

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies of Campus Principals in Rural South Texas Districts

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ABSTRACT

Public school campuses in rural South Texas are struggling to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. Districts now have flexibility in hiring certified teachers, but the need for teachers continues to grow annually. The challenge lies in attracting teachers to smaller school districts, when there are larger districts throughout the State of Texas that can afford to offer higher salaries and better benefit packages. The students attending school in rural South Texas districts deserve the same education that any other school district in Texas provides, so it is imperative to understand how the principals in rural South Texas school districts identify candidates for hire, recruit said candidates, and retain employees on their campuses.

This qualitative research sought to understand the perceptions of campus principals in rural South Texas regarding teacher recruitment strategies, retention strategies, and professional traits relevant to higher recruitment and retention success. Ten campus principals working in rural school districts were interviewed with the intent of gaining insight from their perceptions regarding current recruitment and retention practices in South Texas. Open-ended questions, active involvement, and observation were used to gather data during face-to-face Zoom video conferences. Through repeated analysis of the transcriptions there were 35 words or short phrases which emerged during the interviews. These words or short phrases were organized into themes.

Key findings in this study indicate that the recruitment and retention of teachers is a direct result of the decisions made by campus principals, the salary offered to the teacher, the level of support from administration, the culture and climate of the school, the professional flexibility of teachers, and the advertising practices of rural school districts. School districts in rural South Texas could benefit from this information in their hiring practices and teacher retention efforts. Universities may benefit from the findings of this study and apply this research to the future teacher and administrator preparation practices. The primary beneficiaries of this research are the students attending school in rural South Texas districts.

This study focused on recruitment and retention of teachers in South Texas rural campuses. It also sought to discover what professional characteristics were found to be the most desirable in a potential new hire. Future studies could seek to discover what type of monetary

incentives are the most attractive to teachers, how a positive campus climate and culture impacts a school, and how employee flexibility increases their chances of getting and keeping a job.

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INTRODUCTION

Public education has a direct impact on the future of the United States and abroad. The significance of meeting requirements set forth by the federal government, coupled with individual state requirements, have led to an extremely competitive market for teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention (Ingersoll et al., 2021). Larger school districts in the state of Texas encompass a population saturation that is much higher than rural school districts. In 2020, there were 20 school districts in the State of Texas that had an enrollment of over 50,000 students, and 395 school districts reporting less than 500 students enrolled (TEA, 2020b). Higher populations lead to higher enrollments. Higher enrollments generate more funding in terms of average daily attendance (ADA; Urban Institute, 2020). These large school districts possess the capability of offering teachers a higher salary than school districts in rural areas. Regions 1 and 2 in South Texas are relatively rural, with the exceptions being Laredo, McAllen, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo, and Corpus Christi (TEA, 2020b). Campus principals in the rural school districts are tasked with ensuring that every student on their campus has the same opportunity for a quality education as every other student in the United States (Klassen & Kim, 2019). These campus principals are now faced with a heightened responsibility to hire the best fit for their campuses and their students, but the competition for highly qualified teachers exists between other districts and private industry (Morales, 2016). During the selection process, principals often identify certain characteristics that they are looking for in their prospective hires.

This study sought to identify the recruitment strategies, retainment initiatives, and professional characteristics campus principals in rural South Texas districts prefer when seeking to hire teachers. There are studies which speak of hiring teachers (Whitworth et al., 2016) and of professional characteristics (Sazedj, 2017). This study sought to identify characteristics, possessed by teachers, which are found to be in high demand, the recruitment strategies, and retainment practices campus principals deploy, within a geographical area in the state of Texas. Previous researchers have not identified what characteristics principals are looking to hire, combined with recruitment and retention practices campus principals in South Texas utilize.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature provided five key areas of exploration to serve as the foundation for this study:

- Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers
- Campus Culture and Climate
- Teacher Turnover and Student Achievement
- Campus Principals Role in Hiring and Securing Teachers
- Characteristics Sought in Teachers

Each provides more insight into how campus principals in rural South Texas districts rate the professional characteristics of potential hires and are discussed further in the sections that follow.

Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers

The education profession sees a loss of 17% of teachers within the first year of employment (Farmer, 2020). School districts need to hire highly qualified teachers, but experience difficulties in locating teachers meeting minimum requirements for hire (Hackman & Morath, 2018). The current climate for teacher recruitment and retainment has shifted over the last decade. Teachers are leaving the profession at a relevantly constant rate, and teachers entering the profession has decreased (Harris, 2020).

