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Teacher recruitment and retention is an issue in schools across the country, but especially in rural America. Schools in small and rural communities face a unique set of obstacles and challenges when it comes to staffing their schools with teachers and getting them to remain in the district for more than two to three years.

In response to a request from President Obama's administration, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC) worked with their members to identify specific tips, strategies and suggestions that address the unique realities, obstacles and considerations that rural schools face when it comes to teacher recruitment and retention. A more thorough analysis of the results is attached to this cover memo.

- The major teaching shortage areas are concentrated at the high school level, in special education, and in math and science.
- While recruitment and retention are both difficult tasks in rural schools, survey responses indicate that getting teachers TO the district is harder than keeping them IN the district.
- Rural school districts report not offering incentives when recruiting and retaining teachers.
- Rural districts report a variety of strategies when filling teacher vacancies.
- Salary, location, and housing top the list of factors primarily responsible for the difficulties rural districts face in recruiting and retaining teachers.
- Survey respondents ranked a variety of incentives on their effectiveness in recruiting and retaining teachers to rural school district. Consistent with responses to previous questions, respondents identified monetary incentives as most effective.

Both AASA and NREAC look forward to working on the issue of recruiting and retaining teachers in rural school districts. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue about the unique obstacles and opportunities rural schools face every day and are happy to provide information as needed. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

If you have any questions about the survey or rural education, please contact:

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In response to a request from President Obama’s administration, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC) worked with their members to identify specific tips, strategies and suggestions that address the unique realities, obstacles and considerations that rural schools face when it comes to teacher recruitment and retention. Teacher recruitment and retention continue to be an issue in schools across America. Schools in small and rural communities face a unique set of obstacles and challenges when it comes to staffing their schools with teachers and getting them to remain in the district for more than two to three years. The survey was administered in late August and early September and almost 300 (298) school administrators from 22 states completed the survey.

**The major teaching shortage areas are concentrated at the high school level, in special education, and in math and science.** When asked to report their districts’ major teaching shortage areas, 63 percent replied mathematics (gr. 7-12), followed by 58 percent for science (gr. 7-12), 46 percent for foreign languages (gr. 7-12), 41 percent for special education (gr. 7-12), and 35 percent for special education (K-6). *See Table 1.*

Table 1

Teaching Area	Percentage
Mathematics (7-12)	63%
Science (7-12)	58%
Foreign Languages (7-12)	46%
Special Education (7-12)	41%
Special Education (K-6)	35%
Music (7-12)	17%
Other	16%
Music (K-6)	14%
Foreign Languages (K-6)	13%
English as a Second Language (K-6)	12%
English as a Second Language (7-12)	12%
Art (K-6)	12%
Art (7-12)	12%
Bilingual Education (K-6)	9%
Bilingual Education (7-12)	9%
Mathematics (K-6)	8%
Science (K-6)	8%
Elementary Education (general)	7%

While recruitment and retention are both difficult tasks in rural schools, survey responses indicate that getting teachers TO the district is harder than keeping them IN the district. Almost one-third of respondents (30%) describe it as very or extremely difficult to recruit or attract teachers to their school district. This result more than doubles to 63 percent when including respondents describing teacher recruitment as ‘moderately difficult’ (33%). When it comes to retaining teachers, 20 percent of respondents describe the task as ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ difficult, a number that grows to 44 percent when including ‘moderately difficult’ responses. See Table 2.

Table 2

	Extremely Difficult	Very Difficult	Moderately Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Not Difficult
Recruit/Attract	9%	21%	33%	24%	13%
Retain	5%	14%	25%	31%	25%

Rural school districts report not offering incentives when recruiting and retaining teachers. Forty and forty-three percent, respectively, of respondents report not offering incentives when recruiting or retaining teachers. Of those that do offer incentives, the most popular is formal mentoring (35% with recruiting/32% with retaining) followed by starting salaries at higher steps on the salary scale. See Table 3.

Table 3

	Recruit/Attract	Retain
None	40%	43%
Signing bonuses	9%	xx
Bonuses for National Board Certified teachers	7%	9%
Bonuses for teachers of hard-to-fill subjects <sup>1</sup>	14%	12%
Starting salaries at high steps on the salary scale for teachers of hard-to-fill subjects	12%	8%
Tuition assistance	16%	18%
Student loan forgiveness	7%	6%
Housing assistance	5%	4%
Formal mentoring/induction program for beginning teachers	35%	32%
Other	11%	11%

<sup>1</sup> In some states, court decisions have ruled that giving financial bonuses to teachers in ‘hard-to-fill’ positions/schools is in violation of collective bargaining agreements in some states (i.e., Missouri).

