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RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF TEACHERS IN RURAL SOUTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

Challenges of teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas continue to plague our nation. South Carolina is no exception. Identifying promising practices to meet these challenges is critical as 24% (12 million) of our nation's students and 40% of our South Carolina students are educated in rural schools. In this paper, we discuss challenges facing rural schools associated with teacher recruitment and retention, highlight promising practices identified through a comprehensive literature review, and conclude with recommendations for meeting these challenges. While we include the national perspective, we also specifically examine these areas of focus from a South Carolina centric lens.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Nationally, 57% of districts and 32% of public schools are rural, and they educate about 12 million (24%) U.S. students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Unfortunately, recruiting and retaining effective rural teachers is often particularly challenging. In a national survey of rural district administrators in 44 states, more than 84% of administrators said they experienced at least some difficulty in filling teaching vacancies, while more than half of the respondents reported "moderate" to "extreme" difficulty (Dadisman, Gravelle, Farmer, & Petrin, 2010).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) defines rural among three subtypes (fringe, distant, and remote) that differentiate rural locations based on the distance and size of the nearest urban area. These criteria assume that families served by a rural school located from a town of 10,000 are likely to have different opportunities and resources than families served by a rural school located 10 miles from an urban core with a population of 100,000. South Carolina has 298 schools designated as rural fringe, which means these schools are five miles or fewer from an urban area of at least 50,000 and 2.5 miles or fewer from an urban area of no more than 50,000. South Carolina has 203 schools labeled as rural distant, meaning these schools are no more than 25 miles from an urban area of at least 50,000 and no more than 10 miles from an urban area of no more than 50,000. Lastly, South Carolina has seven schools identified as rural remote, indicating these schools are more than 25 miles from an urban area of at least 50,000 and more than 10 miles from an urban area of no more than 50,000.

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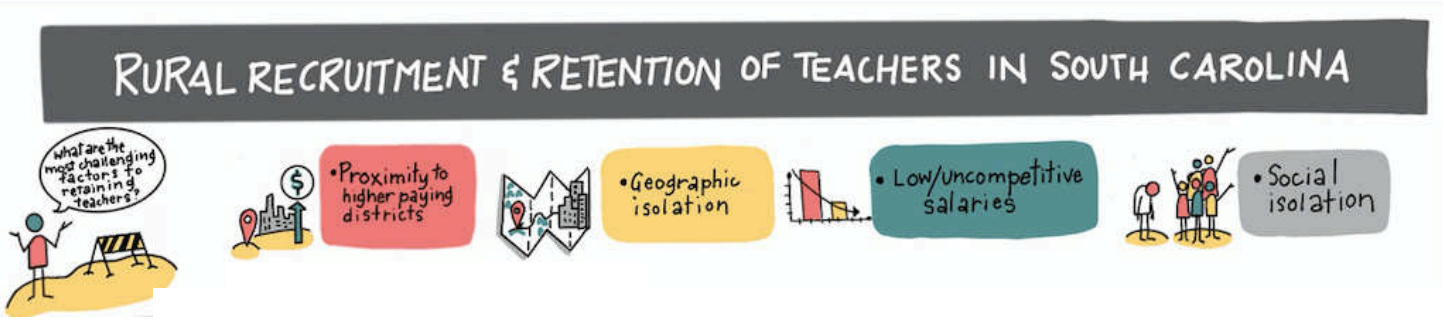
Regardless of rural subtype, schools in these communities tend to be smaller, with an average enrolment of only 353 students, which translates to fewer teachers per grade level and fewer specialized personnel at the school level (Barton, 2012). Although rural locales share many of the same characteristics, examining all schools under the same rural umbrella does them a great disservice. As Monk (2007) highlighted, the term rural often serves as a blanket term for everything that is not urban or metropolitan (see also Coladarci, 2007; Howley, 1997). Such usage ignores the complexity and heterogeneity within rural communities and schools. Because one size does not fit all in describing rural communities, teacher recruitment and retention challenges may vary. While the smallest rural schools may grapple with having limited instructional staff, which necessitates recruiting teachers with multiple endorsements, more remote schools face higher transportation costs that can siphon resources away from other budget items, like teacher salaries. Regardless, distance to urban areas and small school size can make it more challenging to provide individualized services for special needs students and specialized interventions for students with limited English proficiency. Furthermore, the poverty rate among rural public school students is substantial with 19% of rural students living below poverty, although that is less than the poverty rates in cities and towns – 25% and 21% respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Aside from limited resources and often poorer communities, teachers serving rural students tend to earn less than their counterparts in cities, suburbs, and towns. The average annual salary for rural teachers is $44,000, compared to $49,600 for all public school teachers (Coopersmith, 2009). Consequently, teachers in rural schools are less likely to have advanced degrees. In fact, Coopersmith (2009) showed that the number of teachers in rural public schools who have a master's degree or higher is 10.6 percentage points below the number for suburban schools. While recruiting high-quality teachers to rural areas can be exceptionally difficult, retention is often less challenging. The longevity rate for rural teachers staying at one school is an average of nine years. That exceeds the national average of 8.4 years for all public schools and is higher than the rates for both cities and towns (Coopersmith, 2009). Retention efforts are bolstered by lower average class sizes, more autonomy for teachers, a greater sense of social cohesion, and fewer discipline problems (Monk, 2007). In a study by Hammer and colleagues (2005) of 1,565 rural school districts across the U.S., the researchers highlighted the most challenging factors related to retaining teachers once hired, including being in close proximity to a higher paying district (29.1%), geographic isolation (25.5%), low/uncompetitive salaries (24.8%), and social isolation (20.8%).

