within Classroom Activities;
2. Whole School-Level Activities;
3. Community Level Activities; and
4. Family/Personal Factors (p. 123)

Within Classroom Activities consist of such things as interactions with students, collegial relationships with other teachers, and a sense of accomplishment in the duties of teaching itself. Beyond the classroom, the influence of Whole School-Level Activities might include relationships with supervisors, professional development opportunities, paperwork requirements, or the physical condition of the school. Examples of Community Level Activities include parental support, involvement in the community, geographic location of the school, and the safety of the environment. The last category of influence, Family/Personal Factors, is concerned with issues such as quality of lifestyle, commitment to family, contentment with rural living, and home ownership (Boylan et al., 1993).

Through review of available literature on rural education and discussions with Montana rural education experts, factors were identified and used to construct the survey instrument for this study. Thirteen factors were identified as possible influences for teachers in their decisions to accept teaching positions. Fourteen factors were identified as possible influences for teachers in deciding to remain teaching in small rural schools. Each grouping of factors was then categorized using the four influences identified by Boylan as part of the data analysis process.

Research Questions

Three research questions were crafted to address the problem identified for this study:

1. How much influence did each of the 13 factors have on teachers' decisions to *accept* employment in their present school as reported by teachers in the "Teaching in Montana's Small Rural Schools Survey?"
2. How much influence did each of the 14 factors have on teachers' decisions to *remain* teaching in their present school as reported by teachers in the "Teaching in Montana's Small Rural Schools Survey?"
3. When individual factors were categorized by the four spheres of influence identified by Boylan et al. (1993) (e.g., Within Classroom, Whole School-Level, Community Level, and Family/Personal), how did they rank as having influenced teachers' decisions to accept employment and remain teaching in their present schools?

Significance of the Study

Teacher retention is a critical issue for all rural schools, but particularly for Montana, since it is characterized by a high percentage of school districts classified as "rural." Recent research concerning rural teacher recruitment and retention "appears thin and much of it has been conducted outside the United States," reports Collins (1999, p.

- 1). Other scholars describe it as "limited" and "of poor quality" (Storey, 1993; De Young, 1987; Stephens, 1985). Much of this research has focused on the issue of why

teachers leave rather than why they stay and populations studied have tended to be concerned with pre-service teachers, first-year teachers, and/or administrators. Ingersoll and Rossi (1995) state that more research is needed on the specific influences that affect teachers' decisions to remain at their schools or in the profession. Information gained from this study may suggest strategies that school districts and administrators can employ in recruiting and maintaining quality in their teaching staffs in Montana school districts.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

There are natural limitations of this study. The study focused only on the smallest school districts in Montana. While there are other schools and school districts in the state, it was the intent of this study to focus on those 107 school districts, or the smallest, which have or seem to have the greatest challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers. The sample for this study was also the population and thus findings may not necessarily be generalized to other larger school districts in Montana; however, the study's findings may be applicable to similar size school districts in other states with high percentages of rural schools. The study was purposely delimited by two factors. First, elementary certified teachers were the focus of the elementary school districts in the state and information was sought from these 147 teachers. Second, only data/information from the 2001-2002 school year was sought.

Definition of Terms

There are several terms and concepts whose definitions are important for this study.

6E—A school district enrollment size category; elementary with 40 or fewer students (Montana Statewide Education Profile).

Elementary School—A school is classified as elementary if it has one or more of grades K-6 and does not have any grade higher than grade 8; for example, schools with grades K-6, 1-3, or 6-8 are classified as elementary schools (Schools and Staffing Survey-1990-91, National Center for Education Statistics).

Local Education Agency (LEA)—LEAs, or public school districts, are government agencies that employ elementary or secondary teachers and are administratively responsible for providing public elementary/secondary instruction and support services (Schools and Staffing Survey, National Center for Education Statistics).

Multi-Grade—Students in a class assigned to one teacher represent more than one grade level (Claudette Morton, Director of Small Schools Alliance).

Office of Public Instruction (OPI)—The state education agency for the Montana K-12 school system (Montana Statewide Education Profile Glossary).

Public School—A public school is defined as an institution that provides educational services for at least one of grades 1-12, has one or more teachers to give instruction, is located in one or more buildings, receives public funds as primary support, and is operated by an education agency (The Schools and Staffing Survey, National Center for Education Statistics).

Rural—The U.S. Census Bureau category for an area with a population of 2,500 inhabitants or less.

School District—An agency administratively responsible for providing elementary and/or secondary instruction or educational support services (Montana Statewide

Education Profile Glossary).

Small School—The Montana Statewide Education Profile reports that Montana is comprised of many small schools and classrooms due to the rural nature of the state. During 1998-99, the average school size was 175 students per school; over half of the schools had 100 or fewer students, and over two-thirds had 200 or fewer (p. 8).

Teacher—A teacher is defined as a full-time or part-time teacher who teaches any regularly scheduled classes in any of grades K-12 (The Schools and Staffing Survey, National Center for Education Statistics). In this study, the term teacher does not include itinerant teachers, substitutes, administrators, or specialists such as counselors, music teachers, physical education teachers, special education teachers, or librarians.

Teacher Recruitment—Refers to the various strategies employed by school districts/administrators to attract teachers to accept employment in a school district (formulated by the researcher based on review of the related literature).

Teacher Retention—Refers to the proportion of teachers in one year who are still teaching in the same school the following year (Policy Research Report, Texas Education Agency).

Teacher Attrition—Refers to the number of teachers in one year who are no longer teaching the following year (Policy Research Report, Texas Education Agency).

