Perceptions of Rural Superintendents on Factors Influencing Employment Decisions

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Introduction

Rural school districts play a vital role in the nation's education system because one in four children in the United States attend a rural school, which makes rural educational institutions crucial for the communities that they support (Tekniepe, 2015). A rural superintendent is a community figure and is responsible for serving students, families, staff, community, and school board needs. The position of a superintendent is complex, and one of the most demanding positions in school administration whether it is in a rural or urban setting.

Career superintendency in a single district is extremely rare and turnover in the position is one of the highest in the education field. Chingos, Whitehurst & Lindquist (2014) claim that a "school district superintendent is largely a short-term job." Sparks (2012) argues stability at the central office has been linked to a greater likelihood of success for new education initiatives, which typically take five to seven years to mature. Thus, superintendent turnover has drawn speculation and concern that revolving leadership at the district level may have negative consequences for school districts. Outcomes resulting from frequent superintendent departures, such as student achievement and implementation of initiatives, are more difficult to predict. Because "many school districts across the United States find it increasingly difficult to retain their superintendents long-term," the causes and effects of superintendent tenure need to be better understood (Kamrath, 2015). Although limited studies have examined why superintendents leave their positions and how their departures impact school districts, much is still unanswered in the literature about why they stay in a position. Building on previous research regarding superintendent tenure, we examine how a small sample of rural superintendents perceives the aspects of their role that influences their employment decisions. This study examined the factors superintendents themselves identify as impacting their decision to stay or leave a school district. We explore one main research question:

> What are the perceived barriers, challenges, and opportunities superintendents experience in their jobs that lead them to stay or leave their positions as superintendents?

Multiple conditions are necessary for a superintendent to be successful and effectively implement change in a district. Our study contributes to the literature by providing perspectives of rural superintendents, their experiences in serving high needs, rural communities, and their perceived abilities to implement change.

Literature Review

We situated our study within three areas of existing research regarding superintendent employment: superintendent turnover, the rural superintendent's relationship with their school board and other policymakers, and expectations of

the job. Our conceptual framework draws on research that is relevant to the complex and evolving landscape of the rural superintendency. In support of our analysis, we used continuous participation theory and prospect theory as a theoretical framework to understand the perceptions of superintendents of how the push and pull of the job, politics, and other variables that influence their productivity and ultimately frame their employment decisions.

Superintendent Turnover in Rural Districts

Superintendents of rural districts throughout the United States are responsible for the districts' success and face challenges because of personal, professional, and cultural obstacles that exist in isolated areas that can be opposed to outsiders (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). This leads to an increased turnover rate for the rural superintendency that negatively affects student achievement, and financially affects the rural communities (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014; Wood, Finch & Mirecki, 2013). While studies from the beginning of the millennium estimated typical superintendent tenure anywhere from 4-7 years (CUBE, 2002; AASA, 2000; Natkin et al, 2003), the average superintendent tenure in a rural position is 2.7 years (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014; Wood, Finch & Mirecki, 2013). The average tenure for superintendents in a non-rural district is between six and seven years (Byrd et al., 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Superintendents commonly leave their roles for superintendency in other districts, other positions within the same district, a position in a different field, a position in higher education or some education related field, or retirement. However, many superintendents are frequently forced out of their positions involuntarily by dissatisfied school boards and politics. Not only is the superintendency transitory in nature, but "approximately 20% of superintendents turn over each year, with more than half of them leaving the superintendency altogether" (Grissom & Mitani, 2016).

Due to the high superintendent turnover in rural districts, sometimes school boards turn to shorter contracts due to concerns and reservations. Tekniepe (2015) finds single-year contracts reflect a board's uncertainty of a superintendent, questioning of the vision, and potentially holding a lack of commitment to the superintendent's leadership. This leads to increased board control over the superintendent, which could reduce the ability of the superintendent to lead innovative change to improve academic achievement within the district.

Grissom & Andersen's (2012) study shows that superintendents tend to move away from positions in rural districts toward positions in more populated urban and suburban areas. The low pay for superintendents in rural districts may be one reason for patterns consistent with superintendents using jobs in rural districts as "stepping stones" to positions in larger districts (Grissom & Andersen,

2012; Watson & Hassett, 2004). The evidence shows that rural superintendency can be seen as a temporary position due to shorter contracts, isolated areas, and lower salaries. Superintendents make moves to larger or higher paying positions once experience and knowledge are increased. Grissom and Mitani's (2016) analysis also showed that higher salaries lead to lower likelihood of superintendent turnover.