While the national rural picture demonstrates a need for a context-driven teacher recruitment plan, the statistics do not appropriately paint the urgent needs for South Carolina's rural schools. The "Why Rural Matters" report by the Rural Trust identified specific and alarming challenges facing South Carolina rural schools (Showalter et al., 2017). Two of every five schools in the state are classified as rural. Of students attending public schools in the state, 40% attend schools in rural areas. Almost 69% of rural students come from low-income families, the fourth-highest state rate in the nation. Furthermore, 68% percent of rural students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, which is significantly higher than the national average. Almost half of rural students are minorities, the fifth highest rate in the country. Statistics for student academic achievement and college readiness are also dismal. The report highlights how South Carolina rural school students have the sixth-lowest levels in fourth grade math and science, and low levels of achievement in various other categories. Rural students also have the sixth-lowest rate of taking Advanced Placement classes and the 11th lowest rate of high school graduation. These achievement gaps are likely related to the state spending per student. South Carolina's rural schools have the 12th lowest rate per-student spending, $5,200 per student compared to more than double in the highest-ranked state. In fact, South Carolina has a long, dark history of underfunding rural schools. In 2014, the SC Supreme Court found the state had failed to provide "minimally adequate" education to children in the state's poorest districts in the *Abbeville vs. SC Department of Education* case (Click & Hinshaw, 2014). The ruling came 21 years after contentious courtroom battles and legislative debate over the state's responsibility to educate those who live in what has become known as South Carolina's "Corridor of Shame." While this lawsuit allocated $110 million to be spent specifically on the Corridor of Shame, by 2016, only $55 million had been resourced to the affected rural districts. Furthermore, these additional resources have been assigned specifically to capital infrastructure improvements. While the state has added more funding for rural schools in recent years, it still is ranked 30th in the nation for the amount of money it spends on rural schools. Consequently, the fiscal shortages make the challenges in rural teacher recruitment and retention even more difficult.

Our literature review revealed several approaches rural communities and others are using to attract and keep high-quality teachers to rural schools that are evident across the nation and within South Carolina. These approaches are discussed in more detail below within both of the sections summarizing literature and programs at the national level and then across our state. These efforts for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural schools include better preparing teachers for teaching in rural and remote locations, offering financial incentives, and nurturing "grow-your-own" (GYO) programs that train paraprofessionals already working in rural schools or target aspiring teachers who want to return to their home communities after receiving their degrees (Barton, 2012).



INFORMATION SOURCES AND METHODS

To identify studies related to rural teacher workforce initiatives nationwide and in South Carolina, a restricted search protocol was used. The terms "rural teacher," "recruitment," "grow your own," "rural teacher retention," "rural minority teacher recruitment," and "federal funding teacher recruitment," were used to search PsychINFO, Education Source, and ERIC databases. In addition, a Google search for local and national organizations focused on rural education initiatives was conducted. References considered for inclusion were reports from organizations related to rural teacher recruitment and retention and original papers published in peer-reviewed journals.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Since the beginning of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, rural schools in particular have been struggling to attract and retain highly qualified teachers as mandated by the Act of Congress (Elfers & Plecki, 2014; Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006). This has led to a multitude of rural teacher recruitment and retention practices, such that several national studies have sought to explore their efficacy. In 2005, Hammer and colleagues surveyed 1,565 rural school districts across the U.S. and found that the most commonly used recruitment strategies included promoting the advantage of teaching and living in the area (35.0%) and offering competitive salaries (22.4%). Conversely, the least commonly used strategies for recruitment included offering targeted incentives for hard-to-staff schools or content-shortage areas (4.4%) and offering housing or relocation assistance (4.1%). Surprisingly, fewer than one in five of the rural school districts collaborated with colleges or universities (14.7%) or invested in GYO initiatives (13.6%). While retaining rural teachers may not be as difficult as recruiting them, Hammer and colleagues (2005) found the most commonly implemented strategies used to retain rural teachers included providing the best possible work conditions (73.9%), creating a positive school culture (69.2%), and providing professional development opportunities (64.6%). Overall, the researchers inferred efficacy from these retainment strategies since nearly one in two rural teachers reported enjoyment of their job, district, or school environment (49.6%) as the main reason for remaining in the rural district. In 2007, Monk extended the efforts of Hammer and colleagues (2005) to recommend policy changes to rural teacher recruitment and retention. His national survey exposed the heterogeneity inherent in rural landscapes and thus recommended a policy focus on hard-to-staff rural schools as opposed to all rural schools. According to his research, these hard-to-staff schools tend to have higher proportions of students with special needs and/or children with limited English skills. In 2010, Dadisman and colleagues further expanded on the previous two studies by specifically examining GYO programs, alternative certifications, and high school programs across the 50 states. They found that while all of the initiatives fell into one of the above categories, they were all implemented to address varying school or student needs. The GYO programs were typically used to recruit teachers for hard-to-staff areas, such as math, science, special education, and foreign language, or they were aimed at supporting parents, community members, and paraprofessionals in low-income communities to attend college and become highly qualified teachers. The high school programs were utilized to increase high school and college students' interest and experience in a teaching career. Lastly, the alternative certification