Tenure—Whenever a teacher has been elected by the offer and acceptance of a contract for the fourth consecutive year of employment by a district in a position requiring teacher certification..., the teacher is considered to be reelected from year to year as a tenured teacher... (School Laws of Montana, OPI, 2001).

Turnover—The rate at which teachers exit schools; consisting of both teacher migration (i.e., “movers”—those who transfer or migrate to teaching positions in other schools) and teacher attrition (i.e., “leavers”—those who leave teaching altogether).

Ungraded—Classes or programs to which students are assigned without standard grade designation (Montana Statewide Education Profile Glossary).

Other terms and concepts are defined in the context of this research narrative.

Summary

“The rural teacher can properly be viewed as the key to the quality of rural education” (Sher, 1983, p. 261). It is essential that strategies be identified and implemented that will contribute to the longevity of quality teachers for Montana’s rural schools. The purpose of this study was to identify factors inherent in Montana’s smallest elementary schools that attract and retain teachers.

In the next chapter, a review of the related literature will provide the reader with information regarding teacher shortages in general, as well as Montana teacher shortages. The field of rural education and the research conducted related to the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural schools will be reviewed and organized according to three categories suggested by Sher (1983). Finally, an overview of a model of teacher retention developed by Boylan et al. (1993) will conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, information is presented on teacher shortages, both nationally and specific to Montana. Issues pertaining to rural education and its body of research are discussed. Research specific to the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural schools is analyzed according to Sher's (1983) three categories: characteristics, conditions, and compensation. An overview of the four spheres of influence developed by Boylan et al. (1993) as a theoretical model for teacher retention concludes the chapter.

Teacher Shortages

Nationally, estimates indicate that 2.4 million teachers will be needed in the next decade (Hussar, 1999). The National Education Association warns, "an historic turnover in the teaching profession is on the way" (www.nea.org/teaching/shortage.html, p. 1). Two of the greatest factors contributing to the looming shortage are increasing student enrollment and the aging of the current work force. By 2008, student enrollment is expected to exceed 54 million, an all-time record according to the National Center for Education Statistics (1998; as cited in Fox & Certo, 2001). Rising birth rates and the

impact of immigration are viewed as central to this historic national event (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Secondly, more than a third of today's teachers are age 50 or older and will more than likely retire within the next 10-15 years (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1998; Merrow, 1999; Fox & Certo, 1999).

Additionally, more teachers are now needed and will continue to be needed as a result of appropriations set aside for education at the national level. The United States Congress, in response to educational research supportive of smaller classes as a means to increase student performance, passed legislation in 1999 to provide additional funding to schools to reduce class size. Hand-in-hand with smaller classes is the need for teachers to fill those classrooms.

Lastly, teachers are not entering and/or staying in the profession. While not a new problem, serious consequences could be the result when combined with the other contributing factors identified above. Darling-Hammond (1999) reports that institutions of higher education are producing more than sufficient numbers of teachers. The following statistics from America's Teachers: Profile of a Profession shed light on this issue of teacher supply and demand (NCES, 1993-025):

- Only 58 percent of newly qualified teachers were employed as teachers the year after they graduated (p. 25).
- Twenty-eight percent of newly qualified teachers did not apply for teaching jobs (p. 28).

New college graduates represent the primary source of supply for teacher vacancies; thus it is of great concern that such high numbers of newly qualified teachers are not entering the profession. Researchers reason that some graduates view the teaching

field as a career option for the future or that positions in desired locales were simply not available (Fox & Certo, 1999). Others report a loss of interest in teaching as a result of discouragement with their student teaching experience, attraction of other jobs with higher salaries, feelings of unpreparedness, and dissatisfaction with perceived teaching conditions (NCES, 1993-025).

Another factor is the attrition rate for beginning teachers. Marlow et al. (1997) reported that "as many as 40 percent of beginning teachers resign during their first two years of teaching" (p. 43). Levels of support from the administration, other colleagues, parents and the community are cited as important in teachers' reasons for leaving (Marlow et al., 1997; Metropolitan Life, 1986).

A different explanation emerges in the report of The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. In its report, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," inadequate preparation was indicated as one of the factors to explain why some teachers don't remain in the profession (1996). In the Condition of Education report (1999), the majority of public school teachers (71%) indicated they felt well prepared to handle discipline in their classrooms; however, far fewer teachers reported that they felt well prepared to implement new teaching methods (41%), implement state or district curriculum and performance standards (36%), use various assessment strategies (28%), integrate technology into their teaching methods (20%) or address the needs of students with disabilities (21%) (NCES, 1999-80).

Other researchers argue that distribution of teachers is the problem, not a teacher shortage (Fox & Certo, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999). Wealthy school districts and

districts in alluring geographical locations are likely to continue to have plenty of teacher applicants when vacancies occur (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Shortages are more common for urban and rural areas, however (Croasmun et al., 2000; Chaika, 2000). A lack of qualified teachers was reported by two-thirds of the districts that comprise the Council of the Great City Schools Organization according to a report by Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (1998).

Subject area specialization in science, math, special education, technology and bilingual education represents another key distribution issue. Career opportunities offering far higher salaries abound for those with backgrounds in science, math and technology in today's economy (NASBE, 1998). Rising rates in student enrollment comprised of students with special needs, including English as a Second Language, demand teacher education majors with subject matter expertise in bilingual and special education.

Teacher shortages are occurring nationally for a variety of reasons—rising student enrollment, aging of the work force, and reductions in the supply of teachers. In the next section, the teacher shortage problem in Montana is presented.