Aside from average tenure and salary issues, studies have debated whether or not superintendent turnover is really a significant issue worth addressing. Qualitative data have identified many concerns of stakeholders, yet quantitative data have yet to demonstrate measurable change stemming from frequent superintendent turnover (Alsbury 2008). Generally speaking, "successful reforms require five years or more of a superintendent's attention, implying that excessively short tenures, particularly if experienced frequently in a brief period of time, could prove detrimental to system-wide improvement efforts" (Natkin et al, 2003). Districts with high rates of turnover "repeatedly experience a shift in priorities and expectations with changes in leadership, and they face the ongoing challenge of effectively sustaining educational improvement efforts" (Kamrath, 2015). Specifically, "superintendent turnover creates disruption in district management and can negatively affect staff morale, funding for district operations, and community support, potentially hurting student achievement" (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Hill and Jochim (2018) suggest that rapid turnover in the superintendency also diminishes its professional reputation. Although Freedberg and Collier (2016) support the idea that "many experts agree that it takes far longer for reforms to take root than the average length of time that many superintendents stay in their positions," they also propose that "turnover is not always disruptive, and can even be positive" when innovation and change is necessary.

The School Board and the Political Arena

Political conflict is commonly associated with superintendent turnover. Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) first introduced Dissatisfaction Theory to explain superintendent turnover by proposing that changing community values and demographics lead to the unseating of school board members and later, the superintendent. Alsbury (2008) built on this research and presented another way of looking at community evolution in that "it could be argued that the school board is a microcosm of the current attitudes, joys, and stresses of the citizenry," and that "communities who are in conflict affect everyone, including students in the local school." Because school board members are frequently up for re-election, they often expect superintendents to make significant impacts within unrealistic time frames (Freedberg & Collier, 2016). In addition to competing for positions on the board, "some board members have one-issue agendas or seek to build their own reputations at the superintendent's expense" (Hill & Jochim,

2018). Just as Ulrich (2017) asserted that instability on the school board explains some superintendent turnover, Sharp et al (2002) argued that "consistent board support leads to extended years of service from the superintendent."

School board interactions with superintendents also contribute to superintendent employment decisions. In one study, Kamrath (2015) found that problems with the school board was the greatest contributor to superintendent turnover in the districts he observed. Grissom and Andersen (2012) found that reasons for poor relationships between superintendents and their school boards include role confusion, tendencies among some board members to micromanage, and incompatible approaches to decision making. They were able to conclude, districts with high-functioning school boards tend to have much less superintendent turnover (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Byrd, Drews, and Johnson (2006) also found that average tenure among superintendents was found to decrease as the level of difficulty working with the board president or board members increased.

Despite board relations consistently presented as a major factor in superintendent decision making about whether to stay in a district or leave, an overwhelming majority of evaluations of superintendents by school boards rated superintendent performance as good or excellent (Ulrich, 2017). Grissom and Mitani (2016) also note the interesting finding that there is little evidence that school boards or communities hold superintendents accountable for test scores or score changes, at least in terms of continued employment. On the other hand, superintendents gave board members a much lower rating related to the school board's performance and indicated that board turnover and community pressure are major stressors in their job (Ulrich, 2017).

The Work of Superintendents: Expectations versus Reality

Superintendents frequently leave positions when expectations do not meet reality. Sharp et al (2002) found that 95% of superintendents entered the profession thinking they could make a difference and 91% thought the job would allow them to move the district forward. Bollinger & Grady (2018) reiterated sentiments of well-intentioned superintendents who enjoyed creating a vision for the district, acting as instructional leaders, building relationships with others, and developing the potential of those around them. Yet, as time goes on and "a gap arises between the superintendent's expectation of experience and what he/she actually experiences," job dissatisfaction can materialize (Ulrich, 2017). For example, in Kamrath's (2015) interviews, he found that "superintendents generally asserted that power is something to be shared, and that decision-making is best done as a collaborative effort with stakeholders. In contrast, staff members perceived shared power as weakness and collaborative decision making as "wishy-washy."' Hill and Jochim (2018) recognize variations in legal status and authority across the country can complicate the position as well. "Superintendents are expected to

work actively to transform, restructure, and redefine schools, yet they hold an organizational position that is historically and traditionally committed to resisting change and maintaining stability. Consequently, superintendents are quitting, being dismissed, or retiring early because they have failed to deliver the quick fixes demanded of them" (Sharp, Malone, & Walter, 2002).