programs, as well as a few GYO programs, were implemented to recruit teachers into the hard-to-staff regions of the particular state, or they specifically addressed the issue of diversity in the teaching profession, like South Carolina's Call Me MISTER. The only other analytic study that researched strategies for the recruitment and retention of rural teachers was conducted by Beesley and colleagues (2010) and focused on secondary teachers in the mid-continent region. They found that the districts did not use signing bonuses and relocation assistance, as implied by the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey. Instead, the districts relied on help from college and university programs, state-funded GYO programs, and federal funding opportunities. By examining a smaller sample of districts, this study was able to identify three retention and recruitment themes which will form the basis of this paper: teacher preparation, financial incentives, and GYO programs.

TEACHER PREPARATION AND RECRUITMENT

With regards to preparing teachers for rural schools and communities, universities serve as the conduit for supporting this preparation. However, a study conducted in the mid-continent states (i.e., Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) found that of the 120 colleges and universities that offered teacher preparation programs, only 17 had a rural emphasis (Barley & Brigham, 2008). Nine of the 17 institutions of higher education addressed at least three of the following that were identified as promising practices for preparing teachers for rural settings: offering access to distance learning opportunities and courses in rural areas, providing options for multiple certifications, recruiting prospective teachers from the pool of residents already living in rural communities, offering practicum placements in rural schools, and incorporating courses related to issues of teaching in rural areas. To help foster rural recruitment and retention, these teacher preparation programs relied heavily on technology for professional development, creating institutional partnerships between universities that credential teachers and rural community colleges, and customizing programs to prospective teachers' individual certification needs (Barley & Brigham, 2008).

Several universities across the nation serve as exemplars for rural teacher preparation. The University of New Hampshire recruits students with a STEM bachelors for a 15-month master's program geared for teaching certification and placement in one of the state's rural schools. They incentivize recruits with a 50% in-state tuition discount, a stipend of $28,000, and a new laptop for a three-year commitment teaching in a rural New Hampshire school. The curriculum focuses on incorporating place-based pedagogical practices into STEM content so that the future teachers learn how to incorporate local resources to engage rural students, families, and communities. The initiative is funded from a federal grant (U.S. Office of Innovation and Improvement Teacher Quality Partnership Grants Program) and aims to recruit 60 qualified residents over the five-year grant period beginning in 2016. Adams State College in Colorado prepares in-service teachers for dual certifications in special education and language, literacy, and culture. This master's level program uses both distance learning technology and onsite weekend classes so that prospective teachers can continue to live in rural communities in southern Colorado while obtaining their degree. Adams State College also has the literacy-focused Rural Education Access Program (REAP) which involves partnerships with rural community colleges and school districts in southern Colorado. In this program, participants receive an associate degree at a junior or community college and then transfer to Adams State for their final two years of coursework and practice-teaching. This bridge program enables easier entry into the profession for rural residents by eliminating the need to travel to the Adams State campus for the first two years. REAP graduates receive a bachelor's in interdisciplinary studies with Colorado licensure in elementary education. This federal grant-funded program boasts that 99% of graduates are employed within 90 days of graduation. In another example, Wichita State university in Kansas allows secondary education majors in content-shortage areas to work for school districts while completing their certification requirements. Similar to Adams State College, Wichita State has also partnered with rural community colleges in south-central Kansas to address teacher shortages in rural school districts. Their Preparing Educators Together program

allows prospective teachers to pursue an elementary education degree and teaching license by taking Wichita State coursework on two campuses of a partnered community college. Likewise, Southeast Missouri State University partners with community colleges, such that the local school offers an associate degree in teacher education. Students can then transfer to the university as juniors. In addition, the Extended Studies Department has courses almost entirely conducted at a distance. Other blended classes combine distance and campus classes. These bridge programs and blended pedagogies at the three mentioned universities represent just a few of the examples where universities are trying to improve access to teacher education by eliminating the barrier posed by a long commute, as well as trying to provide a more affordable option. While both Wichita State and Southeast Missouri State report that there is high demand for these classes, we could not find any program evaluation reports or quantitative assessments for gauging their success in placing highly qualified, certified teachers in rural schools.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Targeted financial incentives, including salary increases, scholarship programs, affordable housing, and transportation stipends, seem to have mixed results in the literature. In their survey of secondary, rural teachers in the central U.S., Beesley and colleagues (2010) found that monetary rewards are often insufficient in motivating teachers to remain on the job. More specifically, in an Idaho teacher survey, rural teachers make $20,000 less than the average suburban teacher salary, but nearly half of rural teachers (45.1%) reported being generally satisfied with their job (Player, 2015). Conversely, a report by Cynthia Prince (2002), "Higher Pay in Hard-to-Staff Schools: The Case for Incentives," argues that targeted financial incentives, especially for STEM teachers, are essential to attract and retain well-prepared teachers in the most challenging schools. However, the evidence coming from both Beesley and colleagues (2010) and Prince (2002) is primarily anecdotal and descriptive. As specific state examples are explored, the reader will see little evidence of program evaluation with regards to teacher recruitment and/or retention.

