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FACTORS IMPACTING TEACHER TURNOVER IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH FEWER THAN 500 STUDENTS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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by

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TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH FEWER THAN 500 STUDENTS:

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by

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ABSTRACT

Rural Texas districts experience higher rates in teacher turnover compared to other districts. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study was designed to explore the relationships among district size and the factors that contributed to teacher turnover. Data was collected from Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students. A simple correlation determined that no relationship existed between district size and teacher turnover rate during the 2016-2017 school year in the 313 districts that had fewer than 500 students. Participating districts came from two different regions. Four superintendents were interviewed about the factors surrounding turnover regarding the teacher turnover in 2016-2017 along with historical trends in their district. The results demonstrated that no significant relationship exists between district size and turnover rate. These findings may provide information on teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students.

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A special acknowledgement goes to my participants. I was anxious about meeting strangers in a world that I am so unfamiliar with. You all were the most hospitable, most helpful people that I have had the pleasure of meeting. After working with you on this project, I have to admit, you are the unsung heroes of public education in Texas. Your commitment to the teachers, students and families is truly inspiring. You all do more with less, but your focus remains on the people involved. Thank you for your humanitarianism; your communities are lucky to have you.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my paternal grandparents, Grandma Dot and Pop Pop. Although Pop Pop passed away before this dream became a reality, his influence was timeless. I am honored to have had the opportunity to complete this program at the same university that he taught at. Throughout this program I have had the opportunity to have a wide variety of conversations with my Grandma Dot. I appreciate the time she invested in me as well as the criticality in our conversations. I know exactly where my rebel-rousing side came from. Thank you for teaching me to stray away from status quo. We have such an important role as educators and I strive to always be critical and reflective in my practice. Education is the future. My grandparents unwavering dedication to education was an integral part of my upbringing. I am thankful for the service to our future that both of them provided through formal and informal education. I will forever pay it forward. As my grandmother says, “teaching is just in our blood”.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Introduction

According to Tehseen and Hadi (2015), "Across the US, nearly half a million teachers leave their schools each year" (p. 234). Currently, there are many studies in the research community that seek to explain teacher mobility, retention, and turnover in public education. Djonko-Moore (2015) explained, "An enhanced understanding of teacher attrition and mobility will enable administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to consider changes in policies, procedures, or training that can increase teacher retention . . ." (p. 3). However, there are still many questions surrounding teacher turnover, specifically regarding policies and laws that were put into place to help the low-income, minority students (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Teacher retention has also become part of the working literature surrounding the topic of turnover. According to Sass, Flores, Claeys, and Perez (2012), "Many teachers who leave the profession are highly capable and competent individuals, thus, the question is how to retain these teachers . . ." (p. 2). Unfortunately, the students are the ones directly impacted by teacher turnover. Djonok-Moore (2015) noted, "teacher attrition and mobility undermine efforts to provide a rigorous education for students . . ." (p. 2).

Additionally, the data since 2010 in Texas rural schools has been higher in respect to teacher turnover when compared to all teachers in Texas. According to TEA (2017) districts with fewer than 500 students had 27% leave in 2011-2012, 43.6% in 2012-2013, 37.6% in 2013-2014, and 34.2% in 2014-2015 which was much higher than the districts with 50,000 or more students.

Table 1

Turnover by district size

District Size	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
50,000 and over	14.6	19.1	18.0	17.7
Under 500	27.0	43.6	37.6	34.2

Rosenberg, Christianson, and Angus (2015) asserted,

> Rural schools often serve students from large geographic areas with low population density, which can influence the local tax base and affect a rural school's ability to recruit teachers, engage parents, and involve students in after-school activities. Many rural schools have lower student enrollments than nonrural schools and must hire more teachers, on a per-pupil basis, to teach the required curriculum. (p. 200)

This explanatory sequential mixed methods study sought to examine the relationship between teacher turnover and district size, and the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students.

Background of the Problem

According to Keigher (2010), "Of the 3,380,300 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2007-08 school year, 84.5 percent remained at the same school ("stayers"), 7.6 percent moved to a different school ("movers"), and 8.0 percent left the profession ("leavers") during the following year . . ." (p. 3). There are many issues surrounding public education in America today. Feng (2014) noted that "Several studies have investigated the effect of school characteristics on teacher attrition and teacher mobility . . ." (p. 25). Similarly, Djonko-Moore (2015) found that mobility and attrition are exceptionally prominent. Regardless of the specific factors surrounding the schools, our country must ask why our teachers are leaving the profession.

Understanding the reasons that surround teacher retention, turnover, and attrition in public school settings will help educators and administrators better serve the needs of their communities in both present and future situations. The factors surrounding these issues are widespread. Feng (2014) found that teacher mobility is linked to per-pupil instructional expenditure, and lower salaries. Additionally, Djonko-Moore (2015) stated, "The main findings are that the teachers' perceptions of students, parents, and community appear to be more important in mobility decisions than their personal characteristics and school setting characteristics . . ." (p. 18). The current study sought to examine the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students.

According to Rosenberg, Christianson, and Angus (2015), "Rural schools' remoteness and limited opportunities also can affect the pool of available school

administrators and teachers. Prospective staff might not want to live in a rural community, or the community might offer few job opportunities for their spouses . . .” (p. 195). Therefore, the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural districts may be difficult due to the myriad factors surrounding the district, employees, and students.

Data are available to help understand issues surrounding teacher turnover and mobility. However, specifically understanding why teachers leave the smallest public school districts in Texas will provide insight to better education for the students in these rural areas. Teacher attrition and retention are important factors that surround turnover, but the specific factors that cause turnover in these areas must be researched further.

Statement of the Problem

The demand for public school teachers is increasing while teacher turnover creates various issues in our schools. Although many studies explain the reasons teachers move around, we must continue to dissect the phenomenon in order to gain a better understanding of the issue. The problem addressed in this study was teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students. Specifically, the problem concerned factors that contributed to teachers that left these districts after completing the 2016-2017 contractual agreement.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between teacher turnover and district size, and the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students.

Secondly, the study explored the teacher turnover and organization mobility among those that have left these districts. The study answered the following research questions:

1. What relationship exists between Texas districts' turnover rate and districts' size?
2. What factors contributed to teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students?

Definitions

This section provides conceptual definitions of key words that are used throughout the study. In this research, the following terms are defined:

Accountability rating.

A label defined by the Texas Education Agency that indicates a district's performance. The label is assigned as met standard, met alternative standard, improvement required, or not rated and is based on target scores on all required indices for which performance data is available. The four indices include: student performance, student progress, closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness (TEA, 2017).

Beginning teachers.

Teachers with 0-5 years experience (TEA, 2017).

Occupational mobility.

Occupational choices after teaching (Feng, 2014).

Public education.

Federally funded elementary and secondary education (K-12) in America (Feng, 2014; Ingersoll, 2012; Sass, Flores, Claeys & Perez, 2012).

Teacher attrition.

For this study, teacher attrition is, "The permanent exit of a teacher from the teaching profession" (Djonko-Moore, 2015, p. 3).

Teacher retention.

The ability to keep teachers at a particular school, in a specific district, or in the public education sector (Dagli, 2012; Djonko-Moore, 2015; Feng, 2014).

Teacher turnover. According to Dagli (2012), " . . . teacher turnover is an umbrella term used to indicate teachers who leave the teaching profession or move to another school . . ." (p. 3121).

Texas Performance Accountability Report (TAPR).

According to TEA,

> The Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) pull together a wide range of information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas every year. Performance is shown disaggregated by student groups, including ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The reports also provide extensive information on school and district staff, programs, and student demographics. (TEA, 2017, State Accountability).

Significance of the Research

The results of this study will contribute to the existing literature surrounding teacher turnover in rural Texas. Similarly, the findings of this dissertation research add to the plethora of evidence that policymakers use at campus, district and state levels. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study may also demonstrate the importance of

campus and district level organizational analysis regarding the factors surrounding teacher turnover. As Jimerson (2003) explained, "To the extent that rural districts are experiencing high rates of shortages, whether from recruitment challenges and/or high staff turnover, students in these areas have a high probability of being denied the fundamental resources necessary for a quality education" (p. 13).

Assumptions

The study used archival data from the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) from Texas Education Agency (TEA) together with Texas Education Directory Customized Reports and Data Files (AskTED) for the 2016-2017 school year. The data was specific to Texas public school districts that had 500 or fewer students during the specified year. The researcher met with four superintendents of districts with fewer than 500 students to better understand the myriad of reasons surrounding teacher turnover. The researcher assumes that the participants were truthful in their interviews. Colleagues and leaders may assume that these factors can be rectified through the findings in this study. Assumptions surrounding teacher turnover may evolve due to the amount of research and literature in the field.

The researcher assumed, in conducting the study, that:

1. The data provided on the TAPR reports by TEA were accurate for the 2016-2017 school year.
2. The participants were honest and accurate in their communication.

Limitations

The study did not analyze teacher turnover except in relation to district size. The qualitative findings of the study analyzed the factors surrounding teacher turnover through the perspective of superintendents. Only four superintendents out of 39 that were invited actually responded to the invitation and consented to take part in the study. The findings of the study were limited to four specific public school districts in Texas' Region 51 or Region 52 with 500 students or less and therefore are not generalizable to other districts of 500 or more students, or other Regions in Texas. The small number of participants limits the study.

The superintendents' responses should be noted as a limitation in the study. The participants admitted that some discrepancy could exist between the reasons given to an administrator upon resignation and reality due to relationships and superiority. The participants narrowed the reason that teachers left after completing their 2016-2017 contractual agreements to one specific factor after discussing a myriad of factors, throughout the interviews. These factors were contextualized to the specific year, but the participants also spoke from a historical perspective and the two overlapped on many occasions. Another limitation of the study is the ambiguity in language.

There was also potential for bias due to the personal background of the researcher, this must be noted as a limitation of the study. The researcher is a public school teacher in an East Texas district that is surrounded by districts with fewer than 500 students. This issue will be further addressed in Chapter III: Role of Researcher.

Delimitations

This study was restricted to Texas public school districts that had fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year. From the 313 total districts that met this criterion, the researcher selected two specific regions in the eastern portion of Texas. The restricted geographic location, financial consideration, and travel restriction delimited the study to a very specific sample of public school districts with fewer than 500 students in eastern Texas.

Organization of the Study

For the future of education practice and society in general, we must seek to understand the reason teachers are leaving districts with fewer than 500 students. According to Gallo and Beckman (2016), "Considering the large portion of the world's schools are located in rural areas, it is important to attend to the unique needs of rural teachers and students . . ." (p. 1). The factors surrounding rural education and teacher turnover in these areas must be uncovered.