Montana Teacher Shortages

“A teacher shortage problem does, in fact, exist in Montana,” was a conclusion of the Governor's Task Force on Teacher Shortage/Teacher Salaries completed in 2000 (Burke, 2000, p. 2). Nielson (2001), in her analysis of various Montana studies conducted in recent years states, “the problem is here, right now, and it's big” (p. 17). In

some ways, Montana mirrors the explanations at the national level, the aging of the teaching force being one example. Nielson (2001) reports that an 85% increase in the number of retirements occurred in 2000 over the previous year according to Montana Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) data. Within the next five years, an additional 1,568 teachers will be 50 years old with 25 years of service or more and may likely consider retirement.

Montana also mirrors the national research performed by Darling-Hammond (1999). An adequate supply of teacher graduates is completing Montana's education programs (Nielson, 2001). One institution, the University of Montana (UM), reports that a dramatic decline in the percentage of graduates that stay in Montana to teach has taken place in the last six years. While the information is not complete, statistics maintained by the Director of Field Experiences, Marlene Bachman, show that only 27% of the 2000-2001 UM teacher education graduates accepted jobs in Montana compared to 79% of graduates staying in Montana during 1995-96. Nielson (2001) noted a similar finding in an examination of the "teacher program completers" from the eight teacher education colleges in Montana in 1996-97 and 1997-98. She found that only 29% of the 1,830 graduates were actually teaching in Montana's accredited schools during the 1999-2000 school year.

In addition to the loss of teachers through retirement and the loss of new graduates, experienced teachers are also leaving Montana. The 2000 Montana K-12 Staff Recruitment and Retention Report (Nielson, 2000) revealed that of the 1,108 certified staff positions with turnover in the last five years, 16% or 177 were the result of taking

another position out of state. Writing about the aggressive recruitment of other western states such as California and Nevada, one Montana Standard reporter stated, "They're even raiding experienced teachers who retire early here then pad their income and retirement pay by teaching elsewhere" (December 26, 1999, A5).

As in the nation, Montana is experiencing difficulties in certain subject area specialties. Information collected by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) during October 1999 indicated that the greatest needs for teachers were in order of priority: music, special education, guidance, world languages, and library (Nielson, 2000). Requirements of accreditation standards may partially account for the numbers of guidance and library positions that are difficult to fill. The Standards for School Accreditation established FTE requirements for both library media services and guidance based on the enrollment of the school. In the case of library media, for example, a school with 126-250 students must have a .5 FTE certified media specialist, 1 FTE is required for schools with 251-500, etc. Regarding guidance, the standards state, "A minimum equivalent of one full-time counselor for each 400 elementary (K-8) students shall be provided" (OPI, 2001, 10.55.710). Special language is included for small schools:

- Schools or districts with fewer than 125 students shall employ or contract with a certified, endorsed school library media specialist, or seek alternative ways to provide library media services, using certified personnel (10.55.709 (2)).
- Schools and or districts with fewer than 125 students shall employ or contract with a certified, endorsed school guidance specialist, or they shall seek alternative ways to provide guidance services and meet the required guidance program goals (10.55.710 (3)).

Of greatest concern in this study, especially for the small rural schools in Montana, is the finding of the Montana K-12 Schools Staff Recruitment and Retention Report that within

“the next two years, school districts estimate the greatest need for new certified staff will be for elementary teachers—approximately 150 per year” (Nielson, 2000, p. 3). These teachers must by necessity be generalists, able to teach a variety of subjects.

All the reasons for the national teacher shortage problem are present in Montana as well. Additionally, Montana is experiencing the loss of its graduates and experienced teachers to other states that pay higher salaries and offer other incentives. Since Montana is primarily a rural state, the next subsection focuses on the nature of rural education.

Rural Education

Defining the concept of “rural” has been a predominant theme present in the literature about rural education for many years (Kannapel & Young, 1999). The U. S. Department of Education Committee on Rural Education found 31 different definitions in their search for the meaning of rural (Nielson, 1991). Stern (1994) attributes the differences to be dependent upon program authority in federal and state statutes. The U. S. Census Bureau has established several categories to describe community type within two broad descriptors: “metropolitan” and “nonmetropolitan.” These descriptors reference counties; however, rather than “places” within the counties. Two of the six categories listed under nonmetropolitan that contain “rural” are as follows:

- Completely rural (no places of 2,500 or more population) adjacent to a metropolitan area.
- Completely rural, not adjacent to a metropolitan area (Stern, 1994, p. 17).

Despite the various definitions that exist, “rural” is usually determined on the basis of “sparse population” and/or “isolation from a population center” (Stern, 1994, , p. 4).

According to Beeson and Strange (2000), "one-fourth of U.S. schoolchildren go to schools in rural areas or small towns of less than 25,000 population. Fourteen percent go to schools in even smaller places with fewer than 2,500 people" (p. 1). In terms of actual schools, the Atlantic Educational Laboratory (AEL) indicates that 45% of schools in the United States are located in rural areas and small towns [On-line, 2001]. Despite this fact, these schools, the children and communities they represent are usually left out of the national education debate (Beeson & Strange, 2000). Great diversity characterizes rural populations, accounting for this void. In describing Rural America, Sher (1977) maintains that it is like a blind man attempting to understand what an elephant is by holding its tail. A fishing village in Alaska, an Indian Reservation in Montana, a farming community in Iowa, a mining town in Appalachia, and an oil boom town in Texas may all be small rural communities; however, homogeneity is not apt to be present when comparing these communities. Beeson and Strange (2000) maintain that this diversity causes rural people to be "politically invisible" (p. 1).

Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) describe certain common characteristics, generalizable and unique to rural communities, in their extensive review of literature on rural education. They report that "most rural communities:

- Are experiencing population loss;
- Are poorer;
- Offer few opportunities for educational and occupational advancement;
- Are quite similar to urban America in their economic structure; and
- Have lower levels of formal education of rural residents" (p. 68-69).