Our literature review revealed several examples of states utilizing bonuses, stipends, loan programs, and housing assistance to attract teachers to and retain them in rural schools and districts. For example, in North Carolina, the Collaborative Project provided bonuses and professional development (along with afterschool enrichment for students) for educators teaching in rural schools, with the intent of improving rural student achievement (Henry, Smith, Kershaw, & Zulli, 2013). In addition, North Carolina has been spending approximately $84.5 million annually on teacher retention efforts (The University of North Carolina System, 2014). As another example, Mississippi's Employer-Assisted Housing Teacher Program offers housing loans of up to $6,000 toward the closing costs on the purchase of a home (Mississippi Department of Education, n.d.). The loan is forgiven and converts to an interest-free grant if the teacher remains at least three years in a critical teacher-shortage district. Prince (2002) also demonstrates that college scholarships and loans are another way to channel teachers to the subject areas and locations where they are most needed. Mississippi's Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program provides full scholarships to candidates who pledge to teach in the areas of the state experiencing severe teacher shortages. Virginia's Teaching Scholarship Loan Program, initiated in 2009, awards stipends to prospective teachers who agree to teach in public schools with high concentrations of low-income students, in rural districts with teacher shortages, or in a high-demand academic discipline. Due to this loan program and other educator recruitment efforts, Virginia has experienced a growth in the number of graduates from teacher education programs between 2009 and 2016, unlike 45 other states (Sorensen, Frank, Gais, & Sun, 2018).

Money for targeted incentives often comes from maximizing federal funding opportunities. For example, some rural schools reported using Title I funds, federal funds to aid elementary and secondary education, to pay for teacher professional development (Government Accountability Office, 2004). States receive these funds on the basis of a formula that considers a number of factors, including the number of children living in poverty and the cost of education in the state. Similarly, Title II funds have been used to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in rural districts (Beesley et al., 2010). These funds are intended to improve teacher quality and increase student success by providing evidence-based professional development activities but can also be combined with other Federal program funds under the provisions of the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP). Since 2004, rural administrators have used REAP funds to assist teachers and paraprofessionals in meeting the highly qualified provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), as well as to recruit highly qualified teachers with targeted incentives (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). REAP technically falls under Title VI funding and contains two tracks: the small rural school grant program and the rural and low-income school program. The small rural school grant program provides rural local education agencies with financial initiatives aimed at improving student academic achievement. The rural and low-income school program is awarded to state education agencies who make sub-grants to eligible rural districts with the aim of improving student achievement. In addition, some rural schools have utilized Title VIII funds to cover tuition costs for paraprofessionals seeking teacher certification (Beesley et al., 2010). These funds are primarily used for educational programs that prepare nurses to practice in rural and medically underserved communities. Lastly, the federal E-Rate program has supplied funds to support the creation of distance learning opportunities for teacher certification and professional development (Federal Communications Commission, 2018). The federal E-rate program makes telecommunications and information services more affordable for schools and libraries.

"Money for targeted incentives often come from maximizing federal funding opportunities."

GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

As for the third approach to recruiting teachers, Grow Your Own (GYO) programs involve targeting and training local residents who were most likely to return to the area and remain there. Studies have repeatedly shown a strong, positive correlation between location of current teaching position and location of hometown, high school, or college (Monk, 2007). Monk's (2007) analysis reveals that those who enjoyed their rural lifestyle as children and young adults value the benefits smaller rural schools and communities offer, such as strong student-teacher relationships, fewer discipline problems, increased individual instruction, increased parental involvement, and lack of crime.

In national GYO programs, administrators reported providing additional training to paraprofessionals who were already working in their schools, retraining military volunteers who were service oriented, and collaborating with colleges and universities to offer alternative access to coursework (Beesley et al., 2010). In the 2007 Rural Teacher Retention Study, 12% of hard-to-staff districts said they were using a GYO strategy because traditional hiring strategies were leaving vacancies (Dadisman et al., 2010). Dadisman and colleagues (2010) also investigated GYO programs in 16 states and found that they often involved partnerships among school districts, local community colleges, and four-year institutions of higher education. Funded primarily

by state and federal grants, successful programs had a strong mentoring component and intentionally sought prospective teachers to fill the direst school and district instructional needs: math, science, English language learner support, and special education.