The superintendent has a multifaceted, demanding job description. The School Superintendents Association (AASA) conceptualizes five major roles within the responsibilities of the superintendent: (1) teacher-scholar, (2) business manager, (3) statesperson/political leader, (4) applied social scientist, and (5) effective communicator (Ulrich, 2017). Each of these roles require unique skill sets often unrelated to one another, yet they are all critical components to the work. Not only must superintendents exhibit competencies in many professional arenas, they need to be savvy enough to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously. For instance, in rural districts where resources are insufficient, superintendents may need to act as building administrators, bus drivers, or substitute teachers as well. Kamrath (2015) adds that in smaller districts where there are fewer school administrators, people notice when the superintendent is not present at events and functions. Rural superintendents are identified as political figures. Although superintendents generally desire the complex challenge presented by the superintendency, one study found the "lack of fiscal resources inhibited superintendent efficiency and contributed to superintendents leaving the profession" (Byrd, Drews, and Johnson, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Research on superintendent employment has often been rooted in continuous participation theory, decision–output theory, and dissatisfaction theory (Alsbury, 2003; Wirt & Kirst, 2009). These theoretical perspectives have predicted that superintendents are less likely to remain in districts where the school board becomes dissatisfied with them or where the working relationship with the board becomes strained (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Superintendent turnover is the result of a two-sided decision. The school board must consider if a superintendent should be retained or dismissed, and the superintendent themself must decide to remain in her or his current position or leave. Grissom and Mitani (2016) recognized both the "push" and "pull" forces at work for turnover noting that superintendents could leave because they are high performers and have attractive offers from other districts or because they are low performers and schools boards are dissatisfied. "Evidence that voluntary turnover in the superintendency occurs frequently suggests that the influence of district characteristics should be considered because they help define the working conditions that factor into the costs and benefits of remaining in the district versus taking other opportunities" (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Given that school boards and superintendents

consider many factors when contemplating a change, it is important to investigate district and personal factors that might influence turnover decisions.

For this study we used prospect theory as a basis for analysis regarding superintendents' employment decisions because it models real-life choices, rather than optimal decisions. Prospect theory was developed as a behavioral economic theory by Kahneman and Tveresky (1986) to describe how people make choices that involve risks and frame decisions. The theory posits that people make decisions based on the potential value of losses and gains rather than the final outcome, and that people evaluate these losses and gains using their own heuristics. An important implication of prospect theory is that the way people subjectively frame an outcome or transaction in their mind affects the utility they expect or receive.

Research Methodology

Data were gathered from superintendents who were currently serving in the superintendent role during the 2018-2019 school year in the State of Idaho. The target population included all rural superintendents from all geographic areas of the state (n= 108). The sample of 10 superintendents to interview was randomly selected from the population. The study reports on the reflective responses of these ten superintendents who worked in rural settings in Idaho. We defined rural districts based on Idaho's definition of rural in Idaho Code 33-319 which states:

A school district shall be considered a rural school district if it meets one (1) of the following two (2) criteria:

(a) There are fewer than twenty (20) enrolled students per square mile within the area encompassed by the school district's boundaries; or
(b) The county in which a plurality of the school district's market value for assessment purposes is located contains less than twenty-five thousand (25,000) residents, based on the most recent decennial United States census.