This explanatory sequential mixed methods study examined the impact of teacher turnover in Texas pubic school districts with fewer than 500 students. This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter II synthesizes the literature related to factors surrounding teacher turnover, and the factors surrounding teacher turnover that are specific to rural areas. Chapter III outlines the design of the mixed methods study, the participants, the role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, provisions of trustworthiness, and a summary of the research. Chapter IV describes the findings of the

study. Chapter V examines the conclusions of the study, discusses implications of the study, and presents considerations for future research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

Teacher turnover afflicts all educational organizations in one way or another. As Dove (2004) stated, "Teacher attrition is the largest single factor determining the shortage of qualified teachers in the United States and in developed countries throughout the world. Major factors . . . include salary, quality of teacher preparation, working conditions, and conditions that affect service . . ." (p. 8). Urban districts and hard to staff schools have been the topic of research over the last decade. However, there is a need for literature surrounding rural districts. Rural schools are quite similar to their urban counterparts when it comes to characteristics such as; student poverty, below average funding, and lack of quality educators. Yet, rural districts have distinct characteristics that must be explored. Jimerson (2003) noted that "Research indicates that the classrooms with the most advantaged students are staffed by the most qualified teachers . . ." (p. 18), which causes one to question the disadvantaged areas. According to Fowles, Butler, Cowen, Streams and Toma (2014), "Of all the tasks delegated to human resource managers, effective recruitment and selection of new employees is one of the most

critical . . .” (p. 504). However, the retention and recruitment of qualified teachers is quite difficult in rural areas due to the abundance of factors stacked against them.

Rural educators are in need of support from the district, state, and national level. Gallo and Beckman (2016) argued, “Without policies tailored to the unique context of rural schools and communities, ensuring equity of access, resources, and opportunities in schools across the United States becomes a difficult task . . .” (p. 2). The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between teacher turnover and district size, and the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students.

Teacher Turnover

Grissom, Viano, and Selin (2016) discussed the difference between voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover. In regard to voluntary turnover, an employee compares their current job benefits to an alternative and chooses to leave because the alternative is better. Examples of voluntary turnover include: salary, better working conditions, and better opportunities. On the other hand, involuntary turnover is a decision made by the employer. Involuntary turnover usually stems from job performance, evaluation, resource constrains, and the overall wellbeing of an organization (Grissom, Viano, & Selin, 2016, p. 242). The organizations’ role in “job fit” and one’s individual ability to perform the job directly affect teacher commitment and satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2015).

Additionally, teacher turnover may be predicted by personal characteristics, or preferences related to benefits associated with positions or opportunity. These personal

characteristics may lead to staying, moving, or even leaving the profession altogether (Grissom, Viano, & Selin, 2016, p. 244). The personal characteristics may be influenced by the climate and culture of a particular school district. The attributes include; collaboration, support, and a sense of family and directly relate to student achievement and engagement (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). The factors that influence teacher turnover and attrition must be explored concerning leadership, teacher experience, and certification area.

Leadership.

Work conditions and job satisfaction may be directly related to educational leadership. Several studies found a link between leadership and teacher turnover (Bolger & Nir, 2015; Player, Youngs, Perrone & Grogan, 2017; Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). The principal directly impacts job satisfaction and job satisfaction impacts performance and retention. Leaders must take into account the personal intentions including aspirations of each teacher (Bolger & Nir, 2015; Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). When teacher turnover rates are higher than the state or national average, teacher turnover in those areas begs to question the related factors. Dove (2004) noted, "In most studies, major factors cited include salary, quality of teacher preparation, working conditions, and conditions that affect service . . ." (p. 9). However, these factors may not be generalizable to all districts.

A variety of literature can be found on beginning teachers that either leave the profession or move districts. Ingersoll (2012) explained, "Beginners are now the largest group within one of the largest occupations in the nation, and these beginners have steadily become more prone to quickly leave teaching . . ." (p. 49). Many of the

complaints among teachers include: lack of planning and grading time, lack of resources, lack of student discipline, lack of cultural proficiency, large class sizes, unnecessary paperwork, and inadequate facilities. Carroll and Foster (2010) stated:

> It is essential that current principals and aspiring principals recognize that their leadership style has a direct impact on the teachers' level of job satisfaction in the school. Effective principals create an environment where teachers feel a sense of collaboration and support, and as a result, are dedicated to their jobs. (p. 52)

Leadership support is important for teachers that are new to the profession or new to the district. According to Plessis, Carroll & Gillies (2015), the needs that were addressed by novice teachers in out-of-field positions, or positions outside of their certification area were specified as; leadership training, teacher preparation, effective school support/induction programs, and an in-depth understanding of professional development.

Other factors such as grade specific experience and grade reassignment also impact teacher turnover. According to Ost and Schiman (2015), "Teachers with one year of past experience and one year of grade-specific experience have mean turnover of 24% but teachers who switch grades between their first and second year have turnover at rates indistinguishable from a novice teacher at 28% . . ." (p. 114). A similar pattern was also true for teachers with three to six years of experience. The study showed that grade reassignment could impact future turnover. "It is possible that past switches impact current turnover because past switches reduce the total amount of grade-specific experience a teacher is likely to have" (Ost & Schiman, 2015, p. 123). This could also

hold true for reassignments up to five years ago since it reduced the level of experience in a specific grade. Attitudes about these reassignments were also considered in their study. Teachers that experience reassignments were less collaborative, less satisfied, and often complained about the lack of time they had for planning. The assignment and reassignment of teachers is directly related to effective campus leadership and finding the best fit for all teachers on the campus. Public school teachers are the most numerous public employees and are subject to prescriptive programs, systems, and management that directly influence the turnover rate (Grissom, Viano, & Selin, 2016, p. 241). Yet, research shows that retention increases when teachers experience a sense of control over their classroom, and are able to collaborate in shared decision-making concerning policies and practices (Vagi & Pivovarova, 2017).

Carroll and Foster (2010) explained, "Current and future principals must recognize the impact they have on teacher retention and must take steps to ensure that teachers in their schools feel a sense of satisfaction with their jobs to improve the "survival rates" of teachers" (p. 53). Leadership directly impacts teacher retention and turnover. Tehseen and Hadi (2015) discussed a variety of studies that outlined instructional leaders as being critical to teacher development, productivity and loyalty based on the quality of relationships established. Similarly, the principal is responsible for teachers' growth while influencing their behaviors and dedication to the school or profession in general (Tehseen & Hadi, 2015, p. 237). The environment and demands placed on the teacher contribute to turnover. The "person-environment-fit" examines the knowledge, skills, and ability needed to perform a specific job. When a person feels

confident and competent in their ability to perform a job, their likelihood of remaining with the job increases (Bogler & Nir, 2015).

Teacher experience.

Many states have adopted vigorous evaluation systems for teachers in order to have an institutionalized way to determine dismissal (Grissom, Viano, & Selin, 2016; Drake, et al 2015; Jacob, 2011). However, the voluntary turnover seems to impact districts more than involuntary dismissal. The data shows beginning year teacher turnover rate is higher than other categories. When turnover takes place in a school district, the educational leaders typically recruit and replace. They hire new teachers that are new to the profession, or new to the district. According to Fowles et al. (2014), "Work to date suggests that the initial hire may be the most important step in matching high quality teachers to low performing students . . ." (p. 504). However, there are specific factors that arise when a teacher that is new to the profession is hired. Plessis et al. (2015) explained, ". . . that carefully prepared novice teachers may not be fully prepared for the realities of being assigned out-of-field positions . . . school leaders' unawareness of novice unsuitably . . . and support needs" (p. 5). Induction programs have the potential to provide necessary training and mentoring for beginning teachers that are both new to the profession and new to the district. Ingersoll (2012) added, "These programs aim to improve the performance and retention of new hires and to enhance the skills and prevent the loss of new teachers with the ultimate goal of improving student growth and learning . . ." (p. 47). Induction programs that involved common planning or collaboration time for teachers were the most effective. Additionally, mentor teachers,

reduction in teaching load, and supportive communication with administrators were among the effective practices in induction programs. Ingersoll (2012) explained, "The more comprehensive the induction program, the better the retention . . ." (p. 50). However, these programs that also positively impacted student achievement, job satisfaction, commitment, retention, and teacher performance are hard to come by (Ingersoll, 2012). In their 2014 study, Ingersoll, Merrill and May found

> . . . those who entered through a traditional program were also slightly less likely to leave teaching after their first year (at a 90% level of confidence) than those who entered via a non-traditional or alternative route program . . . Those with less-than-full teaching certificates were no more or less likely to depart after their first year. However, the 19% who had no certificate at all were more likely to leave . . . (p. 24)

The drastic change in the number of certified teachers and the need for certified teachers brought about other issues. Ingersoll (2012) explained, "In 1988, the most common teacher was a veteran with 15 years of teaching experience. By 2008, the most common teacher was not a gray-haired veteran; he or she was a beginner in the first years on the job" (p. 49). In fact, "By [2008], a quarter of the teaching force had five years or less experience" (p. 49). Unfortunately, teacher attrition is very high amongst these beginning teachers. Ingersoll (2012) noted:

> Several studies, including our own analysis have estimated that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave within the first five years of entry into teaching. Moreover, we have found that the attrition rates of first-year teachers have

> increased by about one-third in the past two decades. So, not only are there far more beginners in the teaching force, but these beginners are less likely to stay in teaching. (p. 49)

On the other hand, teachers with the most experience have the most options and a variety of opportunities with potential for higher earnings. Effective teachers, who are successful in the classroom are more likely to exit early in their careers especially if they are teaching at the high school level (Grissom, Viano & Selin 2016).

Certification area.

According to Sass et al. (2012), "Teacher assignment was envisaged to be a strong predictor of teacher retention, as teachers in high-demand areas were thought to be more employable elsewhere for greater financial compensation . . ." (p. 17). These high demand areas are usually found in high schools. The foreign language teachers, math teachers, English teachers, and science teachers are hard to come by due to the specialized content area. Teachers that hold certification in these content areas also tend to have a degree in the same area. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff, (2013) discussed the impact of teacher turnover in these areas, " . . . teacher turn-over has a significant and negative impact on student achievement in both math and ELA . . ." (p. 30).

When analyzing teacher turnover in the specialized content areas, Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2012) found that " . . . some features of teacher education and preparation have a strong bearing on retention of new teachers. Most striking, those who have received more pedagogical training are far more likely to stay in teaching after their first year . . ." (p. 34). This study noted that science and mathematics teachers

specifically received less pedagogical training, which leads to higher attrition rates compared to other subject areas. However, a later study by Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) found " . . . that first-year science and mathematics teachers on average tended to be of higher academic ability than other teachers, at a statistically significant level . . ." (p.15). These teachers were also less likely to hold a degree in education, and were more likely to have completed a graduate degree as well which may lead to opportunities in other fields that would contribute to attrition. (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014, p. 15).

Ingersoll, Merrill & May (2012) explained, "Although it is important for teachers to have strong subject-matter knowledge, our data suggest that adequate preparation in pedagogical methods and skills – the how of teaching – is also important . . ." (p. 34). Although there are many different types of pedagogical preparation approaches, Ingersoll et al. (2012) found that those that received " . . . comprehensive pedagogy- those entering teaching with a number of methods, courses, materials selection preparation, learning theory and psychology courses, usually a full semester of practice teaching, observation of others, and feedback on their teaching . . ." (p. 33) were more likely to continue teaching. Those that did not, were twice as likely to leave. The preparation programs for pre-service teachers and professional development for in-service teachers has an impact on turnover rates and must be considered in order to better serve teachers and students.

Other extrinsic motivators such as stipends for specialty areas are positively associated with teacher turnover and retention as well. However, foreign language teachers had the highest attrition rates due to their specialized degree area and the factors that surround a highly sought after position. Unfortunately, "Many schools in Texas offer

additional stipends and mentoring support for mathematics and science teachers to increase retention . . .” (Sass et al., 2015, p. 17) without offering the same benefits for foreign language teachers. Unfortunately, in the rural areas specifically it is difficult to fill these positions and retain quality foreign language teachers.