Campus Culture and Climate

Campus culture and climate are essential elements to the functionality of the school. The school culture is something usually seen in the traditions and the general personality of the school and should be viewed as the nucleus of the campus (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017). The school climate is the general feeling of the school (Allen et al., 2015). This often includes external variables such as family dynamics, peer issues, and a variety of uncontrollable issues associated with students (Downs, 2017). The culture sets the stage for every emotion experienced inside and outside of the campus walls (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017).

Teacher Turnover and Student Achievement

Teacher turnover is known to impact student achievement in rural schools and is credited to have this impact based on the limited number of impactful teachers that the students share on a particular rural campus (Miller et al., 2019). Teacher quality and student achievement are linked (Malloy & Allen, 2018), thus proving that teacher turnover on campuses could have an extremely negative impact on student achievement. There are times where turnover on school campuses may be a positive thing, such as teachers leaving that are not effective, or not capable of maintaining an elevated level of rigor in the classroom (Adnot et al., 2017); however, teacher turnover can also have a negative impact on student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

Campus Principal's Role in Hiring and Securing Teachers

Principals play a key role in the teacher hiring process (Engel et al., 2018). The importance of the role played by principals in this hiring process has been continually increasing in recent years (Engel et al., 2018; Xia et al., 2020). Furthermore, principals not only play a key role in teacher recruitment, but they are also critical to teacher retention (Bartanen et al., 2019; Engel et al., 2018; Xia et al., 2020). Effective principals work to ensure that they have strong teacher retention practices in place which avoid elevated levels of teacher attrition (Bartanen et al., 2019). Principals play an increasingly key role in the teacher hiring process (Engel et al., 2018). Engel et al. conducted a study which aimed to document the trends across 2.5 decades in principals' reported influence over teacher hiring decisions in the United States and explore how and whether principal influence varies systematically across contexts. Regression analysis was conducted utilizing seven waves of nationally representative data from the Schools and Staffing

Survey. The findings indicated that principals reported having increased influence over the 25 years the data spanned.

Professional Characteristics of Teachers

During the teacher recruitment process teacher characteristics play a critical role (Tamir, 2021). Professional skills and personal characteristics have each been highlighted in the existing literature as being critical elements of what is looked for in potential teachers (Harris, 2020; Holme et al., 2018; Tamir, 2021). How teachers fit in to the broader school organization is also a characteristic analyzed during the teacher recruitment process (Harris, 2020). Teacher characteristics play a critical role in the hiring process. Tamir (2021) conducted a study which reported on principals' perceptions regarding the teacher characteristics deemed most important for hiring effective teachers. The data for this study were gathered via semistructured interviews of principals across three different school types: urban public schools, Catholic schools, and Jewish schools. Findings revealed that across all three school types, principals tended to focus on both professional skills and personal characteristics as critical components in the teacher hiring process.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of campus principals in rural South Texas districts regarding strategies for the effective recruitment and retention of qualified teachers. The teaching profession has multiple responsibilities and requires skillsets that range from counselor to parent, and from instructor to disciplinarian. It is essential to identify quality teachers, recruit these teachers, keep them employed with the district, and identify how this process can be repeated successfully (Theisen, 2005).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the purpose of the proposed study, one overarching central research question (RQ) was developed. The five subquestions (SQs) were developed in line with the central research question and the purpose of the study. The research questions of the current study were as follows:

RQ: How do principals in rural South Texas districts describe their teacher recruitment and retention practices, and what professional characteristics do they seek in the potential hire?

SQ1: What are the current recruitment factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?

SQ2: What are the current retention factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?

SQ3: What are the perceptions of rural South Texas campus principals regarding the impact teacher recruitment decisions has on the school's future campus culture and climate?

SQ4: What are the current procedures or initiatives utilized to recruit and retain teachers?

SQ5: What are the professional characteristics campus principals actively seek in a potential hire?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

This investigation was a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). The study had a broad spectrum of research and was designed to explore phenomenon which surfaced. “Basic research is motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon, and it has as its goal, the extension of knowledge” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017, p. 3). This study focused on the perception of rural South Texas campus principals regarding recruitment and retention strategies of qualified teachers.

The lens that guided the analysis of this study was symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is mentioned in the works of Peter Hall (2007) as a conceptual framework utilized in the sociological discipline which involves how society is created by interactions of people, and specifically face to face interactions. “Symbolic interactionism is often represented as a perspective which is limited by its restriction to 'micro' aspects of social organization” (Dennis & Martin, 2005, p 191).