Several states serve as exemplars for successful GYO programs at both the state and district level. More than 200 Texas districts participate in the Ready, Set, Teach! GYO program, which provides work-based learning and internships in teaching for career education students (Texas Association of School Boards, 2015). In one district, the required eighth-grade exploration course has increased awareness of Ready, Set, Teach! and in 2015 increased enrollment by more than 20%. Anecdotal evidence shows that some students have become teachers in their home districts or nearby schools. A promising GYO program identified by *Education Week* is the Idaho State Board of Education's Grow Your Own Teacher Scholarship Program, which places bilingual education, English as a second language, and Native American teachers in classrooms serving historically underserved populations (Esswein & Hanson, 2018). The program is open to school district employees and volunteers who wish to pursue either an associate's and/or Bachelor's degree in education with a bilingual or English as a second language endorsement, or Native American students preparing to teach in school districts with significant Native American populations (Hanson & Yoon, 2018). The program provides full-time students with up to $3,000 in scholarship funds. The program's scholarship for part-time students depends on the number of credit hours and the fee charged to part-time students at the participating college or university. Focusing specifically on paraprofessionals, Paraprofessional Resources and Research (PAR^2A) located in the University of Colorado, Denver has developed an alternate route to teaching by working as the lead agency to coordinate a smooth pathway for paraprofessionals, career changers with college degrees, recent college graduates, and emergency substitute teachers wishing to enter the teaching profession (Chopra & DiPalma, 2016). PAR^2A has transitioned more than 166 candidates into home grown teachers in 93 rural districts where PAR^2A hopes they will stay in the profession as a result of their deep roots in the community.

It is important to note that despite the seemingly widespread call for a GYO approach, it appears that not all GYO programs are inherently successful. Specifically, research has shown that GYO programs often struggle with participant retention (Rado & Perez, 2015). For example, Grow Your Own Illinois largely functions as a loan distributor that helps paraprofessionals gain a guaranteed position with their local school district. Candidates in the program receive forgivable college loans of up to $25,000 if they commit to working in underserved schools for five years. Candidates can use these loans to attend a network of colleges of education and community colleges. GYO Illinois has enrolled about 700 candidates in its first five years, but more than half left the program after receiving some funding. Only 80 have graduated from a teacher education program, and more than half of these are teaching full-time or part-time, far below the goal of 1,000 teachers by 2016. An additional 71 have been admitted to colleges of education. Applicants tend to be adults from the local communities, but most candidates struggle to pass the Basic Skills Test required for new teachers. Furthermore, only 38% of teachers are being prepared to teach in hard-to-staff rural schools despite this being the explicit goal of the program. Similar to Illinois, Idaho has the GYO Teacher Program that offers college scholarships, as well as a specific career ladder for bilingual school district staff to complete requirements to best help ESL and Native American students. While Idaho cites this program for the 14% increase in teaching certificates issued since 2014, 35% of these certified teachers are not employed in Idaho public schools. According to the 2018 Idaho Teacher Pipeline Report, the state is currently trying to understand what is happening with this population, noting that college-based initiatives alone are not sufficient in actually placing highly qualified teachers in the classroom. While Illinois and Idaho have quantitatively assessed the efficacy of their GYO programs, this is unfortunately far from a national trend. Dadisman and colleagues (2010) referenced eight GYO programs with likely more existing at the timing of this paper, but this review found only two program evaluations. By and large the efficacy evidence is anecdotal and appears in promotional material, like The Resource Guide to Creating Your Own

Teacher Pipeline (2016). In fact, this resource guide by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016) cites the Illinois GYO program as evidence of success in existing GYOs.

In conclusion, many rural school districts in the United States are facing severe teacher shortages (Bordonaro, 2017; Palmer, 2017; Whaley, 2017). A recent report by the non-profit Learning Policy Institute found that longstanding teacher shortages were becoming more acute in some states and especially among the type of schools common in our state, high poverty rural schools (Sutcher et al., 2016). In many of these states the difficulty of hiring qualified candidates has expanded beyond historical high-need content areas such as special education and math to include English language arts and elementary education (Cross, 2017). Several factors are contributing to these shortages, including an aging workforce, decreased enrollment in teacher preparation programs, and persistently high attrition from the profession (Goldring, Taie & Riddles, 2014). Research to date shows promising but limited success of the three main approaches (i.e., teacher preparation and recruitment for rural schools, financial incentives, and a GYO strategy). Nonetheless, these promising practices are, as discussed in the next section, being used in South Carolina to address teacher recruitment and retention.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina, like much of the country, struggles each year to recruit and retain qualified teachers to rural districts across the state. All areas of certification and all locations are now considered "critical needs" meaning that a high number of subjects and schools lack adequate teachers for the classroom. According to the annual supply and demand report produced by the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA), in the 2017-18 school year more than 5,300 teachers left their positions in South Carolina schools and did not return to a similar position in another SC school district. This loss of highly qualified teachers, added to the growing number of already vacant positions across the state, resulted in 621 unfilled teaching positions to begin the 2018-19 school year, a 13% increase from the previous school year (CERRA, 2019).