When looking at teacher turnover and attrition, there are a myriad of factors to consider. The common factors presented in the literature surrounding beginning year teachers include: preparation, work conditions, and compensation. Ingersoll et al. (2012) found that pedagogical training had influence on teacher attrition or retention. Their findings highlighted science and mathematics teachers in their first year of teaching, when attrition is highest. These teachers had less pedagogical preparation compared to other teachers. Ingersoll et al. (2012) noted, “ . . . more than 40 percent of new science teachers had no practice teaching at all, compared with 21 percent of other teachers . . .” (p. 32). Similarly, they had less preparation in “how to select materials or in learning theory and child psychology” (p. 32). Teachers with alternative certifications tend to fall in this category due to the lack of time in the preparation program. In Texas, the alternative certification program may be completed in just one year. This movement began in the 1980s in response to national data that predicted a teacher shortage by 1992. According to Dove (2004), “In general, alternative certification requires applicants to hold a bachelor’s degree in the subject to be taught and, in some states, to achieve a passing score on state required examinations and to fulfill a supervised teacher internship . . .” (p. 11). However, their research found that these teachers were much more likely to leave the profession due to the lack of preparation.

Dagli (2012) found that teachers with advanced degrees may " . . . have more commitment in the profession, but look for better opportunities . . ." (p. 3131). Similarly, " . . . teachers with an advanced degree have lower likelihood of leaving the profession, and higher likelihood of moving to another school . . ." (p. 3131). Teachers that hold advanced degrees have a greater supply of opportunities, which makes these specialty areas exceptionally difficult to retain, and replace in rural areas (Harrington, 2017).

Rural Schools

Rural schools are substantially different throughout the globe. Monk (2007) used Daryl Hobbs', a rural sociologist, description of rural communities. Characteristics of a rural school included: small size, sparse settlement, narrowness of choice, distance from concentrated populations, reliance on agriculture or tourism, centralized school districts, a place bound economic base, and poverty. Monk noted, "Among the 250 poorest counties in the United States, 244 are rural, and out of the more than 8 million children attending public schools in rural areas, 2.5 million live in poverty . . ." (2007, p. 156). Unfortunately, these disadvantaged areas are plagued with unique inadequacies as well. Monk (2007), found a discrepancy among teacher experience between rural and small schools, " . . . suggesting the smallest schools face the greatest hiring and retention challenges" (p. 157). The teachers are less qualified than their non-rural counterparts, attended less prestigious universities, have lower educational attainment, lower scores on state certifications, and lack diversity.

With federal mandates such as the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) came the push for "highly qualified"

teachers and education without regard for the areas that already experienced teacher shortages. According to Jimerson (2003), rural and urban districts may have hard-to-staff schools; however, rural areas struggle to recruit and retain new teachers that are highly qualified.

Jimerson (2003) pointed out, "The challenge of staffing every rural classroom with a highly qualified teacher is not trivial. More than 31% of all public schools are in rural areas. And more importantly, there are more than eight million students [in these schools] . . ." (p. 7). National trends surrounding teacher turnover include, compensation, "teacher quality", class size, student enrollment, high attrition rates, "distribution" of teachers, private sectors, national and international opportunities, and retirement (Jimerson, 2003, p. 8). Jimerson's policy recommendations included:

- Increase financial investment for rural teachers through equitable salaries and benefits, provide additional benefits for hard-to-staff areas, gain federal support for recruitment, and combine policies in order to improve teacher quality and retention.
- Encourage and support rural people to become rural teachers through higher education networking, and "grow your own" programs.
- Strengthen rural components of teacher development programs through teacher preparation programs, field experiences, induction programs, and professional development.
- Support rural-specific research focused on financial aspects, policies, and certification processes, and factors that increase retention. (Jimerson, 2003)

In a study specific to Kentucky, a state with over 50% of its residents living in rural areas, Fowles et al. (2014) analyzed district characteristics, individual characteristics, distance from training institutions, demographics, compensation, credentials, and regional preferences among Kentucky teachers in Appalachian and non-Appalachian public school districts. They found that " . . . teachers are more likely to be initially employed in larger districts, districts located in areas with higher population densities, and districts with higher median salaries for starting teachers . . ." (Fowles et al., 2014, p. 510). Conversely, teachers that received their education from an Appalachian institution were three times more likely to be employed in an Appalachian district than their counterparts, and non-white teachers were less likely to be hired than white teachers. The study found that " . . . Appalachian students are educated by teachers with weaker credentials than their non-Appalachian counterparts . . ." (pp. 512). Rural schools have their own unique challenges, and these specific aspects must be explored.

Students in rural areas.

The students in rural areas have their own unique qualities. Student characteristics must be considered to better understand these rural areas. There were 50 million students in PK-12 grade in public schools during the 2013-2014 school year according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013, "The Status Of Rural Education", para 1).

- "In school year 2010-11, over half of all operating regular school districts and about one-third of all public schools were in rural areas, while about one-quarter

of all public school students were enrolled in rural schools" (NCES, 2013, "The Status of Rural Education", para 3).

- During the 2010-2011 school year 57% of the school districts in America were considered rural, 32% of the schools fell in that category, which included 24% of the nations' students (NCES, 2013, "The Status of Rural Education", para 4).
- The ethnic distribution in rural areas in the Fall of 2010 was: 71% white, 10% black, 10% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% American Indian/ Alaska Native (NCES, 2013, "The Status of Rural Education", para 5).
- The average percentage of 5-17 year old students living in poverty, at a threshold of $22,050 for a family of four was 19% in the United States in 2010, yet the rural south was above average at 22% (NCES, 2013, "The Status of Rural Education", para 8).
- Students at public high schools that offered Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and programs were lower in rural areas (69.1%) than cities (93.8%) and suburbs (96.7%). (Provasnik et al., 2007, p. v)

Student characteristics specifically in rural schools contribute to teacher turnover, " . . . especially the share with special needs, the share with limited English skills, the share of highly mobile students, and the share of students who do not go to college . . ." (Monk, 2007, p. 165). Due to the lack of support services for students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), families typically choose larger districts with greater access to services, treatments, and accommodations (Monk, 2007; NCES, 2013). Support service staffing is also an issue in rural areas, "Because of their geographic location, culture, and

lack of resources, rural administrators have always struggled to staff their schools with qualified special education teachers . . .” (Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2005, p. 9).

Rural districts with place-bound industries such as meatpacking or agriculture increase student populations from low-income families, and/or limited English language skills. These students struggle with stressors including attendance and acceptance. Rural populations may also experience instability in their student population due to mobility of families that are transient. With the increased accountability across the nation, “There is some risk that districts will be increasingly reluctant to incorporate mobile students into their programs out of a fear of being held accountable for what will presumably be low test scores . . .” (Monk, 2007, p. 166). Transfer paper work, fees, and screening processes may manifest from the fear surrounding accountability of new enrollment.

Even without the topic of mobility, students in rural areas have disadvantages that originate with their home life. Education attainment of families is lower in rural areas. Although the percentage of mothers and fathers that graduated with a high school diploma is higher than the national average in rural areas, higher education data are contradictory. Both mothers and fathers in rural areas show lower than average when looking at those that completed a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Mothers showed 15.0% compared to the average of 17.6% with Bachelor’s Degree, and 6.0% compared to the 7.2% average with graduate or professional degrees. Similarly, 14.3% of fathers in rural areas obtained a bachelor’s degree compared to the average of 18.7%, and only 7.9% of the 11.9% with graduate or professional degrees (Provasnik et al., 2007, p. 40).

In summary, the issues surrounding students that attend rural schools extend far beyond the classroom. Unfortunately, the school is the community in many of these areas. Monk (2007) stated, " . . . for many rural schools, the quality of life in the community is lacking, working conditions are problematic, student needs are great, support services are limited, and professional support networks are inadequate . . ." (p. 167).

Out-of-field positions.

Many teachers leave the university after studying specific content areas or specific grade level areas for various reasons. Plessis, Carroll, and Gillies (2015) define out-of-field teaching as " . . . teachers not only teaching in subjects outside their field of qualifications but also teaching for specific year levels without the necessary qualifications" (p. 4). Teachers in rural areas often accept positions that they are not qualified to teach which ultimately impacts the quality of education provided alongside the institution. This issue is specifically unique to rural schools due to the lack of resources.

Gallo and Beckman (2016) explained, " Teacher education programs focused on preparing teachers for rural school contexts . . . are key to rural schools' recruitment and retention difficulties . . ." (p. 3). Similarly, teacher assignment should be very strategic for teachers in these areas. Ost and Schiman (2015) found " . . . that teacher turnover is strongly related to grade reassignments and that the pattern holds whether comparing across teachers and schools, within a school, or within a school and year . . ." and in

regard to beginning year teachers, they found that " . . . teachers with the fewest years of grade-specific experience have the greatest probability of turnover . . ." (p. 123).

Financial issues.

A plethora of financial factors influence rural schools in America. Teacher salaries are lower, the available services for students with special needs are limited, lower fiscal capacities, higher operating costs, and geography (Monk, 2007). Fowles et al. (2014) concluded

> . . . geography exerts a powerful and direct influence over labor market outcomes. Put in a larger context, the findings for teachers raise questions about the credentials of public sector employees more generally . . . the quality of public service workers in these areas is likely to lag those of more privileged regions. (p. 517)

Specific to rural districts, Monk (2007) noted, " . . . perhaps wages are low in rural areas because the attractiveness of the areas to teachers, on average, induces them to accept lower wages" (p. 162). This may be due to the localized teacher labor markets. "During these times of small budgets and unfunded federal mandates, it is necessary that rural school districts develop a dynamic structure for finding and keeping good teachers . . ." (Lowe, 2006, p. 31).

Extrinsic motivators such as leave and allowances may impact turnover. Specifically, salary contributes to teacher attrition including job satisfaction (Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). In the NCES' Status of Rural America, the salaries for beginning year teachers were compared for certain locations: "Comparing these geographically adjusted

base salaries, full-time public school teachers in rural areas had a lower average salary ($43,000) than their peers in towns ($45,900), suburbs ($45,700), and cities ($44,000) . . .” (Provasnik et al., 2007, p. 108). It is said that beginning teachers have a variety of obstacles to overcome as they enter the profession, but these obstacles do not go away; instead, the disparities grow over a teacher’s career because of time and experience (Jimerson, 2003). “Historians who discuss teacher salaries in the U.S. have usually used adjectives such as underpaid and low salaried and have viewed teachers’ incomes as discordant in terms of social rank-‘under rewarded’” . . . (Dove, 2004, p. 10).

Teacher salaries influence teacher turnover and attrition. According to Feng (2014), “Teachers who move into the following types of jobs typically earn more than K-12 teachers: business management, editors, writers, or performers; legal profession; research; computer science and engineering . . .” (p. 38). This literature adds to the factors surrounding teacher attrition. The monetary effects of turnover are not just relevant to individual teachers.

Retirement systems, pension systems, teacher recruitment, loss of veterans and high turnover of beginning teachers lead to financial issues for public school districts across the nation. Carroll and Foster (2010) exhorted:

> We have concluded that the leadership in every state should act now to create a comprehensive workforce development plan for education. These long-term, strategic plans should align retirement practices and public employee pension policies with teaching effectiveness and school performance goals. (p. 5)

Higher salaries produce higher retention rates among teachers, which ultimately increase

the number of teachers that are available to teach (Grissom, Viano & Selin, 2016; Feng, 2014).