Setting, Population/Participants

Twelve individuals were invited to take part in the study. Of those, the first ten responding to the request were included as participants. All of the participants were currently employed in Region 1 or Region 2 service areas in South Texas and were employed at a rural school district as identified by the TEA (2020a). Participants were all campus principals and employed at campuses which were identified as rural by the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2020a). All participants received an email requesting participation and the first twelve participants that responded to the emails with a willingness to participate were considered for the study, with the first 10 participants representing the sample analyzed for the study. The participants all selected a time and date for the interview. The interviews transpired via Zoom but the participants chose the location for their interview. This allowed for another layer of anonymity.

Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis

Twelve individuals were invited to take part in the study. Of those, the first ten responding to the request were included as participants. All of the participants were currently employed in Region 1 or Region 2 service areas in South Texas and were employed at a rural school district as identified by the TEA (2020a).

The participants all participated in individual interview in which they answered a series of five questions (Appendix A). All ten participants were asked the same questions, and all participants provided answers to these questions to the best of their ability. The interviews took from 20 to 30 minutes each. The interviews were recorded utilizing the online platform Zoom and transcribed digitally by the Zoom program, as well as interview notes recorded in real time. It was imperative that accurate notes were kept during the interviews in order to record any other relevant data that the transcription may have missed. Zoom is a web-based meeting website that is secure, and password protected. All participants were provided with the interview questions prior to the interviews in an effort to elicit genuine, well-thought-out responses. They were also provided with copies of the transcripts from the interview and asked to verify the accuracy of their responses. No such modification requests were received as of this writing.

The participants were interviewed online utilizing the Zoom web conferencing program. Zoom offered a secure meeting room with password protected access and provided a real-time captioning option which transcribed all interviews in real time. Each transcription was labeled with the anonymous name provided to each participant which was Participant 1–10. The next step was the process of analyzing the collected data through a thematic analysis process. Thematic analysis includes the following six steps: (a) developing familiarity with the data, (b) creating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing and evaluating possible themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) developing a report on the findings (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Microsoft Excel was used to create a workbook for the documentation of codes gleaned from the analysis of the transcriptions. Each subquestion was assigned a separate Excel sheet, the participants were assigned colors, and the colors were plugged into the box that displayed the code. This is known as a rainbow spreadsheet (Fu, 2019).

RESULTS

The recorded responses from the interview questions produced thirty-five codes. A code is a brief statement that captures the content and context of the entire sentence, phrase, or paragraph. These codes were analyzed and studied producing six themes. These six themes were teacher pay, campus culture, administrative support, advertisement, flexibility, and highly impactful. These themes were derived from the interview responses, which were gathered from the participant answers to the interview questions (Appendix A).

Themes

Teacher Pay

Teacher pay emerged rapidly as a theme due to the frequency of use as well as the number of interview questions the theme addressed. SQ1, SQ2, and SQ4 (Appendix A) were all questions which this theme predominantly emerged. These three questions were related to teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and policies or procedures each campus devoted to recruitment and retention of teachers. This theme emerged after codes were deciphered and appeared fourteen times during the answering of SQ1, SQ2, and SQ4 (Appendix A).

Theme 1: Rural South Texas Campus Principals – Teacher Pay

Theme	Frequency	Question	Conclusion
Teacher Pay	14	What are the current recruitment factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?	The transcripts of participant interviews produced a disproportionate amount of information that surfaced as codes that appeared 14 times throughout the interview process (SQ1-SQ3), suggesting that Teacher Pay is a factor that affects both retention and recruiting.
		What are the current retention factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?	
		What are the current procedures or initiatives utilized to recruit and retain teachers?	

Campus Culture

Campus culture emerged as a theme due to the frequency of use as well as the number of interview questions the theme addressed. SQ1 and SQ2 (Appendix A) were questions which this theme predominantly emerged. These two questions were related to teacher recruitment and teacher retention. This theme emerged after codes were deciphered and appeared eleven times during the answering of SQ1 and SQ2 (Appendix A).

Theme 2: Rural South Texas Campus Principals – Campus Culture

Theme	Frequency	Question	Conclusion
Campus Culture	11	What are the current recruitment factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district? What are the current retention factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?	The transcripts of the participant interviews revealed a large amount of data in the form of codes that surfaced 11 times in the first and second interview questions (SQ1 and SQ2). This indicated that Campus Culture is a factor that influences both the recruitment and retention of teachers in South Texas rural school districts.