While the number of vacancies across the state at any given time is astounding, the problem is further underscored by the increase in the number of novice teachers (i.e., those with five or fewer years of teaching experience) who are leaving the profession and the decrease in the number of graduates from educator preparation programs across the state. According to CERRA, 35% of teachers who left the profession in 2017-18 had fewer than five years of teaching experience, while 13% had one year or less. Just as troubling, of those novice teachers who left the profession, 25% did not finish the school year before resigning their position. Finally, there has been a decrease of 418 graduates from the 2013-14 school year to the 2017-18 school year, a 30% drop over five years (CERRA, 2019). There are several initiatives and potentially promising practices to recruiting and retaining teachers for rural schools in South Carolina that are similar to those across the nation and these again include teacher preparation, financial incentives, and grow your own programs.

TEACHER PREPARATION AND RECRUITMENT

In response to the critical teacher shortage, organizations such as CERRA, SC-CREATE (Centers for the Re-Education and Advancement of Teachers in Special Education), SC-TEACHER (South Carolina Teacher Education Advancement Consortium through Higher Education Research), Carolina TIP (Teacher Induction Program), Apple Core Initiative, Call Me MISTER, and numerous private and public universities have sought to address the shortage and target recruitment and retention efforts. One of these initiatives, in particular, seeks to provide money and program relief to rural districts that qualify for funding. Through the Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI), administered by CERRA, funds are provided for any district, rural or non-rural, who meet the definition of high turnover rates which are currently set at 11% loss of faculty or

higher. The RRI included the term *rural* as it was assumed this would and, in practice, it does primarily serve rural districts though there are some urban districts served by RRI. It is also important to note that the available data on the RRI are in aggregate, so it is not possible to discuss findings for rural districts only. Currently, 36 school districts in regions across the state (13 in Pee Dee, 12 in Savannah River, six in Lowcountry, four in Midlands, and one in Upstate regions) are eligible to apply for funding to increase teacher recruitment and retention. Of those, 30 qualified for and requested the additional funding. From the districts that received money in the 2017-18 school year, 17 reported fewer teachers leaving and/or fewer vacancies for the 2018-19 school year, with one reporting zero vacancies. In addition, five of the 17 districts reported lower departures of early career teachers. Funding received by districts have been used for recruitment and retention incentives, salary supplements for critical needs areas, and salary supplements and professional development for beginning teacher mentors. While the RRI has not solved the problem of rural teacher recruitment, it has been a valuable resource for some districts in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (CERRA, 2019).

Active teacher preparation and recruitment initiatives by CERRA begin at the middle and high school level and continue to undergraduate cohorts with the administration of ProTeam, Teacher Cadet and Teaching Fellows. ProTeam is currently in place at more than 50 middle schools across South Carolina, reaching more than 1,000 students in the 2016-17 school year (CERRA, 2018). The goal of the program is to provide positive experiences for middle schoolers and a chance to engage in the education profession as a possible future. Teacher Cadet is administered at approximately 170 high schools across the state and provides high school and college credits for high-achieving juniors and seniors who display exemplary interpersonal and leadership skills. The goal of Teacher Cadet is to increase knowledge of the teaching profession through college partnerships and working with students and teachers in middle and elementary schools. Through Teacher Cadet, students are exposed to the nature of teaching and schooling and the critical issues that educators face daily and challenged to become advocates for the profession (CERRA, 2018). Finally, Teaching Fellows, a fellowship opportunity provided by CERRA, seeks recruitment of high school seniors into the teaching profession. Two hundred fellowships are provided annually to students who exhibit high academic achievement, history of service, and a desire to teach in South Carolina. Students chosen to receive the fellowship agree to teach in South Carolina schools one year for each year of funding received. Though there is little data on the effectiveness of these programs and they are not specific to rural teacher recruitment, given the numbers of potential future educators that these programs seem to be reaching, it appears they have promise for helping to address teacher shortages in rural and other schools in our state.

There are other promising teacher preparation and professional development programs administered through university partnerships that are focused on rural educators. This includes the *Developing Master Teachers through the South Carolina Science and Mathematics Teacher Leaders (SC-SMTL) Program* (funded by the National Science Foundation Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program) and the Center of Excellence for the Advancement of Workforce and Knowledge Economy in Middle Schools (SC-AWAKE, funded by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education) at the University of South Carolina. Noyce fellows take part in a five-year teacher leadership program for math and science teachers in high-needs rural middle and high schools in South Carolina. Noyce fellows are provided stipends for extended professional development opportunities, completion of National Board certification and coaching teacher training. Thus far, SC-AWAKE partners with rural middle schools to provide professional development opportunities in project- and place-based learning. Teachers from partner schools are eligible to enroll in and receive tuition assistance for a nine-hour Project-Based Learning Certificate through the University of South Carolina. Both Noyce fellows and some SC-AWAKE teachers serve as mentors to pre-service teacher interns and together the support provided to Noyce and SC-AWAKE in-service and pre-service teachers is, in part, intended to improve recruitment and retention of current and future teachers. The impact of the efforts by the Noyce and AWAKE center are still being examined and, as such, at this point their effectiveness on rural teacher recruitment and retention is largely not known though some data are promising. Specifically, all

Noyce teachers have remained in their rural schools throughout the five years of the program and three of the four teacher interns with the AWAKE center then began their teaching career at the partner rural middle school where they interned.

