

2022

## K-12 Administrators' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to Teacher Attrition in Rural Schools

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Michelle McDonald

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

K-12 Administrators' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to Teacher Attrition in Rural  
Schools

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Teacher attrition is a debilitating problem that plagues education, contributes to the teacher shortage, and challenges administrators to staff schools with qualified teachers. The high teacher attrition rates in rural schools in the southeastern United States were the fundamental problem addressed in this qualitative case study. This qualitative case study's purpose was to explore how K–12 administrators perceived the factors influencing teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Maslow's hierarchy of needs human motivation theory, emphasizing the concepts of the hierarchy of needs, provided support for the two research questions exploring K–12 school and district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district. A self-designed interview protocol was used to collect data through semistructured interviews with a purposeful sampling of eight state-certified school and district administrators with a minimum of two years of experience. Open coding and thematic analysis were employed to extract themes and categories. The themes derived from the findings included climate and culture, building capacity, resources, relationships, and rural challenges. They indicated that teacher attrition in rural schools could be reduced by emphasizing strong relationships between teachers and administrators, creating a climate and culture that encourages teachers to stay, and increasing capacity through professional development to improve student achievement. The implications for positive social change are addressing teacher attrition, promoting teacher retention, improving teacher quality, and increasing student achievement. The positive social change will enhance the school district and provide equitable learning opportunities and resources to improve student achievement and community growth.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to the loving memory of my parents, the late Dorothy Mae and Leroy McDonald. At an early age, my parents instilled in me the value of education, the love of learning, and the desire to never give up. Most importantly, they taught me to put God first and how to pray. Because of God and the values that my parents taught me, I was able to complete the doctoral process.

## Acknowledgments

Philippians 4:6-7 states, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God with thanksgiving. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (New International Version, 2011). I give all of the honor, the glory, and the praise to God Almighty. Lord, I give you thanks for hearing my cries, answering my prayers, loving me, and giving me the blessing to complete this doctoral journey.

I thank my parents, the late Dorothy Mae and Leroy McDonald, for their unconditional love, support, and encouragement to follow my dreams. I thank them for teaching me never to give up and to pray about everything. I thank my siblings, Emma, Elroy, Eddie, Linda, and Robert, and family for their love and support. Because you always do so much to help me, I had the time to dedicate to the doctoral process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study addressed the underlying problem of the high rates of teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Holmes et al. (2019) identified teacher attrition as a national, state, and local problem contributing to teacher vacancies each school year. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) and See et al. (2020) explained that teacher attrition contributes to the teacher shortage, which is an ever-growing challenge in today's education system and threatens student achievement (Sutcher et al., 2019). A teacher shortage has been prevalent across the nation for many decades (Learning Policy Institute, 2017; U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). The high teacher attrition rates contribute to the need to recruit new teachers (Madigan & Kim, 2021). However, administrators in rural districts may not have a pool of candidates, making it difficult to staff schools with qualified teachers (Saultz et al., 2017).

Researchers agreed that teacher quality plays a significant role in student achievement (Lee, 2018; Schleicher, 2018; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Because teacher attrition negatively affects student achievement, I explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The implications for positive social change are addressing teacher attrition, promoting teacher retention, improving teacher quality, and increasing student achievement. The positive social change will enhance the school district and provide equitable learning opportunities and resources to improve student achievement, ultimately improving community growth.

More details about this study will be found in this chapter. The sections include the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and the summary. Essential information can be found in each section to explain this study further. The background is built around supporting research literature that summarizes the topic or gap in the practice of the study. The problem is identified, and data and research support and frame the problem while building on previous findings. The study's intent will connect the phenomenon to the focus of the research and present the concepts of interest. The research questions guide the study, while the conceptual framework grounds the study. The nature of the study contains details explaining the concepts to explore the methodology and an explanation for using a qualitative case study design. The definitions section includes literature to define critical terms included in the study. The assumptions consist of information to explain any part of the study that is considered accurate without evidence. The scope and delimitations describe boundaries, and limitations include information about bias related to the study. Finally, the significance of the study, including the potential for social change, is described. The chapter concludes with a summary to synthesize the details of the chapter.

### **Background**

The current COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the challenges of staffing classrooms into the forefront of public education. Although the focus is now on teacher attrition, teacher attrition and teacher shortages have been an ongoing problem in education for many decades. Based on research, challenges with staffing schools began in the 1930s

after the Great Depression (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). The challenges still exist today.

In the 1983 Nation at Risk report, teacher shortage was a significant concern in specific content areas such as science, mathematics, foreign language, and special education (Sutchter et al., 2019). The report emphasized teacher quality is a strong indicator of student achievement (Biddle & Azano, 2016). The Nation at Risk report was a catalyst for education reform.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was in place when the Nation at Risk report was released. Still, ESEA was considered a “civil rights law” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). The law intended to provide educational opportunities by providing grants to support districts serving low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). The education reform needed to address the problems highlighted in the Nation at Risk report, so No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was reenacted to update ESEA. NCLB focused on students’ progress and areas for growth. NCLB brought about a different level of accountability as it brought awareness to achievement gaps and started a discussion on improving education. NCLB emphasized teacher quality as “highly qualified.” NCLB defines “highly qualified” as having the content knowledge and teacher licensure for your teaching area (Saultz et al., 2017). Although NCLB intended to support rural and urban schools that struggled to hire and retain qualified teachers, it left administrators struggling to staff their schools based on the requirements of NCLB. The education reform (NCLB) did not improve the problem of teacher attrition or the teacher shortage.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reformed NCLB. ESSA builds on the positives from NCLB, but ESSA gives the power back to the states. ESSA shifts from “highly qualified” to “teacher effectiveness” (Saultz et al., 2017). Student outcomes and classroom observations determine “teacher effectiveness” (Saultz et al., 2017). ESSA emphasizes the equitable distribution of teachers to enable effective teachers for all students, particularly students in hard-to-staff schools (Saultz et al., 2017). Although ESSA focuses on providing equitable opportunities for all students to access effective teachers, the reform has not come to fruition. Teacher attrition continues to be a challenge for administrators.

Over the years, the federal government enacted policies to address the challenges with staffing schools, equitable distribution of teachers, and increasing student achievement (Nguyen et al., 2020). Although these policies are intended to support administrators with hiring and retaining effective teachers, administrators continue to face the challenge of staffing their schools (Tran et al., 2020). Rural schools have the most significant challenge with staffing schools (Taie & Goldring, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). Sutchter et al. (2016) and Tran et al. (2020) explained that the teacher shortage is more severe in southern states of the United States. When teachers move or leave, the response is often to hire inexperienced or unqualified teachers due to the lack of candidates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Sometimes, teacher attrition or teacher turnover increases class size (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Crouch and Nguyen (2021) connected teacher attrition and low student achievement. Inexperienced or unqualified teachers can harm student achievement. Sutchter et al.



(2019) indicated that schools serving high-poverty or high-minority students usually have the highest teacher attrition rates. High-poverty and high-minority students are most likely to receive instruction from inexperienced, unqualified teachers (Nguyen et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). Students who often need the most support do not have access to effective teachers to provide that support. Tran et al. (2020) declared an inequitable distribution of teachers in poor rural schools due to the challenges of hiring and retaining qualified teachers.