Administrative Support

Administrative support surfaced as a theme due to the frequency of use, as well as the codes having different words but the same essential meaning. Administrative support is a theme that showed codes surfacing in participant responses to questions SQ1, SQ2, and SQ4 (Appendix A). These three questions were related to teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and procedural practices of the campus principal in relation to the impact on campus culture. Theme three is a product of multiple forms of codes which came together to form an obvious pattern.

Theme 3: Rural South Texas Campus Principals – Administrative Support

Theme	Frequency	Question	Conclusion
Administrative Support	11	<p>What are the current recruitment factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?</p> <p>What are the current retention factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?</p> <p>What are the current procedures or initiatives utilized to recruit and retain teachers?</p>	<p>The transcripts of the participant interviews revealed a large amount of data in the form of codes that surfaced 11 times in the first, second, and fourth interview questions (SQ1, SQ2, and SQ-4). This indicated that Administrative Support is a factor that influences both the recruitment and retention of teachers in South Texas rural school districts.</p>

Advertisement

Advertisement surfaced in the form of multiple codes having different words, but the same essential meaning. The codes ranged from suggestions such as word of mouth to social media. Advertisement is a theme that showed codes surfacing in SQ4 (Appendix A). This question is a procedural question for campus principals, which indicates the current default recruitment and retention protocols for their campus.

Theme 4: Rural South Texas Campus Principals – Advertisement

Theme	Frequency	Question	Conclusion
Advertisement	13	<p>What are the current procedures or initiatives utilized to recruit and retain teachers?</p>	<p>The transcripts of the participant interviews revealed a large amount of data in the form of codes that surfaced 13 times in the fourth interview question (SQ-4). This indicated that Advertisement is a current strategy utilized by rural South Texas Districts for both the recruitment and retention of teachers.</p>

Flexibility

Flexibility was recognized as a theme because it was either mentioned verbatim, or a combination of words were interpreted as meaning flexible. SQ5 (Appendix A) was the question which this theme predominantly emerged. This question was related to the professional characteristics that the campus principals actively sought in their potential hires.

Theme 5: Rural South Texas Campus Principals – Flexibility

Theme	Frequency	Question	Conclusion
Flexibility	7	What are the professional characteristics campus principals actively seek in a potential hire?	The transcripts of the participant interviews revealed a large amount of data in the form of codes that surfaced 7 times in the fifth interview question (SQ-5). This indicated that flexibility is a current professional characteristic sought by rural South Texas principals when considering a potential hire.

Highly Impactful

Highly impactful surfaced as a theme when reviewing the transcript for responses regarding question SQ3 (Appendix A). This was the only question which this theme predominantly emerged. This question was related to the perceptions of rural South Texas campus principals when it came to the way their decisions involving teacher recruitment and retention impacted the culture and climate of their campuses. Codes such as constant, complete, and huge were interpreted as signifying that their decisions were highly impactful.

Theme 6: Rural South Texas Campus Principals – Highly Impactful

Theme	Frequency	Question	Conclusion
Highly Impactful	7	What are the perceptions of rural South Texas campus principals regarding the impact teacher recruitment decisions has on the school’s future campus culture and climate?	The transcripts of the participant interviews revealed a large amount of data in the form of codes that surfaced 7 times in the third interview question (SQ-3). This indicated that highly impactful were the words used to describe the impact decisions made by campus principals would have on the campus climate and culture.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concern for teacher pay suggested a mobility of teachers based on available resources. This translates to teachers having the ability to move from job to job in search of the best pay or benefits package. The participants expressed a concern for the future of this trend. The participants expressed that advertisement should be a top priority to lure prospective teachers to the district as well as a source of information to the community regarding the uniqueness of the district. One way to address these themes would be to organize a needs assessment of school districts regionally. This needs assessment would be structured to identify gaps in benefits and pay of each school district in the region as well as the benefits advertising

provides the districts. This assessment could provide information to school districts and school boards and create a proactive plan to remain competitive with offered pay and benefits as well as the effectiveness of advertising. Another recommendation for practice would be for the Education Service Centers to become more involved with the sharing and distribution of resources to assist school districts regionally. This information could address hiring practices, salary recommendations, campus culture input, and all relevant recruitment and retention trends in the region and state.

The campus culture, theme 2, and administrative support, theme 3, also resonated as a theme which the participants expressed a desire to continue to discuss. The participants addressed the campus culture and administrative support as answers to teacher retention and recruitment efforts. Theme 6, highly impactful, also shares relevance in this recommendation because it references the impact of the campus principals' decisions on the culture of the campus. This could be an opportunity to organize a stand-alone study on the importance of a positive or supportive campus culture. A recommendation of this study is to create checkpoints throughout a school year to assess the current culture and climate of the campus. This should be a survey type instrument and provide the participants anonymity in order to generate the most accurate results. This survey would provide real time data to support culture health and make changes where necessary.