Isolation is consistently linked with rural communities, albeit geographical, social, cultural and/or professional (Bull & Hyle, 1989). In fact, isolationism is a frequently

cited reason teachers leave their positions in rural communities (Murphy & Angelski, 1996-97; Bull & Hyle, 1989; Barker & Beckner, 1987; Luft, 1991).

While these characteristics seem somewhat dismal, a number of positive assets are also noted about rural communities. A set of values permeates rural communities that cause its residents to strongly desire to be there, in fact, "staying close to family and friends is more important than high-paying jobs" reports Kannapel and DeYoung (1999, p. 69). Relationships with others are of primary importance. Nachtigal (1982) comments on the social structure of rural communities:

Social interactions are more tightly linked in rural communities than in urban communities; personal interactions are more frequent. One meets the same people in a variety of social settings—at school, church, the local stores, the doctor (p. 270).

Many of these positive characteristics are true of rural schools as well. With generally smaller enrollments, the teacher and students know one another well, extending that sense of community within the school. The school itself is central to many social, cultural, and recreational activities for the community. Other important strengths of rural schools include: individual student attention, strong community support, greater opportunities for student participation in extracurricular activities, and caring teacher-student relationships (Jess, 1985; Carlson, 1992).

Special problems, however, exist for rural schools according to Beeson and Strange (2000). Isolation and low salaries cause difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators. General fund budgets are often consumed by high costs of transporting students long distances. Teachers must "wear many hats" in the rural school

setting, resulting in the need for them to teach subjects or perform services outside their area of certification (Nielson, 2001). Kannapel and DeYoung report that “educators who serve rural schools, as a group, are younger and less experienced than their urban counterparts and have less professional preparation” (1999, p. 70).

Efforts to bring attention about rural schools and communities to national attention were made by the Rural School and Community Trust in its published report Why Rural Matters released in 2000 (Beeson & Strange, 2000). In it, the authors gathered and analyzed data from all 50 states to compare them on the following measures or “gauges,” as they were termed:

- Rural Importance Gauge: How important is it to the overall educational performance of the state to explicitly address the particular needs of schools serving its rural communities? (p. 4)
- Rural Urgency Gauge: Given the conditions in the state’s rural schools and communities, how urgent is it in each state that policymakers develop explicit rural education policies? (p. 5)

Each gauge was comprised of several indicators (8 and 11, respectively, as above) to arrive at a placement for each state along a continuum. For example, three indicators for the rural importance gauge included the number of people living in rural places, the percentage of public schools in rural areas, and the percentage of rural children in poverty. Indicators for the rural urgency gauge included such things as average rural teaching salary, percentage of rural schools with internet access, and average percentage of rural school expenditures spent on instruction. Montana’s ranking (Appendix B)

indicates that “rural education is crucial to Montana, and the need for an explicit rural education policy is critical” (Beeson & Strange, 2000, p. 40).

Defining what it means to be rural has been problematic for research in the area of rural education. Adding to this quandary is the fact that the great diversity represented by rural America contributes to its neglect on the national agenda. A recent report, however, indicates that it is crucial that Montana address the importance of rural education. A discussion of rural educational research that has been conducted is presented in the next subsection.

Rural Education Research

Educational research in issues faced by small rural schools is viewed as woefully lacking. Storey (1993) in his review cites the following assessments:

Research on the particular problems and issues in rural education is still relatively obscure, lacking in focus, and comparatively unsophisticated (DeYoung, 1987, p. 36).

There is not at present a body of research providing a comprehensive and inclusive view of rural education that even begins to approach that on education in an urban setting (Stephens, 1985, p. 167)

Research concerning rural teacher recruitment and retention “appears thin,” reports Collins (1999, p. 1), especially within the United States. McIntosh agrees that “references in the literature on the topic of recruitment are extremely limited and almost non-existent on the topic of retention” (1989, p. 26). The literature that does exist often contains methodological problems (i.e., small sample size, controlling for variables), concluded Boylan and McSwan (1998) in their examination of several North American

studies.

The vast majority of the research conducted in the United States specific to rural teachers—recruitment, turnover and/or retention—dates back to the 1980's and early 1990's and is survey design. More current research on this topic appears to be emanating from British Columbia, Australia and New Zealand. A great deal of the research focuses on the reasons teachers leave rural schools or how to recruit teachers to rural schools. Fewer studies have looked at the reasons teachers might be attracted to or continue to teach in rural schools.

A useful framework for examining the literature and research on the recruitment and retention of rural teachers is one proposed by Sher (1983). He maintains that difficulty in securing and retaining well prepared and well qualified teachers is "largely a function of the three C's: characteristics, conditions, and compensation" (p. 261). Characteristics, as outlined by Sher, refer to the presence of personal qualities related to preparation, pre-service training and background experiences that might attract teachers to rural areas. With respect to conditions (the second "C"), Sher includes environmental surroundings—geographical, cultural, recreational as well as the school facilities themselves. Compensation as the third "C" encompasses not only salary but also incentives, rewards and benefits such as travel allowances, housing loans, or paid tuition.

In the next subsection, the research literature concerned with the issue of teacher recruitment and retention in rural schools will be discussed according to Sher's three categories. Research related to each category will address what is known about why teachers leave and why they remain teaching in rural schools.

Characteristics

Horn (1985) suggested that the characteristics for the rural teacher would ideally include the following:

- Ability to teach more than one subject or grade level;
- Ability to teach a wide range of abilities;
- Preparation to supervise several extracurricular activities; and
- Ability to adjust to the uniqueness of the rural community (in Queitzsch & Hahn, 1995, p. 24).