As a result, the federal government enacted policies to address having an equitable distribution of teachers and improving student achievement, with ESSA including rural schools. Teacher attrition has a lasting effect on national education systems, the economy, and students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). There is a need to understand K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition. If K-12 administrators can understand the factors contributing to teacher attrition, they could address them, promote teacher retention, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement resulting in positive social change.

### **Problem Statement**

The underlying problem was the high teacher attrition rates in rural schools in the southeastern United States. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) discovered that schools in the South experience the highest teacher attrition rate of 16% to 17% in cities and suburbs and 14% to 15% in towns and rural areas. A state agency that focuses on teacher recruitment and retention provided a five-year report (2012-2013 to 2016-

2017) showing a teacher attrition rate for rural low-income school districts was 13.9% and 10.5% in non-rural low-income school districts in the state involved in this study (Tran et al., 2018).

Based on the School Report Card data, the rural school district in the study reported that the following percentage of teachers left at the end of the year: 19.4% in 2017-2018, 30.4% in 2018-2019, 20.5% in 2019-2020, and 15.1% in 2020-2021. The data indicated a decline in teacher attrition in the rural school district in 2020-2021, but further analysis of the School Report Card data revealed the rural school district had 85 teaching positions during the 2020-2021 school year and 97 the previous year. The school district also had 20% teacher vacancies for at least a quarter of the 2020-2021 school year. Thus, teacher attrition is a national, state, and local problem contributing to teacher vacancies each school year (Holmes et al., 2019). The data show that the state and nation's average teacher attrition rates in rural areas are similar. However, the teacher attrition rate in the rural district included in the study is significantly higher. The rural school district is also experiencing challenges filling vacancies and decreasing teaching positions.

Teacher attrition contributes to the teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; See et al., 2020). Low pay, a lack of respect for the profession, increasing workload, and working conditions contribute to teacher attrition (With, 2017). Teachers, new and experienced, are leaving the profession, but some researchers have found new teachers are leaving for other jobs while experienced teachers are retiring (With, 2017). See et al. (2020) suggested that nearly half of new teachers leave the

profession within the first five years. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) shared that less than one-third of the teachers leaving are retiring. The teacher shortage challenges rural and urban school districts to meet the challenge of staffing their schools with qualified teachers (Saultz et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2020). The lack of qualified applicants results in hiring teachers who are not certified to teach (Sutcher et al., 2019). Teacher attrition creates a financial cost and a cost in teacher quality (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teacher quality has the most significant influence on student achievement (Lee, 2018; Schleicher, 2018; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). A lack of teacher retention affects student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). The gap in practice is a need to understand K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative case study aimed to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to the high rates of teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Based on current research, approximately half of new teachers leave within the first five years (Madigan & Kim, 2021; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). With (2017) explained experienced teachers are not leaving for other jobs; experienced teachers are retiring from the profession. With new teachers leaving and experienced teachers retiring, administrators may not have a large pool of applicants when hiring new teachers, especially in rural schools (Tran et al., 2020). The high teacher attrition rates leave rural administrators scrounging to find teachers to fill vacancies in their schools (Taie & Goldring, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). Teacher attrition affects teacher

quality, finances, and student achievement (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Saultz et al., 2017; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

Common factors contributing to teacher attrition are low pay, increasing workload, job satisfaction, and working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). Holmes et al. (2019) also identified factors such as lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices as reasons teachers leave. These factors supported the need to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools.

A qualitative case study was an appropriate design to explore the different perceptions of administrators on factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district involved in the study. I collected data by interviewing five schools and three district state-certified administrators with a minimum of two years of experience in their current position. School administrators consisted of principals only. The study results provided insights into K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition. Reducing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention provide schools with stability and ultimately improve student achievement (Doherty, 2020). As a result of the study, administrators may address the factors contributing to teacher attrition and promote teacher retention.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions guide the data collection and focus of the research. In addition, the research questions guided the study's key objective of exploring K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural schools

included in this study. There are high teacher attrition rates in the rural southeastern school district in the United States. The following research questions guided the data collection when exploring the K-12 administrators' perception of factors contributing to teacher attrition in the school district included in the study.

RQ1: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

RQ2: What are K-12 district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

### **Conceptual Framework**

High rates of teacher attrition pose a threat to student achievement. This study explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. According to research, teachers leave because of low pay, increased workloads, working conditions, job satisfaction, lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices.

Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs human motivation theory emphasizing the concepts of the hierarchy of needs was the conceptual framework that guided this study towards understanding how the factors from the research contributed to teachers leaving. Abraham Maslow is well known for his human motivation theory to frame research focused on job satisfaction. Maslow built this theory to believe that people achieve human motivation when they meet their five-tier hierarchy of needs. The overall goal was to achieve self-actualization, but one cannot reach self-actualization until the needs are met at the first four levels of the hierarchy.

## **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs human motivation theory is used in educational settings to motivate people in the workplace. Maslow's approach made a compelling conceptual framework to frame this study because of the focus on motivation, fulfillment, and personal growth. Teachers leave the profession for various reasons related to the hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy of needs is physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (see Figure 1).

### ***Physiological***

Physiological needs may not be met if there is low pay and an increasing workload. Teachers may not have enough money to meet the basic needs of food and shelter. A heavy workload may prevent teachers from getting adequate rest. Physiological needs must be met to progress to the next level, safety.

### ***Safety***

Student behavior is a factor in the research that contributes to teacher attrition. Poor student behavior can make a teacher feel unsafe, causing the safety needs not to be met. Working conditions also jeopardize job security which is a part of a need to be safe. The COVID-19 pandemic can create a feeling of being unsafe in the classroom.

### ***Love and Belonging***

The third level of the hierarchy of needs is love and belonging. Teachers need to feel they are part of a team to meet the demand of belonging. Administrative support and relationships also support the need for love and belonging, yet these contribute to teacher

attrition. When the condition of belonging is met, one feels motivated to move to the next level of the hierarchy: esteem.