**Rural districts report a variety of strategies when filling teacher vacancies.** The most common strategies are recruiting teachers from local populations (73%), recruit online (64%), advertise extensively (62%), recruit from substitute teacher list (55%), hire alternatively certified teachers (45%) and transitioning current teachers to hard-to-staff subjects (37%).

**Salary, location, and housing top the list of factors primarily responsible for the difficulties rural districts face in recruiting and retaining teachers.** Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated low salaries, followed by social isolation (55%), lack of adequate housing (55%), geographic isolation/remoteness (50%), and expectations that teachers teach multiple subjects (39%). The same issues were reported for retention difficulties, though at lower rates: low salaries (47%), social isolation (42%), geographic isolation (38%) and lack of adequate housing (35%). *See Tables 4a (below) and 4b (next page).*

	Recruit/Attract					
<i>Table 4a</i>	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat Important	Not a Factor	N/A
Low salaries	29%	26%	21%	13%	6%	5%
Concentrated student poverty	7%	10%	22%	23%	32%	6%
Geographic isolation, remoteness	21%	29%	21%	16%	7%	5%
Social isolation	24%	31%	21%	12%	7%	5%
Distance from colleges and universities	4%	18%	29%	20%	22%	6%
Lack of adequate housing	21%	24%	22%	18%	10%	5%
High cost of living	4%	9%	16%	26%	38%	6%
Economic health of the surrounding community	11%	20%	29%	19%	15%	6%
Teachers are expected to teach more than one grade	13%	15%	17%	20%	26%	8%
Teachers are expected to teach multiple subjects	16%	23%	21%	23%	13%	5%

	Retain					
	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat Important	Not a Factor	N/A
<i>Table 4b</i>						
Low salaries	29%	18%	21%	16%	7%	11%
Concentrated student poverty	5%	10%	23%	22%	28%	12%
Geographic isolation, remoteness	17%	21%	26%	16%	10%	10%
Social isolation	19%	23%	24%	16%	7%	10%
Distance from colleges and universities	2%	13%	27%	24%	22%	11%
Lack of adequate housing	14%	21%	18%	22%	13%	11%
High cost of living	3%	6%	15%	31%	32%	12%
Economic health of the surrounding community	9%	16%	29%	21%	15%	10%
Teachers are expected to teach more than one grade	11%	12%	18%	21%	24%	14%
Teachers are expected to teach multiple subjects	13%	19%	20%	21%	15%	12%
Lack of mentoring	3%	6%	17%	23%	36%	14%

**Survey respondents ranked a variety of incentives on their effectiveness in recruiting and retaining teachers to rural school districts.** Consistent with responses to previous questions, respondents identified monetary incentives as most effective. More than half (51%) ranked bonuses as ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ effective, followed by tuition assistance (45%), and housing assistance (34%). Workload-related items placed high, as well: reduced teaching load (35%), additional planning time (35%) and smaller class sizes (28%).

	Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Moderately Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective
<i>Table 5</i>					
Bonuses	29%	22%	20%	7%	2%
Tuition assistance	18%	27%	20%	10%	4%
Housing assistance	15%	19%	23%	12%	8%
Smaller class sizes	8%	20%	23%	13%	11%
Reduced teaching load	12%	23%	21%	12%	8%
Additional planning time	10%	25%	21%	14%	8%
Release time for professional development opportunities	7%	23%	25%	12%	8%
Teaching assistants	8%	15%	25%	19%	9%
Additional classroom materials or equipment	7%	24%	27%	14%	6%

**In an effort to garner more qualitative feedback, one survey question asked 'Please share your observations, strategies and suggestions that address the unique realities, obstacles and considerations that rural schools face when it comes to teacher recruitment and retention.' The responses listed below are representative of the larger sample.**

Larger districts who can offer a "better schedule" - One or two preparation areas rather than five to seven preps each day. Larger districts who can offer more money - we have tried to combat this by being as competitive as possible at the beginning and hoping that the teacher likes the school "family" atmosphere and stays. Salaries at the "top" as well as retirement packages are not as competitive.

Keep our technology up to date so our students can observe and learn about the world. Students in rural schools need to be as tech savvy as students in the big cities. We need them to be able to communicate with everyone everywhere. They need to learn about the world and make decisions based on what they have learned.