Indeed, the rural schoolteacher is faced with many challenges. Sher (1983) maintains that while circumstances are better today than in years past, the rural teacher is “still expected” in most cases to fulfill such roles as janitor, playground supervisor, nurse, social worker, administrator, and psychologist/counselor, among others (p. 260). These demands tend to defeat teachers who are “unprepared for rural realities,” observes Stone (1990). Young, single, and inexperienced characterizes many who leave rural schools (Stone, 1990; Cotton, 1987). “New teachers often feel that their lives are too closely scrutinized particularly if their values, lifestyles or cultural backgrounds differ from community norms” (Stone, 1990, p. 2). Sher refers to these individuals as “flashes in the pan” and asserts that “they often lack the patience and commitment necessary to adapt themselves and their teaching to local needs” (1983, p. 260).

Psychological and sociological reasons are also reported to cause teachers to leave rural areas. Being far away from family and friends who represent an individual’s system of support results in a perceived sense of deprivation and loneliness (Bull & Hyle, 1989). One’s attitude about the rural situation can also be a determinant. As cited in Boylan and

Bandy (1994), the Challenge-Deficit Model of Ankrah-Dove suggests that the “viewpoint” held by the individual will influence the reaction of the professional in a rural appointment. According to her work, when an individual focuses on the negative aspects of the rural situation—isolation from family and friends, lack of services, long geographical distances, that person holds a “deficit” viewpoint and usually does not stay long. He/she may have been attracted initially to the position by its potential for career building and/or the fringe benefits. At the opposite end are individuals who hold a “challenge” viewpoint and concentrate on the positive aspects both personally and professionally associated with the rural lifestyle (p. 154). These individuals who hold the “challenge” viewpoint are more likely to stay for extended periods of time in rural locations (Boylan, 1991).

Inadequate preparation has been a contributing factor to the lack of teacher retention. Gibson (1994) conducted structured interviews with all newly appointed teachers in two outback regions of Queensland in Australia and contrasted their perceptions with those of major stakeholders providing educational services. One of his findings was that teachers felt ill-prepared to deal effectively with rural situations and especially their role in the community. Gleadow and Bandy (1982-83) conducted a survey of rural elementary school teachers in British Columbia to gain their perspectives on strengthening pre-service programs. In addition to a set of personal characteristics such as flexibility, self-reliance, and sense of humor, respondents believed a rural practicum that included techniques and methods for multigrade and peer teaching was essential.

Barker and Beckner (1987) found programs for prospective rural educators to be few in number. They surveyed 473 public four-year colleges and universities across the United States during 1985. Course(s) to prepare teachers for rural service and/or to provide information about rural education was reported by only nine institutions.

Although many institutions recognize the need for specialized training, Stone (1990) states that colleges and universities have little incentive to do so since the legal and professional requirements they must meet are focused by the needs of big city schools.

Teachers who are most successful in remaining in rural schools are those who come from a rural background or who are interested in the rural lifestyle. Ciscell (1989) surveyed education majors (N=259) and tenured teachers (N=139) to discover the influence of geographic preferences on the location of preferred teaching positions.

Participants were asked to characterize their former high schools by size and geographic location: rural, suburban or urban. A majority (58%) of the tenured teachers who attended rural high schools stated that they preferred teaching in a rural school. Likewise, the undergraduates from rural high schools indicated their preference to begin their teaching career in a rural setting. Very few (0-7%) of the education majors or tenured teachers from suburban or urban high schools expressed a preference for a rural school setting.

Ciscell's finding is also supported by Storey (1993) who surveyed two groups of teachers in British Columbia currently employed in rural/remote school districts and teachers enrolled in the Forgivable Loan Program (N=1,139). Storey sought to gain an understanding of respondents' decisions regarding teaching in rural or remote areas there.

While the response rate was only 49%, 51.2% of the participants in this study indicated that they “considered themselves to have a rural background” (p. 164). Likewise, Anschutz (1987) in his study of factors that influence rural teachers’ decisions to seek a rural position or remain teaching in rural communities in seven states with less than 2,500 found that teachers are more likely to remain employed in rural schools who come from similar backgrounds.

Boylan and McSwan (1998) sought to determine why some teachers chose to remain teaching in rural schools in Australia for periods of at least six years (N=427). The profile of “long-staying” rural teachers developed from their work revealed that:

- 72.3% experienced the rural lifestyle in their upbringing; and
- 60% of elementary teachers had attended a rural education institution for their pre-service studies (p. 53).

The rural lifestyle itself is another reason that teachers choose to remain teaching in rural schools. Carlson (1992) surveyed three groups of Vermont rural professionals during 1989 (N=34) to gain their perceptions about their work experiences in their rural locations. The majority, in response to the question, “If you had another professional opportunity in a metropolitan area, would you leave your rural position?,” indicated that they would not. The reasons cited included “liking the rural lifestyle, slower pace and quality of life, feeling a part of the community, and feeling where they live is a good place to raise a family” (p. 45). Concern about the quality of family life was also present in Storey’s study of teachers in British Columbia. Comments expressed by respondents indicated that they enjoyed the safety of the rural schools and community and appreciated

the smaller class sizes for their children (1993). Boylan and McSwan (1998) found additional support for the importance placed on the rural lifestyle. An open-ended question was presented to the 427 teachers in their study asking them to list the advantages for them of living in a rural area. Responses were grouped into four categories:

- rural lifestyle—68.3%
- environmental benefits—17.1%
- quality of schooling—11.2%
- personal benefits—3.2% (p. 60-61)

Young, single and inexperienced teachers tend to leave rural schools quickly, especially when they are unprepared for the rural realities. Individuals with a rural background and/or who find the rural lifestyle to be satisfying for them and their families are more likely to remain teaching in these locations. In the next section, conditions related to the rural community and school will be addressed. Both community-related and school-related factors may constitute reasons why teachers leave as well as remain in rural schools.