Higher salary may even compensate for working conditions. Teacher retention is critical to education. In a policy brief, Jimerson (2003) recommended focusing on compensation. He noted:

> . . . we believe that *all* rural schools need to offer comparable salaries, and that certain categories of rural schools ("hard-to-staff" rural schools) will need additional incentives, over and above competitive salaries . . . Guidelines for rural districts could include, for example, student poverty indices, teacher turnover rates, unfilled vacancies, declining population, unemployment, underemployment and/or remoteness. (p. 17)

Teacher compensation is an issue across the nation. "Overall, U.S. teachers earn much less than other professionals with the same about of education and experience . . ." (Dove, 2004, p.10). However, compensation becomes an even bigger issue in rural districts that have lower salaries than their counterparts.

Student Achievement and Turnover

Dove (2004) stated, "Continued failure to address teacher retention issues and the continuation of ongoing practices to accept high teacher attrition to other economic sectors promises to cheat children of receiving an education they are capable of embracing and attaining . . ." (p. 13). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reported that every school district in the country is affected by continuous teacher turnover (Carroll & Foster, 2010, p.48). The children in our public

school systems are the ones that are directly impacted by teacher turnover. According to Ronfeldt et al. (2013), "When teachers leave schools, previously held relationships and relational patterns are altered. To the degree that turnover disrupts the formation and maintenance of staff cohesion and community, it may also affect student achievement . . ." (p. 27). If we strive to do what is best for the future of our nation, we must examine the role teacher turnover plays in our public schools.

Djonko-Moore (2015) asserted

> American students of color and in poverty are at risk for many negative outcomes including low academic achievement. Reducing teacher attrition and mobility has the potential to bring positive changes to schools that serve students of color in poverty including more experienced teachers in the schools, less money needed to be spent on training new teachers, and better student academic outcomes (p. 21).

A plethora of current research can be found surrounding teacher turnover and its impact on student achievement, but only a small amount of literature focuses specifically on teachers' mobility and attrition in rural districts. Carroll and Foster (2014) explained, "Teaching effectiveness in virtually every school district in the country will be affected [by attrition], just as we are challenged with educating a 21st century workforce that can keep us competitive in a global economy . . ." (p. 4). Considering the large rural populations across the world, the focus on education in these areas is imperative. "Recruiting high quality employees for public sector positions in these areas remains a critical first step in providing pathways through which these longstanding achievement gaps can be addressed . . ." (Fowles et al., 2014, p. 517). As Gallo and Beckman noted,

"The need for cultural relevance highlights the important understanding that rural school communities have unique needs and structures that require specialized preparation and retention methods . . ." (2016, p. 4).

Summary

Some may consider smaller class sizes, more autonomy, and fewer discipline problems in rural schools to be advantages that may attract teachers to the area (Monk, 2007). Grissom, Viano, & Selin (2016) found several themes surrounding teacher turnover. They analyzed age and experience, race and ethnicity, qualifications, gender, working conditions, effective management, salary, and teacher effectiveness (pp. 244-246).

However, the culture and climate of a school district, and fit may supersede all other factors. Person-environment fit theory may create a framework to better understand teacher turnover (Vagi & Pivovarova, 2017). According to Lowe (2006), "The most critical factor to be considered in teacher recruitment and retention is that schools must be effective in providing teaching and learning environments that are attractive . . ." (p. 28). This type environment positively reflects the community, leaders that inspire and empower their staff, and establish a quality work environment. Successful leaders: welcome accountability, foster community building, mentor new teachers, invest in professional development, budget for recruiting, concentrate on planning, offer incentives, cultivate a marketing strategy, offer an induction program, form cooperatives, and include the locals (Lowe, 2006). This study sought to examine the factors that led to teacher turnover in Texas public schools with fewer than 500 students.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapters outlined the problem, questions and a review of literature surrounding this explanatory sequential mixed methods study. This chapter outlines the methodology selected to conduct the research. This chapter includes: an overview, research design, the participants, the role of researcher, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Overview

The challenges surrounding teacher turnover in beginning year teachers has been a major topic in education policy and reform (Ingersoll, 2012). The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between district size and turnover rate, and factors that influenced Texas public school teachers that left rural districts with fewer than 500 students. Secondly, the study explored the teacher turnover and organization mobility among those that left these districts. This chapter serves as an overview of the methodology that was used to conduct the research.

By using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design the data was collected and analyzed in stages. Both quantitative and qualitative data were necessary to uncover the various factors in this study. Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) explained

> . . . [mixed methods] focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that . . . combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone . . .” (p. 5)

The questions that guided the study included:

1. What relationship exists between Texas districts’ turnover rate and districts’ size?
2. What factors contributed to teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students?

Research Design

Mixed methods design is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2010). Specifically, sequential mixed methods design keeps the quantitative and qualitative phases separate (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The explanatory design is a two phase mixed methods design that allows the qualitative data to explain or build upon quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The two phases began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data (see Figure 1). “The first phase is followed by the subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data. The second, qualitative phase of the study is designed so that it follows from (or connects to) the results of the first quantitative phase” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 72).

Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) noted, “Of course, this process of sequencing qualitative/quantitative data collection or of using inductive/deductive logic is iterative and can go through several cycles” (p. 47). This design leaned toward the quantitative side, “ . . .when the initial quantitative results informs the secondary qualitative collection. Thus, the two forms are separate but connected” (Creswell, 2009, p. 211).

QUAN data collection	**QUAN Data collection**	**QUAN results**	**Identify Results for follow-up**	**qual data collection**	**qual data analysis**	**qual results**	**Interpretation QUAN-qual**

Figure 1. Visual model for explanatory design (Source: J.W. Creswell and V.L. Plano Clark, 2007, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research Design,* p. 73).

In this particular QUAN-qual study, the quantitative (QUAN) findings informed the selection of participants for the qualitative (qual) portion of the research. Data from the 2016-2017 TAPR reports were analyzed and the findings determined the selection of participants for the qualitative interviews that uncovered the narratives surrounding cases of teacher turnover from the district superintendent perspective. According to Tashakkori & Teddlie (2010), “Sequential implementation indicates that implementation of one component (e.g., quantitative) follows the other component (e.g., qualitative), and the relationship between the two components is dependent” (p. 363). The qualitative follow-up interaction analysis qualitatively analyzed the data gleamed from the analysis of variance in the TAPR data. This multistrand design answered questions chronologically. “The conclusions based on the results of the first strand lead to the formulation of design

components for the next strand. The final inferences are based on the results of both strands of the study" (Teddlie &Tashakkori, 2009, p. 153). The qualitative phase essentially confirms, disconfirms or further explores the quantitative findings. In this particular study, it further explored the quantitative findings and confirmed that no relationship existed.

Participants

Participants in the qualitative phase of this study were educational leaders, specifically, the district superintendent in a public, independent school district in Texas with fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year. Due to the sequential nature of the study, the selection of participants depended on the quantitative data analysis. However, the criteria used for participant selection included: (1) leading a district with fewer than 500 students; and (2) a district with fewer than 500 students in Region 51 or 52. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007)

> Some key results from Stage 1 to follow up on might be statistically significant results, statistically nonsignificant results, key significant predictors, variables that distinguish between groups, outlier or extreme cases, distinguishing demographic characteristics, or simply individuals that volunteer to participate in interviews. (p. 123)

Participant recruitment occurred through technology-based communication upon approval of Research Involving the Use of Human Subjects (IRB-H). The targeted participants were selected from an analysis of available data from the Texas Education Agency Department of Assessment and Accountability Division of Performance

Reporting Final Accountability Ratings Report (TAPR). The archival data set was secured from the TEA website (http://tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/index.html). Specifically, the analysis of the report examined the reported teacher turnover rate in districts with fewer than 500 students. A total of 39 district superintendents of these specific districts in Region 51 and 52 were contacted via e-mail to participate in the study (see Appendix A). In order to protect the district, campus, and participants, pseudonyms were used in this study to provide anonymity. A criterion convenience sample was used in this study. The criteria for the sample included: (a) Texas public school districts in Region 51 or 52, (b) educational leaders of a district with fewer than 500 students (c) experienced teacher turnover in the district with fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year. This criterion convenience sample ensured that the qualitative phase complimented the first phase of the study. Once the participants underwent verification of specified criterion, the 39 superintendents were contacted by e-mail directly. At that time, four potential participants responded and completed informed consent prior to the interview process, scanned copies were received before interviews were scheduled, and hard copies were obtained at the face-to-face interview (see Appendix A). The informed consent forms will be maintained in a secure location, along with all other materials related to the study, in the researcher's home. However, once the recorded interviews were transcribed and verified through member checking with the participants, the researcher deleted the electronic audio files. The informed consent ensured participants' anonymity and confidentiality during face-to-face interviews. Once the informed consent

was signed and returned, the interviews were scheduled. All four participants invited the researcher to their district office to conduct the face-to-face interview.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is critical to educational research. During the quantitative phase of the research, the researcher was a detached observer. This role allowed the researcher to remain objective, and avoid any bias throughout the study. The researcher collected and assessed archival data during the first phase of the study.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, "The way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience . . ." (p. 110). During the second phase of the study, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with superintendents of districts with fewer than 500 students.

The researcher is a current educator in a public, independent school district in Texas, but not a district with fewer than 500 students. The role of empathetic observer was possible due to the camaraderie and understanding that the researcher had with teachers across the state. The researcher had formerly transferred from one district to another, which provided insight and empathy for understanding the participants. However, this limitation should be noted.

Protocol

The review of literature showed a variety of factors surrounding teacher turnover. The researcher had an interview and observation protocol that was sent to all potential participants in the initial interview. This protocol was provided in order to systematically

gather information and data. "Having an interview protocol helps keep the researcher organized, and it provides a record of information in the event that the recording devices do not work . . ." (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 115). However, due to the design of the study, the data collection protocol was not specifically developed until after the quantitative findings.

Data Collection

Due to the nature of this sequential design, the findings in the first phase (QUAN) largely determined the direction of phase two (qual). As Creswell and Plano Cark (2007) denoted, in this study the researcher will:

1. Collect data in stages.
2. Ensure that quantitative and qualitative data collection build on one another.
3. Give priority to the quantitative data, as it will guide the qualitative phase of the study.
4. Analyze quantitative data, then make decisions on how the findings will influence the next stage while building the study.

The quantitative sample size included 313 districts; all districts in Texas with fewer than 500 students were included considering the stipulations of the study. The researcher used all independent public school districts that qualified as independent districts with fewer than 500 students according to TEA. The qualitative sample size was dependent on the findings from the quantitative phase. Due to constraints surrounding time, money and location, the researcher contacted two different regions in the eastern part of Texas for participants. The researcher sent an email to all superintendents in

Region 51 and only received one informed consent from the superintendent of First ISD. The researcher then emailed all superintendents in Region 52 because it was the closest region to the participant in Region 51. The researcher contacted all 39 superintendents of Region 51 and 52 in order to have a homogenous group of participants. Four superintendents completed the informed consent and expressed their willingness to participate in the study. One of the participants was from a district in Region 51, and three of the superintendents were from districts in Region 52. It should also be noted that Region 51 and Region 52 are neighboring regions.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) observed that "Attaining an adequate sample size is an important condition to be met when formulating sampling decisions because a small sample size reduces statistical power, thereby limiting the number of statistically significant relationships and differences that can be identified" (p. 361). As Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) explained, ". . . These data collection methods often provide new and uncharted information about the person or the setting of study . . . Combining the two approaches . . . provides richer data than either approach" (p. 95). The connecting of quantitative and qualitative data in this study provided a rich explanation of teacher turnover in specific districts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in explanatory sequential design was similar to the data collection. The study relied on the quantitative findings in order to move into the qualitative phase.