### ***Esteem***

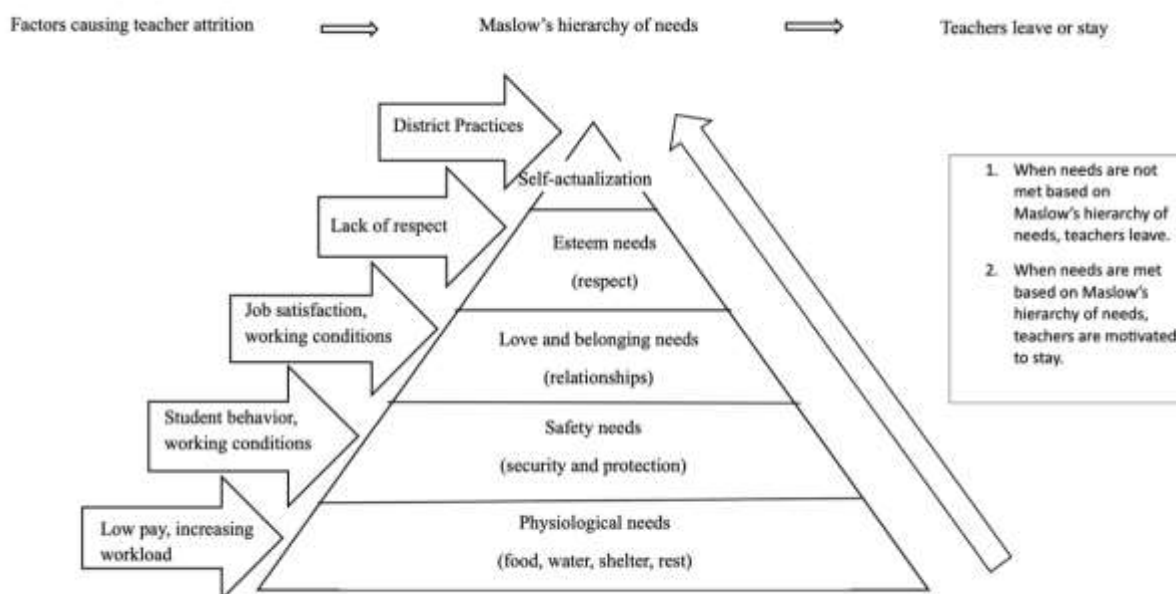
Esteem means having respect for self and feeling respected by others. Teachers often leave the profession due to a lack of respect. A lack of respect is identified as a factor that causes teacher attrition or teacher turnover. A lack of respect may come from administrators, parents, students, or policymakers. Only when all these needs are met will a person feel motivated to achieve self-actualization.

### ***Self-Actualization***

Self-actualization is personal growth. Self-actualization may look like teachers growing professionally by attending or offering professional learning. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs human motivation theory focused on the concepts of the hierarchy of needs and explained how the factors contributing to teacher attrition affect teachers meeting their needs. Still, when the factors are addressed, teachers' needs can be met, resulting in teacher retention (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework: Maslow's hierarchy of needs human motivation theory*



Source: Adapted from Maslow (1943).

Motivation and opportunity play a significant role in teacher attrition (With, 2017). The motivation theory emphasizing the concepts of the hierarchy of needs supported understanding K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The conceptual framework aided in defining the significance and relevance of the study, developing the interview questions, and analyzing the interview transcripts and literature review for common concepts and themes. The conceptual framework supported creating a visual display of how the ideas of the study work together and support each other. Based on Maslow's (1943) motivation theory, a conceptual framework emphasizing the concepts of the hierarchy of needs aligned and focused the study.



### **Nature of the Study**

The implementation of the qualitative case study design ensured that I gathered data and explored the phenomenon of K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The qualitative research design permitted the opportunity to interpret K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition based on their lived experiences and viewpoints. Interviews were one of the primary sources of data collection in qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of K-12 administrators' perceptions of the factors contributing to teacher attrition (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The qualitative case study design allowed the opportunity to collect and analyze data about a phenomenon in a field of study to find a solution to the problem and contribute to social change.

High teacher attrition rates in a rural school district in the southeastern United States negatively influence student achievement. Therefore, there was a need to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district involved in the study. Maslow's hierarchy of needs human motivation theory explains how factors (low pay, lack of respect for the profession, working conditions, increasing workload, and job satisfaction) contribute to teachers' leaving. The hierarchy of needs motivation theory emphasizes the concepts of the hierarchy of needs supported understanding of K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify eight participants (five school-level and three district-level administrators). Each participant has state certification in administration and a minimum of two years of experience in their current administrative position. Each participant engaged in a semistructured recorded interview to share their experiences and views of factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district. The semistructured interview using an interview protocol allowed the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and gather in-depth information to respond to the research questions outlined in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I analyzed the interview data using open coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and concepts to share the K-12 administrators' experience of factors contributing to teacher attrition.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions define the critical concepts for this qualitative case study:

*Rural:* In the United States, Census rural is defined geographically as all population, housing, and territory that is not urban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

*Teacher attrition:* Teacher attrition is teachers leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Some researchers have explained that teacher attrition is teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement (Doherty, 2020).

*Teacher turnover:* Teacher turnover is the teachers who leave for a teaching position in a different location (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Some researchers defined teacher turnover as teachers willing to leave (Vekeman et al., 2017).

*Teacher quality:* No Child Left Behind (NCLB) defined teacher quality as state-certified teachers' education level and content knowledge (Saultz et al., 2017).

*Teacher effectiveness:* Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defined teacher effectiveness as student outcome due to the teacher (Saultz et al., 2017).

*Factors:* Reasons that cause teachers to leave the profession or the job. Common factors contributing to teacher attrition are low pay, increasing workload, job satisfaction, and working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). Holmes et al. (2019) also identified factors such as lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices as reasons teachers leave.

### **Assumptions**

One of the first assumptions was that participants identified through purposeful sampling would sign the consent form and agree to participate in the study. Another assumption was that K-12 administrators would have perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition at the rural school district involved in the study. A third assumption was that the participants in the study would feel comfortable sharing their experience of factors contributing to teacher attrition. The assumptions were made because the effectiveness of the premises is critical to the qualitative case study design, methodology, and outcome of the study.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors that contributed to teacher attrition in rural schools were explored within this study using semistructured interviews and document analysis of deidentified teacher supply and demand reports. The purpose of

selecting the topic of study was to learn more about administrators' understanding of factors that cause teachers to leave. Teacher attrition is a significant problem in the rural schools included in the study. Teacher attrition negatively affects student achievement. Although teacher attrition is not a new phenomenon isolated to rural schools, there was a need to understand K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors that caused teachers to leave rural schools.

This qualitative case study was limited to a small rural school district in the southeastern United States. The rural school district comprises three elementary principals, one middle school principal, one high school principal, and a career and technology education director. A minimum of eight K-12 state-certified administrators with at least two years of experience were expected to participate in the interviews. I used the interview to delve into the administrators' experiences with teacher attrition and the factors that cause teachers to leave. I used the interview questions to gather the information that could be analyzed to determine if K-12 administrators understand why teachers are leaving their schools or the district. The deidentified teacher supply and demand report provided information about what grade level or content area teachers are leaving and which positions are not being filled. The results of this study are transferable to other rural school districts.

Teacher attrition is a problem at the national, state, and local level. Administrators in other places are also experiencing teacher attrition. Once administrators understand the factors that cause teacher attrition, administrators may address the factors contributing to teacher attrition, promote teacher retention, improve teacher quality, and increase student

achievement. This qualitative case study could be replicated in other school districts experiencing teacher attrition. This study also presents the opportunity for future studies to explore strategies for administrators to address the factors contributing to teacher attrition.

### **Limitations**

A challenge may be accessing the participants face-to-face to conduct the semistructured interviews. Unfortunately, due to the current safety protocols for the COVID-19 pandemic, the school district is not allowing face-to-face meetings or visitors in schools. Therefore, I held the semistructured interviews remotely using an online video-conferencing platform.

Bias can occur in all research methods, but since qualitative research is influenced by experience, I am aware of my values and beliefs that could cause bias in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Bias could potentially be a limitation of the study. The case study was conducted in the school district where I am employed. I have a limited professional working relationship with the administrators identified to participate in the study. However, I do not supervise any of the potential participants. In the small rural school district, all principals and district-level administrators, including myself, report directly to the superintendent. Concepts such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be used to ensure validity.