Conditions

Isolation is noted by researchers as the major cause for teacher turnover in rural and remote schools (Stone, 1990; Collins, 1999; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Barker & Beckner, 1987; Luft, 1991; Murphy & Angelski, 1996; Bull & Hyle, 1989). Isolation can take many forms. Geographical distances and extremes of climate permeate the isolation of many rural locations. Davis (1987) created sub-categories of isolation as part of his

study of teachers, parents and students in Western Australia and Northwestern Ontario, Canada (teachers =777). Through an analysis of open-ended comments, he identified three types of isolation: social, cultural and professional.

Social isolation was expressed by respondents through comments referring to "separation from family and friends, difficulties...breaking into the closed social life of the community, and absence of a telephone" (p. 12). Young single teachers bemoaned the fact that few other single people were even available in town (Storey, 1993). Luft (1991) also noted that administrators in North Dakota and Nevada expressed that "lack of social life" was a factor making it difficult to recruit teachers to a rural area.

Being set apart from the rural community was also observed by Gleadow and Bandy (1982-83). In their survey of rural elementary teachers in British Columbia, 46% of the teachers felt they were being closely scrutinized and experienced a lack of privacy. Murphy and Angelski (1996) also reported that teachers are placed frequently on "a high moral pedestal" [in a rural community] and often find it difficult to live in a "fishbowl" (p. 10). Others speak about the existence of a "dichotomy between the locals and outsiders" that increases the sense of isolation in some communities (McIntosh, 1989; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). An interesting observation was pointed out in Boylan and Colleagues (1993) in their study of "long-staying" teachers in that approximately half of the teachers expressed the sense that they were not perceived by the community to be "locals" even after living in the community for as many as fifteen years or more.

Cultural isolation, as described by Davis (1987), refers to the lack of opportunities to access such activities as movies, plays and performances, art galleries and sporting

events. In extremely isolated locations, particularly in Australia and Canada, teachers expressed concern that even radio and television services were limited. Storey (1993) also reported that the lack of social and recreational opportunities was rated as the second highest factor for teachers deciding to leave their rural teaching assignment in British Columbia. He pointed out that for some it was a matter of personal preference in the opportunities available, however. For example, if the area afforded hunting and fishing opportunities and the teacher preferred shopping or seeing a musical performance, there was not a "reasonable fit between the teacher and the community" (Bull & Hyle, 1989 as cited in Storey, 1993, p. 167).

Davis (1987) spoke about the inability to share experiences and learn from others as professional isolation. Roughly a third of teachers in both the Australian and Ontario samples responded with concerns in this area. For some, it was due to the staffing of the school in that few or no other staff members meant little opportunity to interact with colleagues on a regular basis. In other cases, the requirement to teach a variety of subjects caused teachers to feel not only overwhelmed but also not able to stay current in their field of expertise (Davis, 1987; Barker & Beckner, 1987). Barker (1986) reported that it was common for rural teachers to "receive limited or sporadic training" (p. 1).

In addition to inadequate professional development opportunities, other researchers point out that a lack of resources is an influence for some teachers to leave rural schools. Materials may be outdated, curriculum guides inadequate, and funding may be limited for the purchase of equipment and library books. Instruction may be even more difficult to provide if special services are required for handicapped students and no

other staffing is available (Sher, 1983; Bull & Hyle, 1989; Barker & Beckner, 1987; Luft, 1991; Carlson, 1992). Another resource viewed as lacking for some teachers was the support from an administrator (Bull & Hyle, 1989; Taylor, 1997).

Some of the same conditions that cause teachers to leave rural schools may also attract others to stay. Storey (1993) found that the area itself was a frequent reason for teachers in his study to accept the position of employment. Comments ranged from "beautiful scenery...clean air and water...no line-ups" to affordable land and a safe environment (p. 165). To serve as an illustration, one respondent commented, "Where else can one have children, golf, ski, fish, hunt, hike, and mountain bike for less than \$1,000 a year?" (p. 166). Murphy and Angelski (1996-97) and Boylan and McSwan (1998) also noted that the lifestyle possible in a rural community was a contributing factor for teachers to remain in the rural community.

The teaching assignment itself may be a major reason for some teachers to stay. Small class size, motivated students and fewer discipline problems were frequent reasons cited by Storey (1993). Sixty percent of teachers reported by Murphy and Angeleski (1996-97) indicated that they felt a "sense of achievement in teaching" and felt recognized for their work (p. 9). Teachers reportedly enjoyed a "high level of professional autonomy" that characterized these rural positions (Murphy & Angeleski, 1996-97, p. 10). Relationships with students and support of a principal or administrator have been consistently reported as influential in retaining teachers, regardless of location (Storey, 1993; Matthes & Carlson, 1986; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Stone, 1990; Clarke & Keating, 1995; Squires et al., 1992).

The community plays an important role in retaining teachers. Matthes and Carlson (1986), in their comparison study of rural, urban and suburban teachers, discovered that rural teachers ranked the support from parents and community as the second highest reason for accepting a teaching position after starting salary. Support from administration was more highly regarded by urban and suburban teachers. Anschutz (1987) and Squires et al. (1992) concluded that acceptance by the community was a significant factor in the continued employment of teachers. Boylan and McSwan (1998) sought the perceptions of "long-staying" rural teachers about the influence of the local community. Their findings revealed:

- Teachers felt their work was valued by their communities—74.9%;
- Teachers felt their contributions to the community infrastructure were valued—79.5%;
- The community valued having the teacher living locally—70.4%; and
- The communities were committed to improving rural education—67.8% (p. 59).