Quantitative data analysis.

The data from each districts' TAPR report was taken from archival data found on the TEA website. Data was initially compiled and examined in Excel. The researcher had an outside verifier check the data for any errors that could skew the study. A simple correlation was used once the Excel data was imported. ". . . using an independent variable with three categories and a single dependent variable measured on an interval scale . . ." will be ideal for this study whereas the independent variable is district size, and the dependent variable is teacher turnover (Spicer, 2005, p. 153).

The Pearson product-moment coefficient was the statistical measurement used to analyze the correlation between teacher turnover and district size. The null hypothesis was that no relationship existed between districts' size and teacher turnover rate. The research hypothesis was that a relationship existed between districts' size and teacher turnover rate.

Qualitative data analysis.

The researcher used qualitative data gathered from face-to-face interviews of educational leaders of Texas independent school districts in Region 51 and Region 52 that had fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year. One-on-one structured (see Appendix B) and semi-structured interviews took place during the study. All interviews were audio recorded. The researcher emailed a list of the structured interview questions to each participant with the informed consent document in the initial e-mail. These are the questions that had to be answered for the first level of the interview. Emailing the structured interview questions to participants ahead of time provided a foundation for participant perspectives in order for the researcher to expand

on once they were face-to-face. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were also conducted until saturation was obtained. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings from the face-to-face interviews and sent them to the individual participants for member checking. Follow up questions and clarifications were also obtained throughout this process.

This second level of interview led to follow up questions due to the data collected. Thomas (2011) explained the advantages of semi-structured interviews, "The interview schedule reminds you just not of the issues but also potential questions, possible follow-up questions and 'probes', which may encourage the interviewee to say more on these follow-ups . . ." (p. 163). The use of structured and semi-structured interviews provided appropriate insight into the issue being studied. The researcher followed the structured interview questions as a guide, but also followed relevant trajectories when she felt appropriate.

During the interviews the observer took notes and documented observations. "What is written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation becomes raw data from which a study's findings eventually emerge" (Thomas, 2011, p. 96). Written observations were a critical component of triangulation during the study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, "The narrative inquirer may note stories but more often records actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions" (p. 79). The researcher's field notes were used in the study. Stake (1995) explained, "The search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions, which we call 'correspondence' . . ." (p. 78).

Once the structured and semi structured interviews concluded, the researcher reviewed and edited any handwritten notes. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings within 48 hours of the face-to-face interviews. The researcher also e-mailed each participant to thank them for their participation and asked them to review the transcriptions for final member checking. The transcriptions were carefully analyzed and edited as needed. Follow up questions and clarifications were also solidified at this time.

The researcher used a qualitative codebook when analyzing data collected through the interviews. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) explained, "Making these memos becomes an important first step in forming broader categories of information, such as codes or themes . . ." (p. 131). The connections among the data were imperative to the study. According to Stake (1995), "The qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation . . ." (p. 75).

The researcher hand coded all transcripts by common factors that emerged after re-reading the interviews, transcriptions, and researcher's observation notes. The recurring factors were analyzed in order to provide another layer of triangulation.

Connecting the data.

The quantitative findings from the Pearson product-moment coefficient in Excel showed no correlation between district size and teacher turnover rate. At that time, the researcher decided against contacting the outliers and extreme cases since no correlation that was found. Instead, the researcher chose to find participants in one specific area that consisted of two different regions in the eastern part of Texas due to constraints

surrounding time, money, and location. The researcher sent an email to all superintendents in Region 51 and only received one informed consent from First ISD. The researcher then emailed all superintendents in Region 52 because it was the closest region to the participant in Region 51. At this time, three superintendents consented to participate in the study. The superintendents that graciously consented ironically represented the correlation that arose in the quantitative data set. First ISD, Second ISD and Third ISD all showed a decrease in turnover with an increase in district size (see Table 4) while Fourth ISD was the outlier with the smallest district size and the lowest turnover rate.

The final report of the data analysis was connected in the discussion of the findings accompanied by visual representations that aid in the clarity of the findings. "Connecting the data occurs when the analysis of one type of data leads to (and thereby connects to) the need for the other type of data" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 84) The results from the quantitative phase of the study were interpreted in order to confirm or not confirm the relationships that existed among the data, and the qualitative phase was used to provide a better understanding of teacher turnover in these rural Texas districts.

Validity and Reliability

In research, validity, reliability and ethics must be considered. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) define validity as " . . . the ability of the researcher to draw meaningful and accurate conclusions from the data in the study" (p.146). Certain measures were taken to provide confidence in this study. Specific to the explanatory

design of this study " . . . more meaningful information results when the qualitative second phase builds on significant predictors rather than on simple group comparisons" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 146). The researcher was transparent throughout the study. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), "Validity is also enhanced when the researcher discusses . . . potential threats to validity that arise during data collection and analysis . . ." (p. 147).

Provisions of Trustworthiness

In order to triangulate the data, the study used various methods for data collection. Thomas (2011) explained triangulation as " . . . viewing from several points . . . looking in from different angles and vantage points . . . by looking at it from different directions and using different methods . . ." (p. 68). Observations, scheduled interviews, follow up interviews, and field notes were used throughout the study. Themes emerged throughout the interviews with participants.

Member checking was also used in this study between researchers and participants. Member checking was defined by Stake (1995) as, " . . . [the] actor is requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her . . ." (p. 115). The researcher provided transcribed interviews to the participants in order to secure member checks. Additionally, the researcher summarized and restated information from the interviews for participants to verify.

Dependability was conveyed through thick descriptions throughout the study. Multiple mixed measures provided a better chance to assess the consistencies throughout

the research due to the various settings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The researcher asked two questions throughout the study to ensure dependability: " . . . (a) Am I truly measuring/recording/capturing what I intend to, rather than something else? (b) Assuming that I am measuring/capturing what I intended to, is my measurement/recording consistent and accurate (i.e., yields little error)?" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 209).

Summary

This chapter examined the methodology employed by this research in order to analyze the problem and purpose of the study. Explanatory sequential design was used to conduct the proposed research in two phases. "The first strand is usually exploratory and data collection, analysis and inferences are in one approach . . . The second strand (phase) is often confirmatory and the new data, its analysis and inferences are in the other approach . . ." (Cameron, 2009, pp. 146-147). The quantitative strand was used to analyze the relationship among districts' size and teacher turnover rate during the 2016-2017 school year. The qualitative phase of the study used interviews to identify factors that contributed to teacher turnover from superintendents' perspectives.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between teacher turnover and district size, and the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students. The purpose of this study was achieved using mixed methods to examine the quantitative data from the 2016-2017 school year coupled with the qualitative data gleaned from superintendent perspectives. The data were aligned with the research questions throughout the research study and challenged the positions that emerged through the literature review. This chapter includes the quantitative findings, the qualitative findings, the convergence of the two, and a reflection on the methods used.

Quantitative Findings

The results of the statistical analysis were organized through Excel and were examined to confirm or disconfirm the research hypothesis. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze teacher turnover compared to district size. A table was created to organize and display the data in order to increase understanding.

Research question one: What relationship exists between Texas districts' turnover rate and districts' size?

The analysis conducted to answer this question used data collected from the 2016-2017 TAPR reports (see Table 2). The statistical test selected to determine if there was a relationship between district size and teacher turnover rate was The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient using Excel.

Table 2

Correlation Between District Size and Teacher Turnover Rate

	Enrollment	Turnover Rate
Enrollment	1	
Turnover Rate	-0.0921409	1

The results suggested that the relationship between the district enrollment and turnover rate had no correlation (-0.0921409). For every increase in one unit of enrollment, there was a decrease in turnover rate by 0.009 units.

There were 313 Texas public school districts that had fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year. The teacher turnover rate for this sample had a mean of 22.05%. and a midpoint of 20.8. The outliers included fourteen districts with 0% turnover. Similarly, there were seven districts that had over 50% turnover rate. The results suggested that no relationship existed between Texas districts' turnover rate and districts' size for the 2016-2017 school year. The findings influenced the qualitative portion of the study.

Qualitative Findings

After analyzing the quantitative data set and findings, the researcher chose to invite superintendents of Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year to participate in the study based on a convenience sample. Surprisingly, the four superintendents that were willing to participate in the study were from districts that mirrored the larger sample of 313 districts. Table 3 describes the participants in the study.

Table 3

Participant Information

District Name	*District Size*	*Turnover Rate*	*Region*
Fourth ISD	150-200	10%-15%	51
Third ISD	150-200	35%-40%	51
Second ISD	200-300	20%-25%	51
First ISD	400-500	10%-15%	52

Interviews with the four superintendents regarding the factors that contributed to teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students were hand coded and examined by factors. The factors that emerged challenged the factors that emerged in the review of the literature, as well as confirmed some of those that already existed in the literature.

Research question two: What factors contributed to teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students?

Four superintendents of districts with fewer than 500 students in Region 51 and Region 52 agreed to participate in the study and shared their perspective on teacher turnover during the 2016-2017 school year. From the analysis of the interview responses six factors emerged: attrition, leadership, non-renewal, personal reasons, retirement, and upward mobility (see Table 4). According to the superintendents, these factors were specific to the teachers that left after completing the 2016-2017 school year. The superintendents also spoke from an historical perspective, which uncovered other contributing factors, such as, workload, location, and financial factors. These additional factors cited by the superintendents, although not necessarily specific to the teachers that resigned after 2016-2017, provide insight into this particular phenomenon concerning districts with fewer than 500 students.

According to the superintendents, 27% of the teachers retired, 40% of the teachers left for personal issues, 20% were not a good fit for the district and did not have their contract renewed, 13% left for upward mobility, or pursued other opportunities in public education, and 6% left because they were unhappy with district leadership. Additionally, the researcher found that 20% of the teachers left the profession entirely after completing their 2016-2017 contracts according to their superintendent (see Table 4).

Table 4

Turnover Factors

Reason for leaving the district	Percentage of teachers that left
Attrition	20.0%

Leadership	13.3%
Non-renewal	13.3%
Personal Reasons	13.3%
Retirement	26.7%
Upward Mobility	13.3%

The qualitative analysis of superintendent interviews provided six factors surrounding the factors that contributed to teacher turnover during the 2016-2017 school year. No trends emerged specific to one particular district in regard to leadership, personal, retirement or upward mobility. However, Third ISD lost two teachers after the 2016-2017 school year and both left the profession completely (attrition). Fourth ISD had three teachers leave after the 2016-2017 school year, and two of the three were categorized as non-renewals.

Leadership.