### **Significance**

The well-known problem of teacher attrition is significant in rural schools. There was a need to understand administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher

attrition because the ongoing problem affects rural school districts in many different ways. First, the cost associated with recruiting and training new teachers could be expensive (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Second, when teachers leave, there may not be a large pool of applicants to fill the position (Saultz et al., 2017). Third, the alternative is hiring teachers without certifications; therefore, teacher attrition affects teacher quality. Finally, teacher quality plays a significant role in student achievement (Lee, 2018; Schleicher, 2018; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

The research reviewed supported the identification of teacher attrition in rural schools as a problem. It provided details on how teacher attrition affects student achievement and the overall quality of school effectiveness. However, very little was known about K-12 administrators' perceptions of the factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools. The qualitative case study will bring awareness to K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The benefit of this study will be the awareness of the elements in this setting that causes teachers to leave. Administrators may devise a plan to address the factors that contribute to teacher attrition and, as a result, promote teacher retention.

An improvement in teacher retention will improve teacher quality and student achievement. The potential findings will add to the existing research regarding administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools. The implications for positive social change in the rural school district under study may include addressing teacher attrition, promoting teacher retention, improving teacher

quality, and increasing student achievement. The positive social change will enhance the school district and the community and provide equitable learning opportunities and resources. When students graduate from the high school identified as college and career ready, the community will experience growth. The students will be able to be productive citizens contributing to their community. The study is significant and can contribute to positive social changes.

### **Summary**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs human motivation theory emphasizing the hierarchy of needs framed this qualitative case study to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The data collected from the semistructured interviews provided a deeper understanding of K-12 administrators' perceptions of the factors that cause teacher attrition. K-12 administrators may use the results to address teacher attrition, promote teacher retention, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement. The positive social change will enhance the school district and the community and provide equitable learning opportunities and resources. High school graduates with the distinction of being college and career-ready will help the community grow by being productive citizens contributing to their community. Chapter 2 provides further evidence of the need for this study as outlined in the recent existing literature and the conceptual framework.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

An abundance of research proves that teacher attrition is a long-standing problem that negatively influences student achievement. The underlying problem is the high teacher attrition rates in rural schools in the southeastern United States. This qualitative case study aimed to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Current literature presents common factors contributing to teacher attrition as low pay, increasing workload, job satisfaction, and working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). Holmes et al. (2019) also identified factors such as lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices as reasons teachers leave. Teacher attrition contributes to the teacher shortage, creates a challenge to staff schools with qualified teachers, affects teacher quality, has a financial cost, and severely affects student achievement.

The remainder of the chapter will provide detailed information about the review of current literature around critical terms related to the study's topic. In addition, the chapter contains information about the literature search strategy, including databases, search engines, and keywords used to find current literature. The following section includes the conceptual framework focusing on key concepts and a synthesis of the theorist's writing. The literature review is organized around key concepts such as rural, rural communities, rural education, teacher shortage, teacher attrition, factors contributing to teacher attrition, teacher quality, and student achievement. This section synthesizes the literature that describes the phenomenon, research design and



methodology, rationale for the study, and concepts based on current literature. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary to summarize the key ideas from the chapter and provide a transition to Chapter 3.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy required the use of the Walden University library databases such as but not limited to ERIC, Directory of Open Access Journals, Education Source, EBSCO, and Emerald Insight, and the use of search engines such as Google Scholar to access peer-reviewed current articles. Various search terms yielded access to recent peer-reviewed articles aligned to the problem statement and purpose and supported the research questions. Key search terms included but are not limited to the following: *teacher attrition, teacher shortage, teacher turnover, teacher retention, rural schools, and rural education.*

The literature search process was an iterative process that yielded results over time. First, the search terms were typed into the Walden library database without selecting a particular database. Then the filters were set only to show peer-reviewed articles published in 2018 or higher. The search terms were also typed into Google Scholar in search of relevant articles. There were times when the articles located in Google Scholar were cross-referenced in the Walden Library to determine if they were in peer-reviewed journals or if the title of the journal was googled to decide it was a peer-reviewed journal. Finally, sample dissertations were located in ProQuest and used as a tool to identify additional relevant articles based on the study's topic. Over time, various pertinent articles supported the study's case and aligned with the research design.

## Conceptual Framework

High rates of teacher attrition endanger student achievement. This qualitative case study explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. According to research, teachers leave because of low pay, increased workload, working condition, job satisfaction, lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices. The factors contributing to teacher attrition are related to Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs concepts used in educational settings to motivate people in the workplace. The motivation theory emphasizing the hierarchy of needs will support understanding K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs motivation theory was the conceptual framework for this qualitative case study. In 1943, Abraham Maslow developed the theory of human motivation, suggesting that humans are motivated when five hierarchical needs are met. *Physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization* needs became known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In 1954 and 1970, Abraham Maslow continued to revise his work on the hierarchy of needs. The demands did not change, but Maslow's previous belief that each condition had to be fully met before progressing to the next level evolved. A particular need on the hierarchy may not be fully completed before moving to the next level.

### ***Physiological***

Physiological needs are the first level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) considered physiological needs the basic needs or the beginning of the motivation theory. Physiological needs consist of food, water, shelter, and rest. Some physiological needs are called homeostasis. *Homeostasis* is the body's natural process to maintain a steady, normal state of the body's internal, physical, and chemical processes (Maslow, 1943, 1954). If a chemical imbalance or a need is not met, the person will develop an appetite for what is missing.

Homeostasis does not include physiological needs such as taste, smell, and touching (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Physiological needs such as taste, smell, and touching are independent of each other but may inform motivation. Physiological needs are the most basic needs. If needs are not met, hunger would likely dominate the person's needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

The human motivation theory focuses on gratification and deprivation (Maslow, 1943, 1954). If teachers receive low pay and heavy workloads, physiological needs may not be met in education. Arviv Elyashiv and Navon (2021) identified low pay, workload, job satisfaction, and working conditions as reasons teachers leave. Low income impedes the teachers' ability to meet basic needs such as food and shelter, and a heavy workload may prevent the teacher from getting adequate rest. If physiological needs are not met, it may contribute to teacher attrition. Based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, teachers will focus on finding ways to fulfill their basic needs, meaning leaving the profession or the job. If teachers' basic needs are met, teachers may continue in their

current position. When physiological needs are met, teachers progress to the next level, safety.

### ***Safety***

Safety is the next level of the hierarchy of needs. When the physiological needs are satisfied, the following need is safety (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Safety needs consist of security and protection. If a person's safety is threatened, they may only focus on safety, particularly if their physiological needs are met (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

The level of safety needs works similarly to the level of physiological needs. At the level of safety, the person craves a need to feel safe (Maslow, 1943, 1954). In education, teachers leave the profession because of student behavior and working conditions. Sulit (2020) identified principal leadership as one of the most critical factors for retaining teachers. Student behavior and working conditions contribute to the need to feel safe. Poor student behavior can make a teacher feel unsafe. Fear of contracting COVID-19 in the classroom contributes to safety concerns. Working conditions could jeopardize job security. For example, a teacher working in a hostile or toxic work environment may live in fear of losing their job. These factors may make a teacher feel unsafe and eventually leave the school or the profession. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) explained teacher attrition was low in schools where teachers reported satisfactory working conditions. If the teacher feels gratification for the level of safety, the teacher may choose to continue teaching at the current location. When safety needs are met, the person progresses to love and belong.