Community involvement with the school as perceived by rural school principals in British Columbia was considered to provide "the greatest benefits and satisfaction in rural school teaching" (Gleadow & Bandy, 1982-83, p. 17).

Teachers leave rural schools for reasons associated with the isolation found to exist in many rural areas. Often it has more to do with the conditions of the place rather than the job itself; however, work-related issues such as lack of resources, lack of administrative support, and few professional development opportunities contribute to teacher attrition. At the other end of the spectrum, individuals remain in rural schools as "long-staying" teachers because they enjoy the autonomous challenge and satisfaction of

the teaching assignment as well as the support of the community. Next, the contribution of teacher pay and benefits will be presented.

Compensation

Salaries and benefits are often considered to be a consistent source of dissatisfaction with teachers across all educational settings. Farkas et al. (2000) found from a survey of new teachers that "3 in 4 (75%) say they are seriously underpaid" (p. 18). In fact, low salary was reported by the participants to be "the worst part about being a teacher" (Farkas et al., 2000). Overall, salaries for teachers in rural areas tend to be lower than either urban or suburban settings (Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995; NCES, 1996; Stern, 1994; NEA, 1998).

To understand how salary might impact undergraduates' decisions to leave the education profession, Ciscell (1989) surveyed 259 juniors majoring in elementary education in a midwestern university. Participants, grouped by their formal high school location (rural, suburban, or urban), were asked to indicate from a list of four concerns which problem would most likely result in their career termination. Salary was predicted as a primary consideration by forty percent (40%) of the students in each group. Matthes and Carlson (1986) conducted another study of undergraduates in Iowa and Vermont completing their teacher education programs. The 99 respondents who went on to begin their teaching career were grouped by school type: rural, suburban, and urban. While starting salary was not rated as highly for those individuals in rural school districts as a reason for accepting their present positions, all three groups listed starting salary as one of

the most important reasons to consider when accepting a teaching position in another district.

Clarke and Keating (1995) studied 114 teachers representing school districts that included urban, suburban, and rural schools to expose areas of concern for teachers about their work situation. Given a list of variables, pay being one of them, respondents were to indicate the single most satisfying factor and also the single most dissatisfying factor. While only 2% indicated that pay was the most satisfying factor, no teachers reported pay as the most dissatisfying factor. The researchers noted in their analysis that other factors were perhaps greater sources of dissatisfaction.

In the Montana OPI Fall Report 1999-2000 survey "low salaries and lack of benefits were cited as the second highest reason positions are difficult to fill" (Nielson, 2001, p. 8). Montana has lost ground in recent years. Once close to the national average, the most current figures show that the average teacher's salary is \$32,121, nearly \$10,000 below the national average (Nielson, 2001). Morton conducted two comparison studies, one in 1992-93 and the other in 1998-99, examining small school budgets and teacher salaries. These small schools "have only a supervising teacher or principal and administration is provided by the County Superintendents" (1999, p. 1). Of the 151 school districts surveyed, only 24 were paying a teacher close to the state average or higher (Morton, 1999). In addition to salaries, benefits for these small schools are also low. In Morton's most recent survey, fewer districts were providing "teacherages" (housing provided for teachers) (41), fewer districts were providing professional leave (86), while some districts offer no health insurance or limited dollars for health insurance

coverage (1999).

One component of a British Columbia study by Storey (1993) sought to find out the extent of influence its Forgivable Loan Program had on teachers' decisions to accept positions and/or continue teaching in positions located in rural provinces. In the program offered by the Ministry of Education, up to \$12,000 in student loans are forgiven as long as teachers continue to teach in a rural or remote school district. Two groups of teachers were sampled in this study. The first group was composed of teachers currently employed in school districts classified as rural/remote from schools having two to nine teachers (N=688). Teachers enrolled in the Forgivable Loan Program (FLP), some of whom were in the first group, comprised the second group (N=450). Half of the respondents reported that they were or had been enrolled in the Forgivable Loan Program. While none of these indicated that the program was the most important factor influencing their decision to accept employment, 42% of the respondents stated that it was a factor that influenced them. A conclusion drawn by Storey was that "important employment decisions are likely to be influenced by financial factors" (p. 167).

Incentives are employed to attract teachers to remote locations in other countries. Rural service is a requirement for promotion in New Zealand according to Sher (1983). Murray (2001 unpublished dissertation) reports that the Remote Teaching Service (RTS) package was established in 1996 in response to staffing difficulties in remote schools in Western Australia. The package offers teacher and administrators benefits that include locality allowances and free housing. Once participants have completed three or four years of service, they receive additional benefits. Early indicators suggest a reduction in

teacher turnover, although Murray believes it is much too soon to conclude that the RTS has been successful.

While salary and other incentives appear to be a factor in attracting teachers to serve in rural and remote locations, Sher (1983) maintains that they will not necessarily retain them supporting McIntosh's belief that "successful recruitment is much easier to accomplish than successful retention" (1989, p. 26). The next section will provide an overview of a teacher retention model proposed by Boylan et al. (1993) that will be used as a conceptual framework in the questionnaire development for this study.