Two teachers had issues with leadership and decided to resign. According to the superintendent of First ISD, "Both of them, I would consider were not the best fit. Yeah, that would be a good description." The teachers that resigned after completing the 2016-2017 school year had differences surrounding their decision. One had personal issues outside of the school that was causing their character to be questioned in the community, which ultimately hindered their professionalism. The other teacher at First ISD was not the best fit for the position that was offered. They did not have good relationships with the students, and it greatly affected the subject area they were teaching.

> The superintendent explained "[He/She wasn't happy with the principal and [he/she] wasn't really forced out or asked to leave, but . . . the program was dying and a lot of it was because once the kids got to know [him/her] the more they moved away from [him/her] and it was almost to the point where we were going to have to kill the program."

Attrition.

Two teachers left the profession completely to take care of their family, while another teacher changed professions. Second ISD had a teacher leave " . . . to take care of [his/her] elderly parents . . ." while Third ISD " . . . lost [a teacher] to be a stay at home mom . . ." Third ISD also had a teacher that

> . . . got out of education altogether and went to go to work for, [he/she] was a chicken farmer and rancher, so that was [his/her] love and [they] got out and did that so we did not lose [them] to another district . . .

Non-renewal.

Two teachers did not get their contracts renewed. According to the superintendent from Fourth ISD, ". . . teaching was not for them . . ." The individual had " . . . semi retired and got [their] alternative certificate . . . it just didn't really work out . . ." Another teacher that left Fourth ISD was non-renewed " . . . due to legal issues . . ." Fourth ISD's superintendent explained that the teacher they let go

> " . . . started as a classroom teacher then ended as kind of an aide. We had some major issues with [him/her] . . . [He/she] didn't follow our guidance, we had strict guidelines and [he/she] continued to break those . . ." This teacher had parents

and law enforcement involved with a situation at the school that was " . . . right on the cusp of being illegal . . ."

Personal reasons and upward mobility.

Six teachers left for personal or family issues; this also included those that left the profession completely to take care of their family. This area of turnover was difficult to analyze due to the various factors that may or may not add to " . . . personal reasons . . ." hat a teacher decided to resign after the 2016-2017 school year. Speculation from participants included geographic location, salary, opportunities in larger districts, and relocation due to a spouse's job. This factor was difficult for participants to answer specific to the teachers that left after completing the 2016-2017 contract, so the answers were more historical in nature when discussing turnover for " . . . personal reasons . . ."

Retirement.

Four teachers retired, while two teachers moved into a different role in public education that was considered upward mobility. As Second ISD's superintendent explained, " . . . [he/she] left to take a coaching position at a larger district, [he/she] actually has [their] administrative certification so therefore wanted to move to get that experience and hopefully move into administration . . ." Fourth ISD was told by the teacher, " . . . [they] wanted to pursue other interests . . ." and later added that this individual was currently working for the Region Service Center.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that 27% of the teachers that left after completing the 2016-2017 school year had one to five years' experience; 20% had six to

ten years' experience; 20% had 11-20 years experience and 33% had over 20 years' experience (see Table 5).

Table 5

Teacher Experience

Years of Experience	Percentage of teachers in range
0-5	26.7%
6-10	20.0%
11-20	20.0%
Over 20	33.3%

The data revealed that 66.7% of the teachers that left the participating schools were middle/ high school teachers, compared to the 33.3% that were elementary teachers (see Table 6).

Table 6

Grade Level

Grade Level	Percentage of teachers
Elementary School	33.3%
Middle/High School	66.7%

Third ISD only lost two teachers to attrition after the 2016-2017 school year, but anticipated turnover this year. The superintendent explained, " . . . a couple [of high school teachers] that we're losing this year mentioned 'I've got too much on my plate' and that's understandable . . ." Similarly, Fourth ISD admitted, " . . . that's one thing I do worry about, is spreading them too thin . . ." when discussing the amount of preps specific to the teachers at the high school. The superintendents that participated in the study also expressed concern surrounding recruitment and hiring of high school teachers in the specialty areas such as Spanish, English, science, and math.

In regard to years' of service in the specific district that they left after completing the 2016-2017 school year, 60% left after 0-5 years' in the district; 20% left after 6-10 years' in the district; 6% left after 11-20 years' in the district; and 13% left with over 20 years' in the district (see Table 7).

Table 7

Years in district

Years in District	Percentage of Teachers in Range
0-5	60.0%
6-10	20.0%
11-20	6.7%
Over 20	13.3%

Connecting the Findings

The findings from the quantitative phase of the explanatory sequential mixed methods study led to the qualitative exploration of factors surrounding teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students. Delimitations of the study included the sample size for the qualitative data. Only four participants were selected from a narrowed scope of public school districts in Texas with fewer than 500 students. The four superintendents that participated in the study were interviewed about teachers that left after completing the 2016-2017 school year. They discussed factors surrounding turnover for former teachers. These factors were identified from the perspective of the superintendent, not the teachers who left. The teachers from the four participating districts in Region 51 and 52 who left after completing the 2016-2017 school year left for six specific reasons (see Table 8). The factors that emerged specific to the teachers that left in the 2016-2017 school year were quite ambiguous, so the superintendents also spoke to historical trends that they experienced while working as educational leaders in districts with fewer than 500 students.

Table 8

2016-2017 Information on Teacher Turnover by district

District	Experience	Grade Level	Years with district	Reason for leaving
First ISD	6-10 years	High school	3	Leadership
First ISD	6-10 years	High School	10	Retirement
First ISD	11-20 years	High School	3	Personal reasons

First ISD	11-20 years	Elementary	7	Personal reasons
First ISD	Over 20	Elementary	22	Retirement
First ISD	Over 20	Elementary	27	Retirement
Second ISD	6-10 years	High School	0	Leadership
Second ISD	11-20 years	High School	10	Attrition
Second ISD	Over 20	Elementary	13	Retirement
Second ISD	Over 20	High school	3	Upward mobility
Third ISD	1-5 years	High School	2	Attrition
Third ISD	1-5 years	Elementary	2	Attrition
Fourth ISD	1-5 years	High School	2	Upward mobility
Fourth ISD	1-5 years	High School	1	Non-renewal
Fourth ISD	Over 20	High School	4	Non-renewal

The participants admitted that some discrepancy could exist between the reasons given to an administrator upon resignation and reality due to relationships and superiority. However, after the face-to-face interviews, the researcher contacted each participant for member checking and they completed a sentence about each teacher who left that verified their years of experience, years in district, grade level, and reason for leaving (see Table 8). This data from the participants narrowed the reason for leaving to one specific factor after discussing a myriad of factors, throughout the interviews.

Work conditions.

According to the superintendents, there was an overwhelming sense of community in all four districts. The people involved in the organization were the top priority. Similarly, there was a unique culture due to the size of the district. All of the superintendents alluded to the small class size and student to teacher ratio as a positive factor that promotes teacher retention in their district. On the other hand, a negative factor that is undeniable in small schools is the amount of preps and planning that is inevitable because of the faculty size. First ISD had 43 teachers in the district, Second ISD had 24 teachers, Third ISD had 17, and Fourth ISD had 18. Third ISD's superintendent explained

> " . . . that a teacher seemed stressed so I brought him into the office and asked what's going on, the teacher mentioned that he has four different preps, and theatre . . ." The superintendent admitted that the teacher "was loaded", but also continued with " . . . all of us are. I'm the instructional coach, the assistant superintendent, the superintendent and the maintenance director, I understand, I can tell them, hey, I get it, but I knew what I was getting into, and you did too . . ."

The superintendent from Fourth ISD had a similar attitude. The superintendent of Fourth ISD reminisced about their initial interview with the district for a social studies position in the same district that they now lead.

> " . . . I sat in my old office and the principal at the time told me, she said, alright, you have six preps . . . You're going to teach 7th grade Texas history, 8th grade

> and all 9-12 histories, you are the only history teacher on the high school side 7th-12th grade . . ."

After reflecting on their personal experience they said " . . . it keeps the teachers engaged, the days go by quick but that's one thing I do worry about is spreading them too thin . . ." The Second ISD superintendent talked about ". . .a teacher that does Spanish 1, 2, 3 and 7th and 8th grade language arts . . . and our high school math teacher teaches algebra, geometry, algebra 2 and pre-calculus . . . I think it's because we're so small, they have a lot of planning periods . . ."

Teachers are not the only ones with difficult workloads in small schools. Third ISD and Fourth ISD dissolved a principal position because of budget cuts after the 2016-2017 school year. Third ISD got rid of the high school principal and the elementary principal transitioned to a PK-12 principal role with strategic guidance from the superintendent. On the other hand, Fourth ISD dissolved the principal position completely and the superintendent now acts as both superintendent and principal.

Geographic location.

Each superintendent also discussed their location in relation to the larger communities that surrounded their district. First ISD explained that although most of their teachers commute, most have a tie to the community,

> " . . . There are six teachers and then of course myself graduated from here, and then we have several that are local and graduated from surrounding districts. Several that graduated thirteen miles away, and that's where most of our teachers

> live. We have a few that live twenty-two miles away, but most live thirteen miles away . . .”

When asked about alumni of the district, Second ISD’s superintendent responded,

> “ . . . Ten of our twenty four teachers are alumni and they just want to come back and give to their community. Many of them have taught in larger surrounding districts that are fifteen to twenty-five minutes away and have come back . . .”

The superintendent of third ISD discussed the historical trends from their last five year longitudinal studies:

> “ . . . we see that we lose first and second year teachers because they come to our district to get that initial job and then once they’ve got their foot in the door, they’re immediately bolting . . . it’s usually your single male and females that find a partner and then they are out of here because there is nothing here whatsoever. I’d be the same way, you know they come here, they don’t live in the district because there is nowhere to live, they’re already commuting which is already a strain on them financially and so as soon as they can get out of here, they are gone, unless they have ties here and most of our teachers do . . . 75% [of the teachers] at the elementary are from here, graduated from here or have ties here . . . if you knew the last name of some of my staff [you would see] there’s a lot of family here . . . we are not losing a single elementary teacher, they’re all going to stay, they like it, they’re from here so we won’t ever lose them and they’re dang good . . . ”

Fourth ISD explained that most of their teachers commute

> " . . . from 35 minutes away, a few from 30 minutes away, and some from 45 minutes away . . . Most of our faculty, probably as much as 90% have worked at bigger, larger districts and have been involved with major discipline issues, or curriculum modifications, kind of the bureaucratic big district stuff and they want change. They hear about a small district, our district in particular and once they come here and see that we only have ten or twelve kids in a class, they see that it's laid back in a good way, and that they can actually teach kids instead of the kids being just a number . . ."

Financial factors.

Financial factors were indirectly addressed throughout the interviews. All participants discussed District of Innovation (DOI) status, Additional State Aid for Tax Reduction (ASTAR), Chapter 41, Small Schools Adjustment, the Texas Rural Task Force or Title I funding during the face-to-face interviews. Two superintendents spoke to the possibility of closure in the past or future of their district. Despite the financial issues that are unique to the districts, all superintendents spoke to the growing enrollment.

The qualitative factors specific to the teachers that left after completing the 2016-2017 school year did not explicitly include school size as a factor in turnover. However, throughout the interviews, it was clear that district size creates a unique atmosphere for Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students. Another limitation of the study is the ambiguity in language. The inconclusive findings add to the specific issues surrounding turnover that are unique to each district on an individual basis in order to better understand the phenomenon surrounding rural districts in Texas. Although many

similarities emerged in the interviews, each district superintendent expressed unique factors that contributed to turnover or retention in their district specifically.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings are discussed in relation to each of the individual research question. The sequential mixed method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) served as the model for summarizing findings, QUAN followed by QUAL.