### ***Love and Belonging***

The next level of the hierarchy of needs is love and belonging. If the person finds a level of gratification with physiological conditions and safety, the person will move into the love and belonging stage (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Love and belonging may consist of a need for affection and relationships, but love is not considered sex. Love must be given and received for gratification (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

Love and belonging would look like teachers participating in collaborative grade-level, content-based teams or committees in an educational setting. Teachers may have a positive relationship with their students, colleagues, and administrators. Morettini et al. (2020) explained that teachers build resiliency when accepted. When teachers do not form positive working relationships or receive a lack of support from administrators, teachers are inclined to leave the profession or job, contributing to teacher attrition. Opoku et al. (2020) indicated teachers in rural schools need relationships and opportunities for growth to consider returning to the job. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs explains that when conditions of love and belonging are met, one feels motivated. The person moves to the next level of the hierarchy of needs: esteem.

### ***Esteem***

Esteem needs are the next level of the hierarchy of needs. Once gratification is achieved at physiological, safety, and love and belonging levels, the person progresses to esteem needs. Esteem needs are the need to feel self-respect and respect others (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Esteem needs are divided into two categories. First, esteem needs consist of

strength, achievement, adequacy, and confidence. Second, esteem needs include a need for respect from others, recognition, appreciation, or importance (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

Teachers experience esteem needs by receiving respect from their students, parents, peers, and administrators. Administrators may recognize teachers for their accomplishments, such as perfect attendance, student achievement, leadership skills, or being a part of the team to fulfill esteem. Based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs fulfilling esteem needs provides a sense of self-confidence, worth, and strength, but a lack of meeting esteem needs creates a feeling of weakness and helplessness (Maslow, 1943, 1954). A sense of gratification that esteem needs are met could lead to teacher retention, whereas not fulfilling esteem needs may lead to teacher attrition.

### ***Self-Actualization***

Self-actualization is the highest level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs found in the motivation theory. The goal of the motivation theory is to achieve self-actualization. Self-actualization can do what one was created to do (Maslow, 1943, 1954). If a person feels gratification for physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs, the person may still feel restless if he does not achieve self-actualization. Self-actualization is personal growth.

In education, teachers experience self-actualization when the hierarchy of needs is satisfied at the first four levels (physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, and esteem). Self-actualization may look like teachers growing professionally by attending or offering professional learning opportunities, seeking additional certifications, or

obtaining other degrees. In addition, teachers may move towards a teacher leadership role. Self-actualization is the highest level of the hierarchy of needs.

Maslow's (1943) motivation theory emphasizing the hierarchy of needs focuses on the needs occurring and being fulfilled in order. However, there are instances when the conditions do not happen in order. When the requirements do not occur in order or needs are not met in the order of the hierarchy, it is referred to as reversal (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Maslow (1943, 1954) acknowledged that some behaviors are not motivated by the essential needs in the hierarchy of needs.

Previous studies focusing on teacher attrition used Maslow's hierarchy of needs to frame the studies. Fisher and Royster (2016) used Maslow's hierarchy of needs to determine what mathematics teachers need to promote teacher retention. Fisher and Royster (2016) aligned the teachers' needs to Maslow's hierarchy of needs to show the correlation. Hammonds (2017) used Maslow's hierarchy of needs to identify urban principals' strategies to retain teachers. Based on the study, teachers want administrative support. Larkin et al. (2016) identified factors that affect K-12 online teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, and intentions to leave. The study was framed using Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The findings were that K-12 teachers feel job satisfaction and are committed to staying on the job. Factors such as professional community, meeting students' needs, and flexibility were reasons for job satisfaction. In contrast, pay, unmotivated students, and lack of face-to-face interactions were reasons for low satisfaction.

## **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

### **Rural**

Rural is difficult to define. Researchers and policymakers determined it differently (USDA Economic Research Service, 2019). The federal government used more than fifteen definitions to identify rural areas, and each state has its meaning (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). The United States Census defined rural as all population, housing, and territory that is not urban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The National Center for Education Statistics 2007 described rural as nonmetropolitan (Lavalley, 2018). Rural areas are also determined by agriculture, mining, timber, and fishing (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). When most people think of rurality, people envision dense farmland with crops (i.e., cotton, soybean, and corn) or livestock (i.e., cows, horses, pigs, and chicken) for miles and miles with limited stores, restaurants, and businesses (USDA Economic Research Service, 2019). Still, rural is more diverse (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

### **Rural Community**

Rural schools are embedded within the community (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Often rural school districts are the largest employer in the rural community (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Rural communities are experiencing a decline in industries creating fewer job opportunities (Biddle & Azano, 2016). The rural school district conducts business and uses services in the community, supporting the continuous flow of revenue throughout the community (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Rural communities have a lower tax base, often due to the property value in rural areas



(Lavalley, 2018; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Rural schools encompass the traditions and values of the community (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Parents may actively participate in school events, and the community attends and supports the school district's events in rural areas.

Rural communities are often composed of aging community members while young adults move away for job opportunities (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Although rural populations are dwindling, rural communities are becoming more diverse (Ruecker, 2021); therefore, school enrollments are decreasing but becoming more diverse (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Declining enrollment and low funds often lead to school closure or consolidation. Rural school closure or district consolidation may cause a decrease in parental involvement, transportation challenges, lack of student participation in extracurricular activities, and increased unemployment. Parent engagement may decline because of transportation issues or the commute length to the new or consolidated schools. Students may no longer participate in extracurricular activities due to transportation. School closures affect the community's livelihood because it leaves many community members unemployed since the school district may be the major employer in the community. The community loses the place where they gather for events and activities essential to the community. When rural schools close or rural districts consolidate, the community loses a significant asset (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

### **Rural Education**

No one doubts that rural schools have a unique challenge. The rural school challenges are not the same as the urban and suburban school challenges (Lavalley,

2018). Lavalley (2018) explained that more national attention might be given to urban and suburban schools because a larger student population is affected. A significant number of students attend rural schools. Based on the "Why Rural Matters" 2018-2019 report, 9.3 million students in the nation participate in rural schools, and in the state in this study, 120,000 students attend rural schools (Showalter et al., 2019). In the United States, less than three out of every ten schools are rural, while in this study, four out of every ten schools are rural (Showalter et al., 2019). Therefore, the rural school challenge affects the education of many students in the nation and the state.

Lavalley (2018) identified that rural schools face poverty, low student achievement, a low tax base, and low teacher salaries. Showalter et al. (2019) explained that nearly one in five of the 120,000 rural students in the state lives in poverty. In addition, rural schools in the southeastern United States experience high teacher attrition rates. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) discovered that schools in the South experience the highest teacher attrition rate of 16% to 17% in cities and suburbs and 14% to 15% in towns and rural areas. Frahm and Cianca (2021) reported teacher turnover could add to levels of poverty and achievement.