Other initiatives across the state, though also not rural specific, provide recruitment of teacher candidates from outside of the state. The international teacher initiative provides teachers in subjects such as math, science, special education, and foreign-language instruction to fill gaps in districts. Alternative certification programs such as the Program for Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) and Troops to Teachers aim to recruit non-education degreed individuals and veterans to teaching in low-income critical subject areas and provide financial and coursework assistance to meet the requirements of initial licensure. The program for recruitment and retention of minority teachers, a program provided by South Carolina State University, seeks to recruit and train educators considered non-traditional students. Finally, targeted recruitment of teachers for vocational, technology, and trade courses is the goal of a Career and Technology Education (CATE) work-based certification program seeking individuals in career and technology areas who do not meet the requirements of regular certification. Though there is limited data on the effectiveness of these programs, it is important to be aware of these efforts in order to potentially address the widespread and complex issue of rural teacher recruitment in our state.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Historically, education has been perceived as a low paying profession, with pay being even lower for high need, rural districts that do not have a large enough tax base for help. While programs such as the RRI can help, rising tuition costs for college students can keep the profession out of reach. Financial assistance and loan forgiveness programs, other than SC-CREATE, can provide some assistance but may not be able to erase all debt. The SC teacher loan program provides from $2,500 to $5,000 per year and is repaid through service in a South Carolina public school. Rates of forgiveness vary, but for those who teach in a critical subject and geographical location (many of which are rural areas and schools), 33 1/3% can be forgiven for each year in the classroom (https://www.scstudentloan.org/school-loans/sc-teacher-loan-programs-forgiveness). Additional programs such as the public service loan forgiveness for rural service and district provided loan forgiveness programs can ease the financial burden of education preparation programs and initial licensure. However, at this time little is known about the effectiveness of such incentives on rural teacher recruitment and retention.

GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

These programs overseen by CERRA are important in increasing awareness of the education profession and recruitment of qualified educators to the field. However, other than RRI, they do not specifically target the issue of rural recruitment and retention. SC-CREATE (Centers for the Re-education and Advancement of Teachers in special education), a unique grow-your-own initiative, works with local education agencies, higher education institutions, and rural schools to promote the certification and placement of qualified special educators already teaching in rural schools. SC-CREATE provides funding for coursework and textbook costs for educators seeking initial or add-on certifications that will serve the special education population. Furthermore, the poverty rate among rural public school students is substantial with 19% of rural students living below poverty, although that is less the poverty rates in cities and towns (25% and 21%, respectively; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In addition, Sutton and colleagues (2014) undertook a study to determine if SC-CREATE provided an equitable distribution of teachers across South Carolina. According to their results, the number of program completers for emotional disability licensure was lower than for multi-categorical licensure in rural school districts. More importantly, they found that of those who applied to SC-CREATE, there were a higher percentage of completers in rural school districts (Sutton et al., 2014). This finding was not surprising as the goal of SC-CREATE was partially realized

through targeted recruitment in rural school districts. Though these findings are encouraging, Sutton and colleagues (2014) identified a gap in program availability that may disproportionately affect rural teacher recruitment. Specifically, each year there were applicants to the program who were denied entry if they lived in remote parts of the state with no access to an on-campus degree program. In response to this programmatic shortcoming, one of the partnering colleges developed a full distance/online master's program, providing coursework and funding to 18 educators its first year. The creation of an online master's degree program and the targeted recruitment of rural educators provides highly qualified teachers to even the most vulnerable and remote rural schools in the state.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to advance the state's work related to promising practices of rural teacher recruitment and retention, perhaps the most pressing issue is to undertake high quality research and evaluation on the effectiveness of the efforts and programs outlined in this paper. This is, in our view, most important because without such data various stakeholders may be using finite financial and personnel resources on ineffective strategies. Relatedly, research studies and evaluations along these lines should, when appropriate, incorporate cost-benefit analyses. Finally, while some of these efforts and programs already seem to have proof-of-concept, it may also be important to examine usability, feasibility, and fidelity of implementation. Together, this information could provide insights into which efforts or programs we may want to continue to use or expand their use of and direct resources toward them as well as how these may need to be modified to ensure that they can be implemented and sustained.

There are five key recommendations that have emerged from this paper. First, context matters. The term "rural" is often used to describe any area that is not urban; however, since one size does not fit all in describing rural communities, teacher recruitment and retention challenges may vary greatly from one rural community to the next and should be considered when developing plans for recruitment and retention that are context-specific.