Quantitative discussion.

The first research question asked, What relationships exist between Texas districts' turnover rate and districts' size? The trends in Texas public school turnover showed distinct differences when comparing turnover rate to district size. In 2011-2012 schools with over 50,000 students in the district had 14.6% turnover compared to the 27% turnover rate in districts with fewer than 500 students. The 2012-2013 data showed 19.1% turnover in districts with more than 50,000 students compared to 43.6% turnover in districts with fewer than 500. In 2013-2014 the districts with 50,000 or more students had 18% compared to 37.6% at districts with fewer than 500. The 2014-2015 data showed 17.7% turnover in districts with 50,000 or more while the districts with fewer than 500 had an average of 34.2% turnover (TEA, 2017). It appeared reasonable to explore the relationship among district size and turnover rate in the group with the highest turnover across time, the districts with fewer than 500 students. There were 313 public school districts in Texas that fell in this category according to 2016-2017 data. Descriptive statistics were used to answer this question. A simple correlation determined that there was no correlation (-0.0921409) between district size and turnover rate. There

were fifteen outliers in the data set of 313 districts. Eight of the districts had 0% turnover during the 2016-2017 school year, and seven of the districts had a turnover rate of 50% or more.

Qualitative discussion.

The second research question asked, What factors contributed to teachers leaving Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students? To uncover the factors surrounding teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students, the following questions were asked:

1. How many teachers left after completing the 2016-2017 school year? How many were beginning teachers (0 years experience)? 1-5 years? 6-10 years? 11-20 years? Over 20 years' experience?
2. What are the factors that contributed to turnover in your district during the 2016-2017 school year?
3. What are the factors that have contributed to teacher turnover in your district during your time as an educational leader?
4. What is your district doing to combat turnover or promote retention?

The factors that emerged from question one and two showed six specific reasons for teacher turnover after the 2016-2017 contract completion: leadership, attrition, non-renewal, personal, retirement, and upward mobility. Question three and four reiterated the six themes, but also provided additional themes that confirm and contradict the literature surrounding teacher turnover in rural areas. Overall, the teacher turnover experienced in the four participating districts with fewer than 500 students was natural.

The superintendent of Third ISD explained, “We only have 17 teachers total PK-12, so when you lose two or three, that’s a big percentage . . .” The participants gave various details surrounding the factors that contributed to turnover in 2016-2017 in addition to factors that influenced turnover throughout their time as the district leader.

In regard to leadership, participants discussed the turnover in leaders at the principal and superintendent level. The leadership directly affected the teachers, students and families. The superintendent of Second ISD discussed one instance, when a principal was not renewed because the teachers expressed that there would be a “ . . . mass exodus of teachers . . .” if the principal remained. Literature suggests that administrative support is a factor that influences teacher turnover. Teachers are less likely to leave when they have a say in shared decision making, feel supported with student behavior, and had professional development provided (Grissom, Viano & Selin 2016; Player et al, 2017; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Vagi & Pivovarova, 2017). One of the participants was new to the district and explained that he/she may be the cause of turnover during this 2017-2018 school year.

> You know, anytime a new leader comes in there’s something called change that happens and people are resistant to change, that’s in the literature. It’s a fact, people resist it no matter if it’s good or bad, so my presence and my accountability and expectations are without a question going to have some people leave at the high school, and that’s no doubt.

This reflective and transparent assertion from Third ISD confirms the literature surrounding leadership and turnover.

Grissom, Viano, and Selin (2016) noted, “If the benefits of the current job are the highest within a set, the employee stays. If the benefits are higher for another available alternative, the employee leaves to pursue the alternative” (p. 242). Factors surrounding attrition in the 2016-2017 sample included teachers that left to take care of their parents, those that left to take care of children, and those that left the profession to pursue a job specific to their degree field. Grissom, Viano & Selin (2016) found that gender had bearing on turnover because of the higher proportion of women teachers, and their likelihood of exiting for childbirth and childrearing. The teachers that leave the profession to pursue opportunities related to their degree may be contextualized to their geographic location. The participants talked specifically about the turnover in specialized areas such as science and math due to better opportunities outside of public education as a factor of turnover. Harrington (2017) stated, “ . . . in rural school districts near a larger community, science teachers may have more opportunities to work for other types of school districts and potential industry . . .” (p. 46).

Non-renewal was a sensitive topic during the interviews. The superintendents were very careful with their word choice and the amount of information provided on the subject. Three of the four participants reiterated that all information gathered from the interviews would remain confidential and anonymous before discussing the teachers that were non-renewed or left because they were “ . . . not a good fit . . .” as described by Second ISD. This sensitive topic pointed to teacher quality, performance, “fit” and even legal issues. First ISD discussed the life issues that contributed to a “ . . . good teacher at one time . . .” that was dealing with personal issues “ . . . to a point that they could not

function well . . . that over time became a liability . . .” The participants from First ISD and Second ISD explained that a teacher that left “. . . just wasn’t a good match for us . . .” In an extreme case at Fourth ISD, legality issues arose, “ . . . it was involved stuff here at the school but it was right on the cusp of being illegal and had parents and law enforcement involved but it didn’t cross that line . . .” Similarly, First ISD explained, “ . . . things that were happening outside of the district were affecting student perceptions of [the teacher] and the community perceptions of [him/her]. There was possibly some unethical behavior, and [they] are no longer teaching . . .” Although the participants were cautious about specific details surrounding these situations, they were all matter of fact and adamant that by non-renewing these teachers, they did what was best for the district. Fourth ISD’s superintendent even stated, “You either have it or you don’t or you become developed. Then there are some people that you know right off the bat, that this isn’t the line of work for [them] . . .”

Grissom, Viano, and Selin (2016) noted “National data suggests that voluntary turnover occurs nine times more often than involuntary school staffing actions . . .” (p. 242). The most ambiguous factor surrounding teacher turnover was documented as personal issues. Participants discussed a myriad of factors that contributed to teachers leaving for personal issues, because of the inconclusive nature of the reason. The participants explained that some teachers “ . . . [that] want the lights and glamour of that feel good environment . . .” (Fourth ISD) went to neighboring districts, some left for financial reasons, (Third ISD) some “ . . . got crossways with leadership . . .” (Fourth ISD) and some were overwhelmed with the amount of preps and expectations that are

unique to districts of this size (Fourth ISD & Third ISD). Of course, these were speculations based on historical trends and conversations with teachers that left for "personal" reasons according to the superintendents that participated in the study. It must be noted that this is a limitation to the study. When a teacher left for "personal reasons", "leadership" or "upward mobility" there is no certainty that school size did not play a factor in their decision to leave. The study narrowed the focus to the perspective of the superintendent instead of the teachers that resigned after completing the 2016-2017 school year. Future research should examine teacher turnover related to "personal reasons" from the teachers' perspective to see if the perspectives are related or oppose one another.

Retirement was the greatest cause of teacher turnover at districts with fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year according to the four participants in the study. Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas (2016) found that retirement accounts for one third of teacher attrition. There was a difference of opinions when discussing teachers and retirement throughout the interviews. Some participants said their teachers were counting down to retirement while others had teachers that continue to work past retirement or even come back as a retire/rehire. Interestingly, the participants in this study each had at least one retire/rehire in their district.

Two teachers that resigned after completing their 2016-2017 contractual agreements took jobs that were considered upward mobility. One moved into a position at a region service center, and the other accepted a coaching position in a larger district.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. A simple correlation determined that there was no significant relationship between district size and teacher turnover rate in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students. In the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher identified six factors surrounding turnover at four districts in Region 51 and Region 52. Those factors included: attrition, leadership, nonrenewal, personal reasons, retirement and upward mobility.

This research study was conducted to uncover the factors surrounding teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students. The reasons surrounding turnover specific to the teachers that left after the 2016-2017 school year did not speak to district size directly. However, the findings in the qualitative phase revealed six distinct factors specific to the teachers that left after the 2016-2017 school year. The general discussions surrounding turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students according to superintendents brought about additional factors related to workload, location, and financial factors that may have been embedded in the six factors which emerged in the interviews that were not specific to the narrowed scope of the teachers that left after the 2016-2017 school year (see Table 8). The inconclusive findings from the qual phase confirmed the QUAN findings by highlighting the unique challenges that an individual district with fewer than 500 students faces with regard to teacher turnover.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to examine the relationship that existed between teacher turnover rate and district size, and the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students. Additionally, the study explored the teacher turnover and organizational mobility among those that have left these districts. According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2007), "The purpose of the sequential mixed methods analysis of the data is to use the information from the analysis of the first database to inform the second database" (p.142). The design of this study followed explanatory sequential in order to uncover the factors that contributed to teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students.

This methodology used the QUAL findings to explain the QUAN findings. The priority was the QUAN findings because they led the researcher to the participants that were interviewed for the QUAL analysis. The quantitative data collection used the teacher turnover rates from the 2016-2017 TAPR reports, and compared them to the size of each district with fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year. A simple

correlation found that no relationship existed between the size of the district and the teacher turnover rate. However, the information did lead the researcher to a purposeful sample of superintendents from four districts that represented the quantitative data set of 313 districts with fewer than 500 students. Instead of looking at the outliers, the researcher chose a purposeful convenience sample from Region 51 and Region 52. The qualitative portion included interviews with superintendents regarding the factors that contributed to teacher turnover in the 2016-2017 school year as well as historical trends unique to their district. The following research questions were asked during this study:

1. What relationship exists between Texas districts' turnover rate and districts' size?
2. What factors contributed to teacher turnover in Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students?

Question one was answered quantitatively using Excel. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze teacher turnover compared to district size. Question two was answered qualitatively from the data collected through interviews. Six factors emerged surrounding teacher turnover during the 2016-2017 school year: leadership, attrition, non-renewal, personal, retirement, and upward mobility. The connecting of the two phases occurred during the final stages of data analysis. Some of the factors indirectly related to the quantitative question, but district size did not emerge as a specific, stand-alone factor that contributed to turnover during the 2016-2017 school year. The participants explained why each teacher left after completing the 2016-2017 contractual agreement, but then spoke to trends that they have seen throughout their time

as superintendent. Workload, location and financial factors were all themes that emerged in the interviews that were not specific to the 2016-2017 data.

Conclusions

The result of this study adds to the existing literature surrounding teacher turnover in rural districts. However, this particular research had a very narrowed scope. Throughout the interviews the superintendents shared their perspective on teacher turnover in their district specific to the teachers that left after 2016-2017, which uncovered these specific factors: attrition, leadership, non-renewal, personal reasons, retirement, and upward mobility. The participants also spoke to historical trends that are unique to their district concerning teacher turnover, which included, workload, geographic location, and financial factors. Many of the factors that emerged in these interviews confirmed the literature surrounding teacher turnover, and some contradicted the existing literature.

The literature reviewed suggested that teacher attrition and mobility are factors that contribute to turnover (Dove, 2004; Keigher, 2010). This suggestion was confirmed in the study with 33.3% of the teachers claiming attrition or upward mobility as their reason for leaving the district. 20% of the teachers that left after the 2016-2017 school year left the profession completely, while 13.3% of the teachers left for a position that was considered upward mobility.