### ***Relationships***

Rural education is a positive component of relationships between administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community. Research on rural education consistently reveals that the dynamics of the rural community are strong relationships and deep connections (Bridgeforth et al., 2021). Bridgeforth et al. (2021) explained that an advantage of rural schools is small class sizes and the relationships between teachers and

students. Teachers and students form relationships, and students engage in extracurricular activities. An advantage of teaching in rural schools is the unity and strong relationships.

### ***Teachers***

Some advantages are specific to teaching in rural schools. Bridgeforth et al. (2021) described a common theme in rural education as the strong bond and purposeful connections for generations within the rural community. Close relationships between teachers, students, and the community is an advantage of teaching in rural schools (Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2020). Another advantage is the small class sizes that allow teachers to meet students' individual learning needs (Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2020).

There are also challenges to teaching in rural schools. Rural schools are typically small, which creates an environment of isolation (Tran et al., 2020). Due to the small size and low enrollment, there may only be one teacher on a grade level or one teacher in a particular content area which creates a challenge for collaboration. Rural administrators face the challenge of providing professional development for new teachers (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Teachers and administrators in rural areas have limited access to professional development opportunities, decreasing growth potential (McConnell et al., 2021). Inexperienced teachers need professional development and support, which may not be readily available in rural schools.

Rural schools have the most significant challenge with staffing schools (Taie & Goldring, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). When teachers move or leave, the response is often to hire "inexperienced" or "unqualified" teachers due to the lack of candidates (Carver-

Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Sometimes, teacher attrition or teacher turnover increases class size (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Since rural schools face high teacher attrition rates and new teachers are often inexperienced, rural administrators may be challenged to provide mentors to support new teachers. The limited number of experienced teachers in rural schools usually has an increased workload but not an increase in time for planning (Tran et al., 2020).

### ***Students***

Students in rural schools typically struggle with student achievement because they are more likely to have inexperienced teachers (McConnell et al., 2021). Rural students from the state involved in the study had the lowest performance in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Showalter et al., 2019). The "Why Rural Matters Report 2018-2019" announced rural students from this state also had the most comprehensive achievement gap between rural and nonrural students and rural students living in poverty versus rural students not living in poverty (Showalter et al., 2019). Rural students have fewer opportunities to take advanced courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) or meet the requirements of academic programs such as gifted and talented (McConnell et al., 2021). Showalter et al. (2019) explained that rural students are on target with nonrural peers in taking AP courses and college entrance exams. However, rural students in the state included in this study have lower graduation rates and less dual enrollment credit than other rural students in the nation (Showalter et al., 2019). Based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), unlike rural students in the state, rural students in the nation have

higher graduation rates and perform better on NAEP than urban students (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

Rural communities and schools are changing and diversifying (Ruecker, 2021). The African American and Latinx populations are increasing in rural areas. As a result, the number of English Language Learners (ELL) students increased, with over 250,000 rural students as ELL (Ruecker, 2021). In rural schools, the challenges with staffing trickle into the challenge of providing services for English Language Learners. Often, rural schools do not have the teachers to serve ELL students outside of their general classes. Ruecker (2021) explained that although rural schools and communities are diversifying, rural schools struggle to meet the diverse needs of the changing populations.

### ***Resources***

One of the most significant challenges of rural school districts is low funding (Lavalley, 2018). Tieken and Montgomery (2021) explained that 17% of state education funds are rural. Rural schools rely on federal programs such as Title I and grants for funding (Lavalley, 2018; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Lavalley (2018) explained that rural schools are typically at a disadvantage because of a lack of personnel to write lengthy, competitive grants. Unfortunately, grants and federal programs limit how funds can be spent, and the grants are competitive (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). The funding source may not permit spending funds on things that rural schools need. For example, many rural school districts require new school facilities because they operate in old, outdated school buildings. The funding source may permit the school district to purchase devices to implement the one-to-one initiative. Still, the school facilities may not have the

infrastructure to support the one-to-one initiative. The funding source allows the district to purchase supplies, but the students receive instruction in a building where sections are permanently closed due to dilapidation. Nonrural districts receive a large portion of their local revenue, but rural communities have limited tax revenue to provide to the rural school districts (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

Rural schools may struggle to provide resources for students due to remote locations, limited transportation or lack of transportation systems, lack of trained professionals to provide specific needed services, and high poverty levels (Frankland, 2021). Boulden and Schimmel (2021) explained that rural school students might not have access to mental health counselors due to limited resources in rural communities. Rural students may have limited access to the school guidance counselors because rural school guidance counselors typically have multiple roles and have little time to provide services to the students (Boulden & Schimmel, 2021). In addition, rural administrators may not have the funds to provide professional development (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Frequently, funds for educational programs are used to recruit and train new teachers (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

### **Teacher Shortage**

The challenge of staffing classrooms with qualified teachers began in the 1930s and continues to be a critical problem in today's education system in the United States (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). A teacher shortage has been a "silent crisis" plaguing our nation for decades (Ansley et al., 2019; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; U.S. Department of Education Office of

Postsecondary Education, 2017). Teacher attrition contributes to the teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dawson & Leytham, 2020; Nguyen, 2020; See et al., 2020). McHenry-Sorber and Campbell (2019) reported the teacher shortage is predominantly in rural and urban areas based on nationwide reports. Rural schools are greatly affected by the teacher shortage (Nichols, 2018). Sutchter et al. (2016) and Tran et al. (2020) explained that the teacher shortage is more severe in southern states of the United States. The dynamics of teachers leaving creates a teacher shortage and negatively affects student outcomes. Administrators continue to face the challenge of staffing their schools (Tran et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem of staffing classrooms with qualified teachers. The 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey results showed that one in four teachers planned to leave at the end of the 2020-2021 school year compared to one out of six before the pandemic (Steiner & Woo, 2021). In this study, the state's Teacher Supply and Demand report showed that 6,900 teachers (15.5% increase) left their district or profession in the 2020-2021 school year (CERRA, 2021). More jobs are available than qualified teachers (Carothers et al., 2019). As a result, school districts across the nation are struggling to staff schools with qualified teachers.

The teacher shortage makes it difficult for administrators to staff their schools with qualified teachers (Saultz et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2020). The teacher shortage is more prevalent in content areas such as science, mathematics, foreign language, and special education (Carothers et al., 2019; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). The shortage of mathematics and science teacher is not more significant than the shortage

of other content area teachers; however, there are not enough teachers entering mathematics and science education to accommodate the ones leaving (Warren & Robinson, 2018). The supply and demand for science and mathematics teachers create a teacher shortage. As a result, administrators may struggle to find teachers to fill these positions if they become vacant. The positions often remain vacant, causing administrators to use a long-term substitute teacher or eliminate the position.