The definition and identification of "rural" varies in the literature and is often based on National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, which we also considered in our sample. Of the 10 superintendents, eight identified as men and two as women. The superintendents mean years of experience as a superintendent was 9.6 years (range 2 to 35 years), with their mean years of service to their current district of 5 years (range 1 to 10 years). Characteristics of our superintendents and their school district characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. Characteristics of superintendents (*n *= 10)*

Characteristic	Percent
Gender	
Male	80
Female	20

District Student Population	
Less than 1000	30
1001-3000	50
Over 3000	20
Years of experience as a Superintendent	
1–4 years	20
4–10 years	50
>10 years	30
Previously served as a K-12 teacher	100
Elementary teaching exp.	20
Secondary teaching exp.	80

We conducted the study from January to June 2019. The interview protocol developed was an open-ended narrative with question stems about each of the major factors identified by previous research: school board, policies, compensation, community interactions, work culture and climate, district size, and location. Superintendents were also encouraged to identify other factors that the research team may not have asked about. Further, the interview protocol asked superintendents to rate the factors as being "extremely influential to not influential" to their decision to remain in the current district. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and field notes were also collected and discussed post-interview in our coding sessions. The resulting transcripts and field notes were then coded using an analytic, inductive approach (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To add validity to participant interviews they were also asked to numerically rank their perceptions of factors related to superintendent employment from 1 being the most important to 10 being the least important. We also utilized state report cards and NCES information to provide background information for the districts they represented. We did not collect any other artifacts from superintendents as our design relied on their perceptions and interpretations of the role and influences that impact their decisions to stay in the job. We took great care, in accordance with institutional review requirements, to protect identities of the superintendents because of their positions as superintendents, and the relationships with their school boards and communities. The superintendents were forthcoming and honest in their insights and perceptions and shared details that might make it possible to identify them, therefore we have redacted information about their specific systems, surrounding communities, and other sensitive details in the dataset. We assigned pseudonyms for all superintendents and rounded numbers of district student populations, as well as reported those in bands of student population (less than 1000, 1000-3000, and over 3000).

Findings

In a discussion of the factors rural Idaho superintendents identify as influencing their decision to stay or leave a district, participant comments demonstrate the importance and interactions of multiple variables. To review, we consider one research question: What are the perceived barriers, challenges, and opportunities superintendents experience in their jobs that lead them to stay or leave their positions as superintendents? The factors that emerged, as the most influential were school boards, personal fulfillment, work/life balance, ability to contribute, community relations and district culture. Superintendents interviewed for this study freely shared their own experiences, and the experiences of others of which they had knowledge. They all appeared to share openly and honestly and thought reflectively about each interview question. A review of the rankings to their open-ended questions indicated consistency with their perceptions of the level of influence for each of the topic areas.

We present our findings in three main sections. First, the superintendents' portrayal of the significant role the school board takes in their employment decisions – both directly and indirectly. All superintendents indicated that the school board is one of the most influential aspects of the decision for a superintendent to stay in their position. Second, the superintendents described their perceived ability to make a difference or impact on the education of children as being one of the main reasons that took the position. Many described this as the personal fulfillment they get from serving in the role. An interesting connection between these is that the school board must be able to permit the superintendent to make an impact. For example, some superintendents indicated that they had experience with a school board that was not supportive and sometimes actively blocked their ability to make an impact. This may further illustrate the level of influence the school board has on superintendent turnover. Third, we discuss other variables that emerged as influencers in superintendent's decisions to remain or leave a position, such as work/life balance, community relations and district culture. District policies and compensation were identified as less influential factors by study superintendents.

School Boards

Most of the superintendents in this study indicated that their current job satisfaction and willingness to continue in their positions for the foreseeable future was directly related to positive relationships with their boards and personal feelings that their boards shared and supported their visions for their districts. In the words of one superintendent, "The number one thing is the relationship with the school board." They went on to say, "Every election brings with it change to the board and that alone can have a large impact on the tenure of the superintendent." All superintendents rated the school board as "extremely influential" when it comes to the influences on their employment decisions. When

asked to rank order a list of factors influencing to stay or not in their superintendent position, the mean ranking for school boards was 9.67 (10 = the most influential).

Superintendents discussed how the role of the board can change as the community and community interests change. "My job is most stressful when the community has concerns. As the superintendent you always see both sides of the issue and there will always be those that are not happy with an outcome of my decisions." Superintendent A described the superintendent-board relationship in two ways: 1) as being like a marriage and, 2) like an independent contractor working for the board. "It is weird having five bosses, but you often have to organize and train them," said Superintendent B. "I had a rogue board member, and it was hard to keep the rogue board member in line. I heard from the community and staff that what I was doing what was right and that helped me continue in the job. The board member eventually left the role." Superintendents talked of the importance of having the authority they need to do their job, meaning they were given authority to do their job by the board and ability to exercise their authority, "I am in charge." One superintendent talked about the "quarterback theory" - that much like the quarterback of the football team, the credit for successes and blame for failures falls on the superintendent, so they need to establish their authority early. Others mentioned the importance of board support for a superintendent's professional development. They identified the board's support as providing time and resources such as professional journals, conferences, and association memberships as supporting their professional development.