The literature also indicated that the factors surrounding turnover and attrition include years experience, pedagogical training, work conditions, retirement, and leadership (Dove, 2004; Fowles et al., 2014; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll, Merrill & May,

2014; Lowe, 2006; Ost & Schiman, 2015; Plessis, Carroll, & Gillies, 2015; Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). This study found that leadership and retirement contributed to turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students.

According to the superintendents of the four districts that participated in the study, two of the fifteen teachers left because of leadership and four of the fifteen teachers retired. After analyzing the historical trends that the superintendents discussed in the interviews, the researcher also concluded that years experience, pedagogical training, and work conditions were contributing factors that led to the two teachers that were non-renewed and the two teachers that left for personal/life reasons. Financial factors, work conditions, leadership, and geographic location remain the critical components of teacher retention specific to rural schools (Fowles et al., 2014; Gallo & Beckman, 2016; Jimerson, 2003; Monk, 2007). The participants explained their concerns with workload, geographic location, and financial factors that are unique to districts with fewer than 500 students when discussing historical trends in their district.

Throughout the literature, teacher turnover was related to students, specifically in the form of student achievement. However, the absence of findings in this study contradicted this idea. Ultimately, teacher turnover affects student achievement (Fowles et al., 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). When an organization believes that turnover is a natural process and works to find the best fit for their district, student achievement does not suffer from turnover directly. The superintendents talked about the challenges facing the specialty areas in high school, but never linked student achievement to turnover. In fact, many of the superintendents were very frank about the "teachers that have it, or they

don't" in addition to teachers that "just weren't the best match for us" or the teachers "that we really did not want back". These unique cases may have caused more negative consequences concerning student achievement if poor quality teachers were left in the classrooms.

Implications

Given the findings of this study, that teachers are leaving Texas public school districts with fewer than 500 students for personal reasons such as leadership, financial factors, geographic location, upward mobility, the state should consider creating programs that aid the individualized needs of these small rural schools.

Teacher preparation programs and preparation programs for educational leaders can help by accepting the starkly different demands that will be placed on rural educators and leaders instead of focusing on the widely accepted challenges to urban areas. "The challenges facing rural leaders are different [compared to urban leaders]" (Gross & Jochim, 2015, p. 8). 13.3% of the teachers were open about their decision to leave being related to leadership. Gross and Jochim (2015) discussed the various roles that a leader of an isolated rural area must do with less resources and support. Teacher preparation programs could find ways to partner with these remote areas so that teachers and leaders that plan to work in these areas have the opportunity to do their field work in these areas, or have experiences with people from these areas in order to better understand the aspects that set these small districts apart.

There are a few organizations that focus solely on rural districts in Texas. Second ISD explained,

> "...when you talk about grants and things, there are not a lot of things out there specific to rural schools...Texas Rural Education Association (TREA) and the Texas Rural Task Force are really trying to do some things to help rural schools. One of the biggest things that came out of our Texas Rural focus group was retention and keeping teachers. Some school districts, the ones closer to the big cities, do have teachers that'll get the job, and then in a year go to Houston, Dallas, or the big cities where they can make more money. It is a focus, but we aren't the largest population of school districts out there".

The districts that participated in this study were not competing with large cities like Houston or Dallas.

Policy makers must attend to the financial constraints that are leading to factors surrounding turnover in these small, Texas districts. In all four districts, the school is the community. As Gross and Jochim (2015) explained, "In isolated rural places, schools serve as the focus of the community" (p. 8). Regardless of ones' opinion on economics concerning this topic, these schools are developing future citizens and deserve the same educational opportunities as other locations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Teacher turnover is inevitable. The literature surrounding this topic dissects various attributes of turnover specific to public education. The findings in this study have a number of implications relative to small public schools in Texas for both researchers and educators. First, according to Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016), "Teacher attrition remains high, at 8% annually. Two-thirds of leavers

depart before retirement age, most because of dissatisfaction with aspects of their teaching conditions . . .” (p. 3).

Factors surrounding attrition were not expanded on because the participants in the study did not have any detailed information about what led to the decision to leave the profession completely. The leaders were understanding of “taking care of family” or “being a stay at home mom” or pursing a career outside of public education that was specific to one’s love and passion. Administrators should question attrition in their district in order to uncover patterns that may aid in retaining these highly qualified teachers. Policy makers should look at ways the profession may support educators in specific times of need such as maternity leave, family leave, or even making the benefits more attractive to these small districts so that fewer teachers would make the choice to exit the profession completely when faced with these situations.

Teacher turnover trends that exist among the literature and staffing instability in schools must be individualized to specific districts instead of generalized in relation to size, region, or student demographics. Staffing instability may be temporary or historical depending on the district. Future research should include factors specific to districts with similar characteristics including size and location instead of only high-poverty, high minority, and low-performing schools. The root cause of the factors surrounding turnover may be different from one school to the next. Factors must be identified and interventions that specifically relate must be put in place (Holme, Jabbar, Germain, & Dinning, 2017). Another recommendation is individualized case studies, which may be more beneficial in uncovering the factors surrounding teacher turnover in districts with

fewer than 500 students. On the other hand, future research may consider looking at turnover as a healthy and natural part of public education.

Teacher perspectives must also be considered when exploring the factors surrounding teacher turnover. Future research may consider interviewing teachers directly in order to better understand teacher attrition, turnover, and retention.

Recommendations Beyond Research

This study may promote future research to look at the specific qualities that promote teacher retention in small schools. Based on this study, future research may uncover the leadership and school characteristics that encourage teachers to remain in districts with fewer than 500 students.

An overwhelming sense of community emerged during the interviews with the four superintendents that participated in this study. Each participant talked about the family like atmosphere and repeatedly talked about the trust they have in their teachers. One participant explained, " . . . once [teachers] come, they stay . . . I think because of the culture and community here, it's more like a family . . ." Another leader stated that 75% of the teachers were alumni of the district, or had deep connections to the district.

When discussing the elementary teachers specifically, one leader stated, "They're all going to stay, they like it, they're from here so we won't ever lose them and they're dang good!" Another participant said, " . . . I knew my teachers, I knew what they were doing. I could go in there and they are teaching day in and day out . . .". Another leader asserted, "The most important people in your school are your teachers, that's period, the end. If you've got great teachers then you have a great school."

The rural districts that participated in this study were extremely inspiring. School leaders could save financial resources and organizational management by looking at ways to build a positive culture and climate within their organizations through trust, support, and genuine collaboration. It was very clear that they are doing more with less. Their commitment to teachers and students was evident throughout all interactions.

It is recommended that future research examine the ambiguity of teacher turnover for "personal reasons." An examination into the specific factors may provide ways that educational leaders could better support teachers that are considering leaving their districts. Educator preparation programs, and principal preparation programs may consider differentiating their programs to provide professional development for needs that are specific to rural school districts.

Hill (2015) requested that states do more for rural education and educators. Superintendents are isolated and their role carries unique leadership demands. "In isolated places, schools serve as the focus for community activities . . ." (p. 8). Similarly, the participants in this study alluded to their role in the community. Three of the four leaders interviewed explained that their school was the community. However, the burdens surrounding funding, standardization and accountability, increases in student enrollment, and teacher turnover all account for the unique demands on districts with fewer than 500 students. Future research should analyze the role of the state specific to small, rural districts and the burdens they endure. Policy makers should also consider rural specific organizations that support the individualized needs of small schools across the state.

Concluding Remarks

The findings of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study examined the relationship between teacher turnover and district size, and the factors that influenced the Texas public school teachers that left districts with fewer than 500 students. The study revealed that no significant relationship existed between district size and teacher turnover rate. As revealed by the qualitative findings, the factors surrounding teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students during the 2016-2017 school year were unique to each district. Six factors: leadership, attrition, non-renewal, personal, retirement, and upward mobility emerged from the interviews with the four participants from Region 51 and Region 52 in the eastern part of Texas. Despite the factors that emerged, each district had their own, distinct challenges that emerged during the interviews. Tehseen and Hadi (2015) explained, " . . . It is vital for every school to keep its qualified teaching staff . . . [and identify] . . . factors that lead to teacher's job satisfaction and good performance. And also strive to investigate the factors influencing their retention in school" (p. 241).

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Date:

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Paige Benoy, I am a doctoral student at Stephen F. Austin State University and I am in need of your assistance. I am working on a research study that explores the different factors surrounding teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between turnover and district size during the 2016-2017 school year, and the factors surrounding the teachers that left these districts.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance answering a few questions. Your participation would be highly beneficial to my research. I would like to interview you and record your thoughts on the factors that contributed to teachers leaving your district. The feedback given will be kept confidential with names and school information replaced with pseudonyms. The information gathered in this study will be used to help other educators and rural districts with issues surrounding teacher turnover. Your participation is voluntary and I assure you that all identifying information will be kept confidential. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, please just let me know and I will remove any of the data collected from the study.

If you decide to participate in the study, please sign in the provided space below. If you have any additional questions about this study, you may contact the Coordinator of the Doctoral Program; Dr. Patrick Jenlink at (936) 468-1756 or e-mail him at pjenlink@sfasu.edu. Any concerns with this research may be directed to the office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (936) 468-6606.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study.

I hereby give consent to be interviewed by the doctoral student mentioned above. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and that the intent of this interview is to assist with the study on the factors surrounding teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____

Paige Benoy, SFASU Doctoral Candidate

Note: The participant will receive a copy of this consent as a receipt for their files. The original signed consent form will be kept by the researcher.

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APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol / Questions

Thank you so much for your participation in my study. I really appreciate your time and feedback. The information gathered from this interview will assist in uncovering the factors that surround teacher turnover in districts with fewer than 500 students. All data will be used solely for the purpose of the researcher in this particular study. Once the information has been transcribed and collected, it will be destroyed. Your genuine feedback and trustworthiness is greatly appreciated.

Name: _____

Gender: _____ Ethnicity/Race:_____

Position/Department:_____

Number of years in education: _____ In the district:_____

Texas certifications:_____

Highest level of education:_____

Where you earned your degree:_____

Level One Interview

1. How many teachers left after completing the 2016-2017 school year? How many were beginning teachers (0 years experience)? 1-5 years? 6-10 years? 11-20 years? Over 20 years experience?

2. What are the factors that contributed to turnover in your district during the 2016-2017 school year?

3. What are the factors that have contributed to teacher turnover in your district during your time as an educational leader?

4. What is your district doing to combat turnover or promote retention?

Level Two Interview

1. How many teachers do you have? How many are alumni?

2. Why do teachers come to your district?

3. Why do teachers stay in your district?

4. What makes your district unique?

Level Three Interview

1. In regard to the teachers that left after completing the 2016-2017 school year, can you tell me how many years experience they had, what grade level they were in, how many years they taught in your district, and the reason they left your district?

VITA

Paige N. Benoy graduated from Nacogdoches High School in 2003. She attended Stephen F. Austin State University, and received her Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies Degree in 2008. She began teaching in Nacogdoches Independent School District, and returned to Stephen F. Austin State University to pursue her Master of Education Degree, which was conferred in 2011. She completed the Principal Certification Program at Stephen F. Austin State University in 2012. She was accepted into the 2014 Doctoral Cohort at Stephen F. Austin State University where she earned her doctorate in May of 2018. Currently, she continues to serve as a math interventionist in Nacogdoches Independent School District.

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