A Model for Teacher Retention

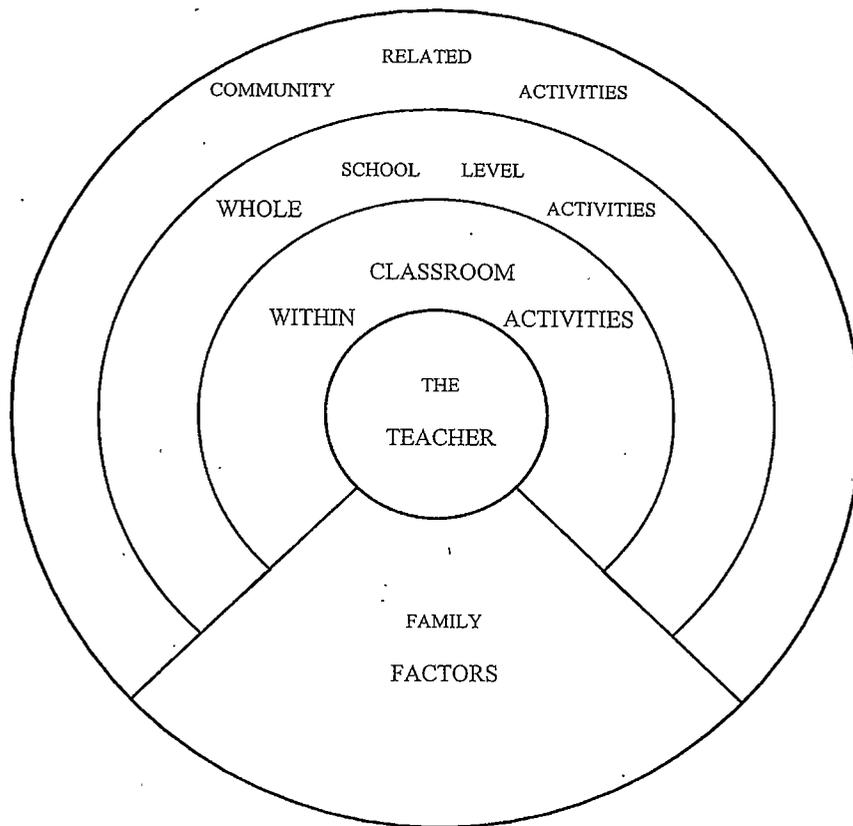
In the last twelve years in Australia, a great deal of work has been done by Boylan et al. in the area of teacher retention and satisfaction in the rural regions of that country (1991, 1993, 1998). Initial survey research of 1,100 teachers in New South Wales identified as "long-term stayers" provided information that revealed that these rural teachers are:

satisfied with their career in teaching, are committed to their profession, they do not wish to leave teaching nor their present rural location in the short to medium term future, they value their community's support for their efforts in the classroom and its support provided for rural education, they find the rural lifestyle conducive in providing a quality lifestyle and for raising their children (Boylan et al. 1993, p. 14).

Teacher comments in response to questions concerning their satisfaction with teaching and the sources of their satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction, their commitment to teaching, and their perceptions about their communities were gathered over a two-year

period. Further analysis of the data collected together with follow-up interviews with these teachers resulted in the development of a theoretical model for teacher retention (Figure 1). The teacher is viewed as the center of the model surrounded by “four principal spheres of influence” that may affect a teacher’s decision to remain or leave: Within Classroom Activities; Whole School-Level Activities; Community Level Activities; and Family/Personal Factors. Teacher retention, according to Boylan, is represented as the complex set of interactions between these influences.

Figure1. Model for Teacher Retention



Boylan et al. (1993) maintains that two of the influences have “immediate and direct consequences” on whether a teacher decides to remain. They are Within Classroom Activities and Family/Personal Factors. While operating independently, they often are complementary to one another. **Within Classroom Activities** are identified as those factors that relate to the sources of satisfaction and commitment to teaching expressed by the study’s teachers. Positive relationships with students and colleagues comprised major sources of satisfaction. Additionally, the profession itself as a “sense of calling” and the challenges of teaching children are central factors in this sphere of influence. **Family/Personal Factors** are those that concern personal and family issues of the teacher. This category was comprised of comments by teachers that identified positive influences such as home ownership, stability, the quality of life and contentment with rural living. A number of influences that could negatively impact the teachers’ decision to stay included factors such as lack of privacy, lack of cultural activities, and a high cost of living.

The other two influences, Whole School-Level and Community Level Activities, represent the “social context” of the teaching experience and either could be the basis for the decision by the teacher to remain or leave. **Whole School-Level Activities** constituted a variety of activities that engaged the teacher outside of the classroom teaching itself. Often these influences were sources of dissatisfaction and included both work-related issues and relationships with administrative staff. Lack of communication, less than adequate school facilities, excessive paperwork, insufficient scheduling, access to professional development, and availability of teacher support were all identified by

teachers as potential sources of dissatisfaction. The influence of **Community Level Activities** encompassed a complex set of interactions that spanned parental support, the teacher's involvement in the community, the geographical area, safety of the environment, and the rural lifestyle. These often were sources of personal satisfaction for teachers and aided in the teachers' desire to remain in their position. Three quarters of the teachers in this study felt that the community valued them for the job they were doing to educate their children. Through review of available literature on rural education and discussions with Montana rural education experts, appropriate subfactors for these four influences identified by Boylan were identified and used in the construction of a survey instrument.

Summary

Teacher shortages in the nation and Montana were discussed as concerns in the present and the near future. Research related to rural education and specifically to the recruitment and retention of teachers was discussed. These statements capture a common theme in the literature:

We have no trouble getting teachers here; it's keeping them (in Yarrow et al., 1998 reported by Lunn, 1997 p. 6).

We're misdiagnosing the problem as 'recruitment' when it's really 'retention' (Merrow, 1999, p. 64).

Rapid teacher turnover, while advantageous because of the 'new blood' continually infused into the system, is generally not welcomed by rural communities because the disruption to school courses, the constant adjustment to new teachers demanded of pupils and other such factors are seen as disadvantages far outweighing the one or two possibly positive aspects of turnover (Boylan et al.