Starting salaries continue to be an issue the only thing we can do is make their day to day work experiences as good as possible. Younger teachers that come to work here stay but attracting them is difficult. We cannot compete with the night life of the city. We have several cultural events and offerings within an hour's drive but the dining and shopping are also an hour away. For some that is just too far.

In our current economic situation there are an abundance of new teachers available in our state. We have had a better selection and better quality these last few years than ever before. In normal times, however, it is often necessary to hire teachers that are less than desirable. Bottom line is that small rural districts are always going to be at a disadvantage when it comes to teacher selection

The unique reality is not getting qualified teachers but being able to fund our district with limited funds from the state and local governments. The method of funding schools in Michigan is what hurts rural districts.

We have had to offer part-time positions for scarce teachers making recruiting difficult. We seek candidates that have multiple certifications so that they can be flexible in staffing.

It is very rare that the rural school gets the "Top Picks" of teachers at job fairs. The time and cost of gas negates the "charm" of teaching in a small, rural school for most teachers who receive offers to teach in suburban or city districts close to their homes. It continues to difficult to keep top teachers when they receive offers from larger, richer, districts closer to their homes.

We just need more funding. That's all there is to it.

1. Multi-grade classrooms are more difficult to staff. More professional development is required to help teachers learn to teach two curriculums simultaneously.

2. Professional development also required to help teachers become more competent in differentiating instruction - challenge those students who are GATE, provide ELL students with sufficient support, provide sufficient support for students with IEPs, while continuing to meet the needs of the "middle-of-the-road" (average) kids.

I think that the days of rural schools of a very small school are numbered because of declining enrollments. The larger town schools are able to offer more choices for classes/teachers and sports offerings are always an attraction for students. Little schools have much to offer students in the way of individual attention and instruction but at some point the attraction of larger peer groups start to overcome all other advantages. Rural schools are doing an amazing job of education children and it would be a shame to lose them.

It does take a special person to locate and work in a rural setting --those people are out there and can do a great job--sometimes it takes a few years to find the right mix but rural schools do a super job in preparing students. The few students that are enrolled have to make the school work as there is no one else to do the work/activities--you are it. Some years, only one student per grade level.

Rural schools face smaller classes and the need for multi-aged, multi-graded expertise for staff members.

Retention requires unique solutions for each individual school case. Strong encouragement for continued college education with tuition and other costs being paid by the school district.

Fully expense paid attendance at professional meetings and conferences provide an incentive for teachers to grow professionally and meet with their peers.

Some candidates may feel there is a lack of resources in smaller, rural districts than in the larger more urban areas. High school teachers having four or five preps is a turn off as well. However, small, rural districts are doing well and have few if any problems should be advertising that. In many cases the smaller communities have agreed to pay a higher tax rate to keep their school district. Therefore, salaries are comparable to the nearby cities.

Schools need to have more flexibility, which the union and school board both fight. In some cases, we are fighting private business for employees and they have more freedom to do what they need to hire employees. State laws are also a problem.

The state testing for teachers makes it difficult to find teachers in certain areas. The testing of teachers does not make them a better teacher.

There needs to be a sense that we are doing something special here. Rather than focusing on the shortcomings we have in teaching ESEA identified subgroups to the same high standards we hold the rest of our students we are lamenting the circumstances students come from and trying to raise their scores at any cost. Overall, our students are capable, but don't have the intrinsic motivation to perform well, the attitude necessary to do that which is difficult and a sense that others are not working that hard. Teachers who come in with new ideas and energy and research are not only not rewarded, they are often ostracized here!

Many rural school districts do not have separate "schools" or "buildings", but house K-12 at one site. Several others are simply divided between elementary and secondary. This often means that teachers "wear more than one hat". While this type of educational environment is not for everyone, many educators find it highly rewarding, and would not change.

One obstacle is the lack of ideas and experiences from a more diverse culture due to the amount of teachers that went to school in the district and have only worked in the district after college. There tends to be a higher resistance to change. We address this by sending teachers to professional development in areas where more diversity exists within the development activity thus exposing teachers to other school expectations in addition to the professional development content--broaden their network.

*The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. More than half of AASA's members—from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior level school administrators to cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders—work in rural schools and communities.*

*The National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition is composed of state and national education organizations focused on the provision and maintenance of quality learning opportunities for the children in the public schools of rural America.*

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