Personal Fulfillment

After board relations, our sample of superintendents seemed to feel that the ability to make an impact was the most important factor for them staying in a position or leaving a position. They indicated that if they felt they were not making a difference, they would not know why they were doing the job. Superintendent B said that she would not want to have to do anything that "hurts the kids". The superintendent was attracted to her district because of her love for the kids and the district was small enough to be part of the teaching and learning.

Several told personal stories of accomplishing goals with the support of their boards or communities and the deep satisfaction and personal fulfillment they felt as a result. Superintendent C brought up the feeling of seeing thrilled families at graduations, "It is the highest, most satisfying thing - better than any other thing – knowing you had a part in that story." He also talked about how he had originally planned to stay in his district for only three years but has been there for 18 years due to being embraced by the community and having an impact on the greater community through his work. Superintendent D talked about the staff

perception that they were the best in the state, which in his opinion made them want to maintain the status quo.

> *They had a false perception of themselves and I had to work with them to look at the data and see where we could do better for kids. Making an impact is an important factor for a superintendent, I must be convinced what we are doing is best for kids. I also must have a strong ego, not a big ego.*

We also heard an example of an individual that was not able to make an impact because it felt like an upstream battle with the board, as they didn't want to change. "This is why the previous superintendent left, because they couldn't make an impact." Superintendent E shared that having an impact can be both easy and hard in a small district. "You must be an expert on everything, and you are often the expert on everything. I think I was less impactful in a larger school district." Superintendents expressed their perceived need to be decisive and able to make decisions that align with the districts needs. They also discussed the importance of understanding the community dynamics and where the school district fits in the greater community. "You can't try to convince people that you have the answer when you don't. You also have to understand each subgroup and build the relationships that will sustain you through tough times." Further, superintendents discussed the importance of understanding where you personal fit in the greater school community. Superintendent F discussed how his predecessor had a strained relationship with a building principal and the principal made it clear that he could not work with the superintendent. Because the community and the board liked the principal, it led to the superintendent leaving his position.

Other Factors that Influence Rural Superintendents Employment Decisions
The superintendents of our study rated compensation anywhere from "extremely influential" to "very little influence" on their employment decisions. Overall, it was ranked as a mean rank score of 7.1 across the sample (with 10 being ranked the most influential factor). The sample seemed to discuss pay with somewhat diverse opinions. "Different states pay more than Idaho but people still stay here because of the rural and outdoor lifestyle, but pay does make a difference.*"*

Another factor that emerged influential from the data was work/life balance, and more specifically the superintendent's own family and their desires. "The desire to make your own family happy dramatically influences your decision to stay." Superintendents described how the public role, especially in a rural community, could also impact your family. One superintendent offered this advice, "A person should do some soul searching before accepting a superintendent situation. You and your family have to be okay with living in the fish bowl." Other superintendents in the study validated this idea. "Definitely for my house, my kids had to live in a fishbowl too," said Superintendent G. *"*I spent more time away from home, and my kids were impacted in school as they

attended the same school where I was the superintendent. It sometimes impacted their relationships with teachers," shared Superintendent D.

Several superintendents talked about how a superintendent often "sacrifices their own family for other people's families" and that a board that supports a superintendent's home life is a positive for superintendent health. They also talked about the difficulties faced by superintendents moving to very rural communities where their families may not want to go. One participant shared a story about a colleague whose family refused to move to a tiny community and are living in another community so he has to travel on weekends to be with them. Superintendents described the superintendent's family as "the people you come home to at night" and if they aren't happy, the superintendent isn't going to be happy. Many superintendents talked about finding a good community fit for both your leadership and your family's existence. Family desire about a position had a mean ranking of 8.67 (10 being ranked the most influential factor) by the study sample.

Another factor that emerged in the study was the role of gender. Superintendent J discussed being the first woman superintendent to lead her rural district. "It can be tough for a female leader. There are challenges to authority, some people in my district look to male colleagues instead of me for answers. I had a board member tell me "you should wear more dresses."