The teacher shortage and teacher attrition present different problems for rural administrators. Teachers in rural schools may face challenges such as working in a high-poverty area, low pay, limited amenities, and geographic isolation, contributing to teacher attrition (Azano & Stewart, 2016). These challenges contribute to their leaving. The 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey also revealed that a more significant number of teachers reported being stressed and exhibiting symptoms of depression (Steiner & Woo, 2021). When teachers leave, rural administrators often do not have a pool of candidates to hire (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Tran et al., 2020). As a result, rural administrators may not fill their vacancies (Taie & Goldring, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). Rural administrators may hire "inexperienced" or "unqualified" teachers to fill their vacancies. Maready et al. (2021) reported that schools serving high-minority or high-poverty populations have a 1.5 times higher chance of having inexperienced teachers. Carothers et al. (2019) explained that when administrators hire unqualified teachers due to the ongoing teacher shortage, these unqualified teachers are often hired to serve disadvantaged students versus students who can learn independently. Previous research shows that it takes approximately three years



for new teachers to become effective (Maready et al., 2021). As a result, underprivileged students fall further behind in academic achievement.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Teacher attrition is defined as teachers leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Doherty (2020) described teacher attrition as teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement. Teacher turnover is teachers leaving or moving to a different school (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Some researchers identified turnover as teachers' willingness to leave (Vekeman et al., 2017). Some literature used the terms interchangeably or described teacher turnover as teachers leaving either the profession or the job (Vekeman et al., 2017). In this study, teacher attrition and teacher turnover were used synonymously.

Teacher attrition is more prevalent in rural and urban districts (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). For example, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) discovered that schools in the South experience the highest teacher attrition rate of 16% to 17% in cities and suburbs and 14% to 15% in towns and rural areas. In rural schools, teacher turnover is lower because rural teachers do not typically transfer to other schools and leave the profession (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Instead, rural districts often lose experienced teachers to more affluent urban districts (Nichols, 2018).

Teachers (new and experienced) are leaving the profession. New teachers go for other jobs while experienced teachers retire (Madigan & Kim, 2021; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). Approximately half of the new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (See et al., 2020). Nearly half of the new teachers went within the first five

years (See et al., 2020) compared to approximately one-third of teachers retiring (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Dawson and Leytham (2020) explained that almost twice as many new teachers without certification leave than new teachers with certification, making attrition a more significant challenge for early career teachers than veteran teachers. Fewer than one-third of teachers retire (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

According to the literature, teacher attrition is a problem nationally and internationally (Holmes et al., 2019). However, the trend of who is leaving varied depending on the location of the study. With (2017) used three decades of data from Norway to determine a growing trend in teacher attrition. The study's results showed that fewer teachers leave the profession in the early years, but more teachers retire early. The study's outcome conflicted with other studies that stated more teachers left within the first five years of their teaching career (Shibiti, 2020).

The state included in this study reported a decline (from 36% to 30%) in new teachers leaving at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. According to the Teacher Supply and Demand Report, many experienced, non-retired teachers left compared to previous years (Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, & Advancement (CERRA), 2021). Early retirement suggests that high-quality teachers may leave the profession while novice teachers remain. As a result, the teaching profession has fewer experienced teachers (Hanson & Yoon, 2018) and fewer students entering the teacher education program to become teachers (Carothers et al., 2019). When few teachers leave and enter the teacher education program, a teacher shortage occurs.

Researchers provided recommendations for combating teacher attrition and improving teacher retention. Vagi et al. (2019) revealed highly effective teachers are likely to stay on the job. Opoku et al. (2020) indicated teachers in rural schools need relationships and opportunities for growth. Hasselquist and Graves (2020) explained that administrators could retain CTE teachers if they do the following: set boundaries, shift focus, build professional support, and innovate in the classroom. Kim and Burić (2020) recommended that administrators focus on teacher burnout versus teacher self-efficacy to increase teacher retention.

Researchers suggested policy changes to improve teacher retention. Tran et al. (2020) declared an inequitable distribution of teachers in poor rural schools that challenged hiring and retaining qualified teachers. ESSA emphasized the equitable distribution of teachers to enable effective teachers for all students, particularly students in hard-to-staff schools (Saultz et al., 2017). A lack of teacher retention and attrition creates an issue of equity. The students who need the best teachers are often left without a good teacher due to the teacher shortage.

Madsen et al. (2019), Farinde-Wu et al. (2019), and Young and Easton-Brooks (2020) divulged that based on literature, teachers of color are underrepresented in U.S. schools, but 54% of students in U.S. schools are students of color. Madsen et al. (2019) explored White teachers' perceptions of their interplay with teachers of color. Because of White teachers' limited experience with interacting with people of color, White teachers overwhelmed teachers of color with handling racial issues leading to teacher attrition for

teachers of color. Principals can support teachers experiencing teacher attrition by establishing a school culture that brings awareness to different cultures.

Over the years, the federal government enacted policies to address the challenges with staffing schools, equitable distribution of teachers, and increasing student achievement (Nguyen et al., 2020). Although these policies are intended to support administrators with hiring and retaining effective teachers, administrators continue to face the challenge of staffing their schools (Tran et al., 2020). Rural schools have the most significant challenge with staffing schools (Taie & Goldring, 2017; Tran et al., 2020).

### **Factors Contributing to Teacher Attrition**

Teachers leave the profession or the job for a variety of reasons. Low pay, increasing workload, job satisfaction, and working conditions contribute to teacher attrition (Arviv Elyashiv & Navon, 2021; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). In addition, the research identified lack of respect and student behavior as factors that contributed to teacher attrition (Holmes et al., 2019). Hasselquist and Graves (2020) identified low pay, lack of resources, and limited administrative support for teacher attrition among CTE teachers.

Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) analyzed three years of data from Arizona's public schools' teacher retention data and working conditions survey to explore potential connections between teacher attrition and working conditions. The findings were that schools where teachers rated the working condition satisfactory had lower attrition rates.

In addition, the schools serving high poverty or minority students also had lower teacher attrition rates.

Perryman and Calvert (2020) investigated the reasons teachers wanted to teach, why they chose to leave teaching, and why they may depart from teaching in the future. For example, teachers leave the profession or consider leaving the job due to performance and accountability. In addition, the nature of the workload and responsibility contributes to teacher attrition.

Harju and Niemi (2020) explored the principal's viewpoints on defining the needs of new teachers. The study's results showed that new teachers need support communicating with parents and collaborating with colleagues, working outside the classroom, and supporting students' learning.

Glazer (2018) researched experienced certified teachers through a lens of resistance to identify factors contributing to teacher attrition. The factors identified in the study are similar to other studies. The factors included forcing the implementation of specific curriculums that teachers did not deem appropriate for their students, increased standardized testing and its effects on the school environment, and lack of job security.

Dunn (2018) explored public school teachers' resignations to identify factors contributing to teachers leaving. Teachers leave due to increasing standardized testing, decreasing pay, and negative evaluations. However, some teachers expressed that they did not feel they were leaving the profession, but the profession left them. In addition, teachers felt there was a lack of respect for the profession. Glazer (2020) conducted further studies with experienced certified teachers to determine factors contributing to

teacher attrition. The study noted a shift from students to adults in factors contributing to teacher attrition.

Warren and Robinson (2018) identified reasons mathematics and science teachers (turnover and attrition) leave. However, mathematics and science teachers leave for different reasons. For example, mathematics teachers leave because of a lack of autonomy, whereas science teachers leave because of low salaries. The study intended to determine factors that contributed to mathematics and science teachers entering the field and aspects that influenced their decisions to stay. The results of the study were not a surprise. Teachers remain because of their passion for teaching and their students.