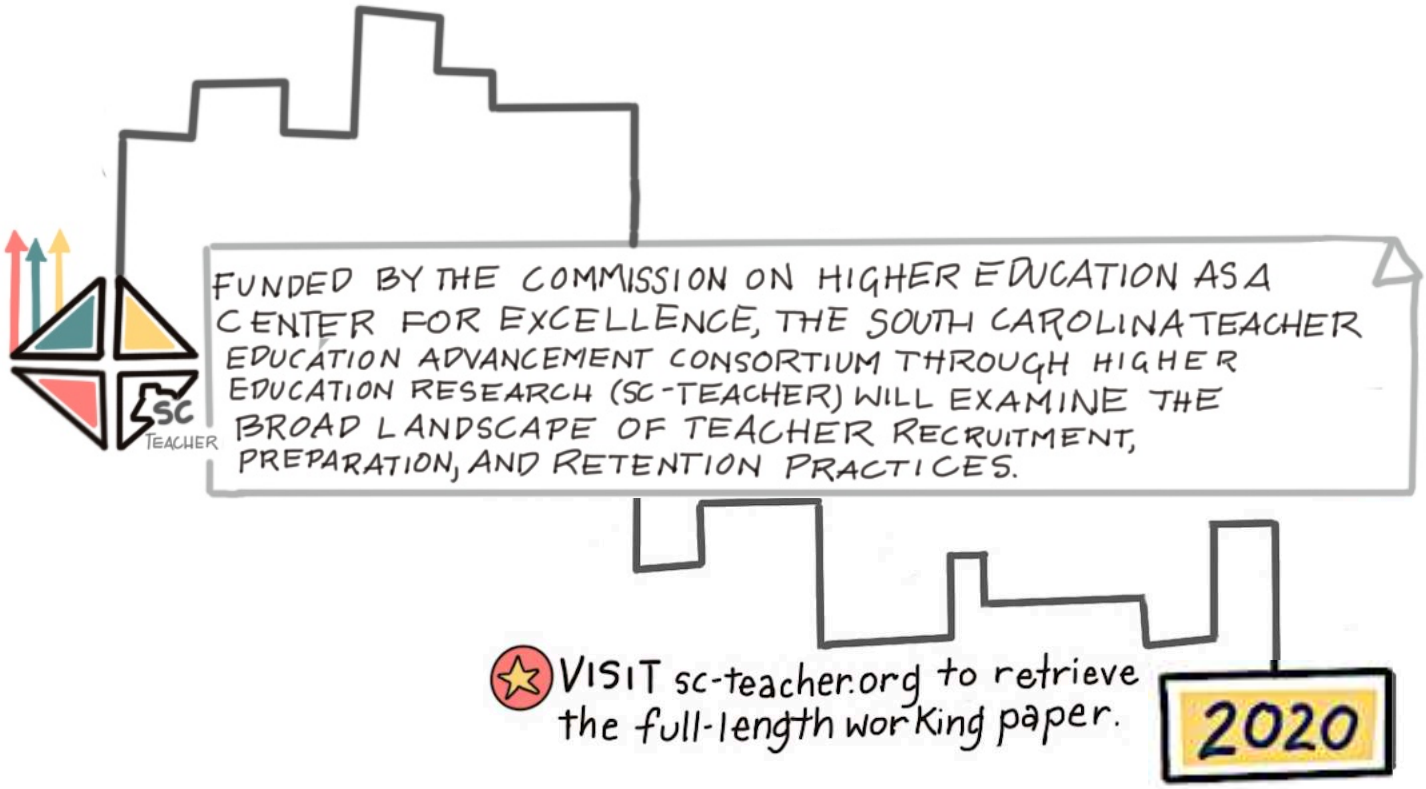
Second, we recommend that we better prepare teachers for teaching in rural and remote locations by partnering with universities to serve as the conduit for supporting this preparation. There are several examples from various states reviewed in the full paper that offer reduced in-state tuition (funded through federal grants and other forms of subsidy), utilize technology for coursework through distance education (to reduce the travel requirements for on-site courses), or have developed a partnership between rural community colleges and the state university as bridge programs.

Third, offering financial incentives is commonly used but effects of programs that offer financial incentives have not been rigorously evaluated and have produced mixed results. Many programs offer bonuses, stipends, loan programs, and housing assistance to attract teachers to hard-to-staff, rural schools and districts; however, systematic evaluations of these efforts need to be conducted.

Fourth, we recommend nurturing "grow-your-own" (GYO) programs that train paraprofessionals already working in rural schools or target aspiring teachers who want to return to their home communities after receiving their degrees. Studies have repeatedly shown a strong, positive correlation between location of current teaching position and location of hometown, high school, or college (Monk, 2007). It is important

to note, however, that despite the seemingly widespread call for a GYO approach, it appears that not all GYO programs are inherently successful.

Finally, rigorous research and evaluation of programmatic efforts for rural teacher recruitment and retention is what is **most needed** in order to identify recommended practices. Systematic research and evaluation studies are limited, which have yielded conflicting results in promising practices. Thus, in order to identify recommended practices, research studies need to be conducted that focus directly on the impact and fidelity of these strategies. Dimensions of fidelity would include implementing intervention practices as intended (adherence), the quantity or frequency of intervention practices (dosage), the quality of the intervention practice, and what has been implemented that differs from the standard practice (program differentiation). Only then will we have the evidence needed to recommend specific practices for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural communities.



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