Finally, superintendents in this study indicated that work culture and the culture of the district are very important and superintendents will be drawn to districts that have a compatible culture to their own ideals. The study superintendents had varying views on who was responsible for creating and maintaining the district culture. Some said that the superintendent has "huge influence in creating and shaping the culture" and "culture emanates from leaders" and several in the study clearly take ownership of their district cultures. While another participant said, "Superintendents support the culture but they do not build the culture."

Discussion

This study reports on how ten rural superintendents in Idaho perceived the factors that influence their employment decision to stay in their role with a district or leave the position. We used prospect theory (Kahneman &Tveresky, 1986) as a theoretical basis to consider our findings. This theory questions the notion that because rational decision-makers will know what they will like, the outcomes of their decisions can be inferred based on decision utility (Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, 1999). Kahneman and Tversky's original study of prospect theory suggests a world in which a person's view of the world is limited by the information they perceive as being important and available at any given moment, therefore decisions might not be consistent with the data or logical. Also, individual preferences may change with changing conditions or contexts. Prospect

theory provides that people's decisions are based not on dollar values but on the psychological values of outcomes. This seems especially true in this study. Superintendents did not rank compensation as the highest influencer and had various opinions on its importance in their decision-making about employment. The study bears out that psychological values of outcomes—perceptions about impact, personal fulfillment, school board relationships, and even family desires—were more influential than dollars. Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theory also offers that what matters is not the absolute level of compensation but the relative level—relative to what the decision maker already has. This notion of the reference point is the central reason why prospect theory is so relevant to understanding staying, because the reference point adds value to staying. Thus, people make different choices about the same likely outcomes of leaving a position depending on their reference points. An individual's history may also be important in understanding what choice they will make when faced with any expected utilities generated on the basis of known probabilities (staying with a district or leaving). Thus, two people will not make the same choice even when they are faced with the same expected utilities because their reference points are different.

The findings of this study support previous research that superintendent tenure is directly related to the quality of the relationship between the superintendent and the school board (Byrd, Drews, and Johnson, 2006; Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla & Ghosh 2003; Harvey, 2003). However, the findings from this study did not align with Grissom & Andersen's findings (2012) indicating that superintendents leave rural districts due to lower salaries. This may be because of the geographic differences of the study samples (California versus Idaho) and also superintendent salaries in relation to other employment in the area. In rural communities the superintendent can often be the highest paid person in the community.

A variable that also relates to superintendent tenure is stress levels of the position and this did not come out explicitly in the data. Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that nearly 60% of superintendents experienced either "considerable" or "very great" stress levels. Their study discovered that superintendent stress is due to the schedule and inability to please all stakeholders. In addition, there was increased stress around the decreased funding and the increased accountability expected by both state and federal mandates. Further, there are additional variables that may influence superintendent turnover such as a growing lack of parental support, student discipline, safety concerns, excessive bureaucracy, conflicting internal and external expectations, deteriorating and overcrowded facilities, community dissatisfaction, federal and state mandates, teacher shortages, poverty, and special programs may exist and contribute to employment decisions.

Limitations

We cannot confirm that these rural superintendents made employment decisions based on the factors they identified. The study is also limited by the small sample size from one state, the superintendents' subjective response bias, and recall inconsistencies. Author 1 is a former rural superintendent and currently teaches in a superintendent preparation program. In addition, several co-authors also have served in K-12 leadership positions. We took great care to ensure validity of our findings and to mitigate analysis bias. Our findings cannot be generalized to other leadership settings, rural settings, or other leaders.

Conclusions and Implications

We sought to better understand the perceptions of rural superintendents and the variables that influence their employment decisions. This study contributes to the literature on factors related to superintendent employment and turnover, with a specific focus on rural superintendents perceptions. Our study also demonstrates areas where we can improve preparation programs that prepare superintendent candidates for rural placements. It is important to consider ways for preparation programs to enrich existing curriculum and practices to represent the current and future needs of rural superintendents. There are also implications for current superintendents to compare their own experiences to those that were expressed in this study. The superintendency can be an isolating position and people can forget that others may be having a similar experience. Those in superintendent roles may be able to consider other perspectives that might aid them in making employment decisions.

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