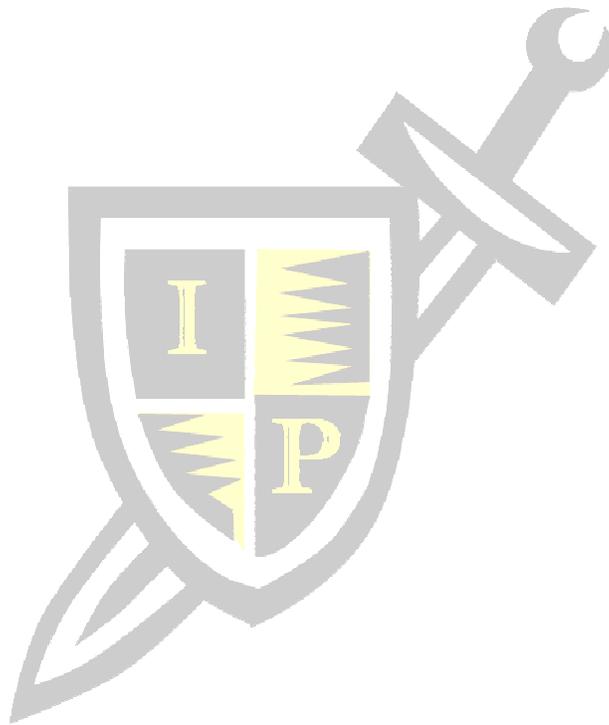
The flexibility of employees surfaced as theme 5. The word flexibility was used to describe a professional characteristic which these participants felt was the most desirable in their potential new hire. This addressed the interview question but could be a theme that would benefit the education community with more research. There would be a benefit to further researching what type of professional characteristics are found to be the most desirable in a potential new hire. There would also be a benefit to seeking to discover what characteristics are seen to be flexible in nature. The participants of this study actively seek potential job candidates that are flexible in what work responsibilities they are willing to endure. There is evidence in this study to support the need for added criteria in the interview instrument to identify the willingness of the potential hire to be flexible. This can be done with added interview questions or the addition of scenarios into the interview process. Universities and private industries that offer teacher preparation programs would be providing a greater service to their potential teachers by offering career training that explains flexibility.

Another recommended practice would be for universities and teacher preparation programs to seek out and solidify partnerships with local school districts. The purpose of these partnerships would be to explore current trends related to recruitment and retention of teachers. It is through these types of partnerships that current data should be shared and utilized to prepare future teachers for the workforce and solidify job placement opportunities for the universities and teacher preparation programs. These partnerships should be viewed as relationships that exist to further the knowledge of real time best practices in the education profession.

In conducting this project, the study found that the perceptions of campus principals of rural schools in South Texas in regard to recruitment and retention of teachers and what professional characteristics they found to be desirable in their new hire candidates support a consensus of ideas which were broken down into six themes. There is evidence in this study to suggest that teacher pay is a nonnegotiable factor in teachers' choice of workplace. There is urgent need to advertise what the rural school districts offer that the larger or urban districts cannot offer. This begins with the promotion of a positive campus culture and climate, which is surrounded by supportive administrators. Flexible teachers contribute to the positive school

culture and climate, and every decision made by campus administrators is made knowing that it will have a profound impact on the future campus culture and climate.

This information offers further insight to campus principals, district administration, teacher preparation entities, and the entire education industry in their quest to stay up to date with current practices. Likewise, this study offers insight to current and potential educators' into how a flexible work mentality would benefit them in finding and maintaining employment as teachers in rural districts, and potentially any district they seek employment.



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APPENDIX A**APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

The questions listed below were the interview questions for the study.

RQ: How do principals in rural South Texas districts describe their teacher recruitment and retention practices, and what professional characteristics do they seek in the potential hire?

SQ1: What are the current recruitment factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?

SQ2: What are the current retention factors influencing the decisions of teachers to consider employment within a campus or school district?

SQ3: What are the perceptions of rural South Texas campus principals regarding the impact teacher recruitment decisions has on the school's future campus culture and climate?

SQ4: What are the current procedures or initiatives utilized to recruit and retain teachers?

SQ5: What are the professional characteristics campus principals actively seek in a potential hire?

All questions were reviewed by three external auditors which were not part of the research in this dissertation. All three of the auditors currently work or have worked as school administrators in South Texas. One auditor is current a campus principal, and two are currently superintendents of schools.