High needs schools are identified as schools in high poverty areas that serve students facing economic hardship (Ansley et al., 2019). High needs schools can also be established within a district to serve students with specific needs. Ansley et al. (2019) explained that current research suggests that teacher turnover in high-needs schools results from stress and job satisfaction.

Stanley (2021) researched the experiences of Black teachers, administrative support, and turnover. The study's results provided three common factors for Black teacher turnover: a lack of support with discipline, relationships with administrators, and social justice. In a different research, Madsen et al. (2019) reported studying White teachers' perceptions of their interactions with Black teachers. White teachers said they heavily relied on Black teachers to deal with racial problems, discipline, and Black parents due to their limited experiences with racially or culturally different people. Frequently, Black teachers did not have an opportunity to use their expertise in the

teaching profession resulting in them leaving the school for other job opportunities. The 2021 State of U.S. Teacher Survey results revealed that more than half of the Black teachers participating in the survey shared they were planning to leave at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. A higher rate of Black teachers was preparing to leave than teachers of other races (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Teachers in rural schools may leave for different reasons. Teachers in rural schools may face challenges such as working in a high-poverty area, low pay, limited amenities, and geographic isolation, contributing to teacher attrition (Azano & Stewart, 2016). The benefits of a rural community do not always outweigh the challenges. Sometimes, teachers working in rural schools may leave because they do not live in the community and desire employment closer to home.

Toropova et al. (2021) conducted a study with eighth-grade math teachers to determine a relationship between job satisfaction, working conditions, and teacher characteristics. The findings were a relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction. The results consisted of factors contributing to job satisfaction, such as the following: teacher workload, teacher cooperation, and student discipline.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Job satisfaction is an individual's perception of positive, enjoyable work experiences (Khan et al., 2017; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Singh & Ryhal, 2021). Teachers' perceptions of the working conditions are related to job satisfaction (Farmer, 2020). Madigan and Kim (2021) explained that teacher retention increases when teachers experience job satisfaction. Toropova et al. (2021) claimed that satisfied teachers with

more substantial job commitment are more likely to stay. Toropova et al. (2021) reported that teachers who feel happy with their job provide higher quality instruction and support for students. Administrators' practices are one of the most significant predictors of teachers' feeling satisfaction on the job (Ansley et al., 2019). Olsen and Huang (2019) revealed principal support and teacher cooperation influences job satisfaction for teachers. Ansley et al. (2019) explained that administrators must establish working conditions that encourage high-quality work to allure and retain high-quality teachers. Inandi et al. (2022) concluded school administrators' leadership influences job satisfaction. Stress contributes to job dissatisfaction (Farmer, 2020) and is linked to teacher turnover (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

### ***Burnout***

Burnout is a feeling that is a result of stress on the job. Teachers endure a great deal of work-related stress. Farmer (2020) explained one of the strongest predictors of teacher stress is the workplace. Stress-related teaching can cause teachers to have a negative work performance (Inandi et al., 2022). In addition, stress can affect a teacher's mental state (Farmer, 2020). Teachers need to learn how to manage stress because stress is inevitable (Inandi et al., 2022). Excessive stress over long periods leads to burnout (Inandi et al., 2022). Teachers who feel job satisfaction experience less stress and burnout (Toropova et al., 2021).

Teachers often experience burnout due to the high demands on the job (Madigan & Kim, 2021). School administrators expect teachers to know their students' mental state while completing additional tasks outside their duties and responsibilities (Farmer, 2020).



Teachers often face compassion fatigue from their concern about their students (Farmer, 2020). Burnout can cause teachers to withdraw, have a negative attitude, and feel like they are not making a difference. In addition, the factors that contribute to teacher attrition can cause teachers to experience burnout resulting in teacher turnover or teacher attrition.

Several studies were conducted to determine the role of burnout in teacher attrition. Madigan and Kim (2021) studied the relationship between teacher burnout or job satisfaction and teachers' intentions to leave. The study intended to determine if burnout or job satisfaction played a more significant factor in teachers leaving. Burnout and job satisfaction predicted teacher leaving, but burnout had a more substantial influence on teachers leaving than job satisfaction had on teachers staying.

Kim and Burić (2020) performed a study to determine the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and burnout. The findings were burnout can predict teacher self-efficacy, but teacher self-efficacy does not predict burnout. Therefore, Kim and Burić recommended that administrators focus on teacher burnout versus teacher self-efficacy to increase teacher retention.

### ***Leadership***

**School Administrator.** Principals play a pivotal role in teacher retention. When school and district administrators understand the factors contributing to teacher attrition, they may retain teachers and improve instruction (Babo & Petty, 2019). There is a significant correlation between teacher retention and administrative leadership (Sulit, 2020). Teacher quality and school culture contribute to teacher retention (Learning Policy

Institute, 2017). Teachers perceive school leadership as one of the most critical working conditions for teacher retention (Sulit, 2020). Principal leadership can influence teacher turnover (Scallon et al., 2021).

Principals are critical to the success of teachers and students (Babo & Petty, 2019). Supportive principals can alleviate teacher stress (Farmer, 2020). Principals make a difference concerning teacher retention and have a direct role in teacher professional wellbeing. In other words, school administrators can guide teachers toward reaching self-actualization. Van der Vyver et al. (2020) inspected the connections between principals' leadership behavior and teachers' professional wellbeing to retain teachers. The results revealed a relationship between teachers' perception of principal leadership behavior and teachers' professional wellbeing. Transactional and transformational leadership significantly influenced teachers' professional wellbeing, increasing teacher retention. The principal's leadership behavior positively affected teachers' wellbeing lowering teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention.

Bukko et al. (2021) conducted a study to determine teachers' perceptions of how administrators build trust. Bukko et al. revealed five ways administrators can build trust: specific actions for benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability, and competence. In addition, teacher perception of leadership predicts teachers' attitudes towards staying or leaving the position (Sulit, 2020).

Hayes et al. (2019) explained that rural administrators are challenged to recruit and retain effective teachers because of geographic isolation, poor teacher salary, and distributed leadership systems. Boulden and Schimmel (2021) reported that rural

administrators struggle to recruit and retain qualified teachers because of low tax bases, low salaries, and burnout due to the responsibility of multiple roles. In rural schools, administrators often have fewer applicants and even fewer qualified applicants to hire (DeFeo & Tran, 2019).

**District Administrator.** Engel et al. (2018) reported that the responsibility for hiring new teachers varies across districts and states. For example, in some places, the district administrator takes responsibility for recruiting and hiring teachers to fill vacancies, but the school administrator employs teachers. In addition, district administrators may limit school administrators' ability to hire teachers to fill vacancies based on policies for filling vacancies, transfer requests, budgets, and student enrollment (Engel et al., 2018).

DeFeo and Tran (2019) explained that rural schools have fewer administrators, particularly at the district level resulting in superintendents serving in other roles. Nichols (2018) reported that hiring administrators in rural schools could also pose a challenge. The inability to hire administrators leads to administrators serving in dual roles (Nichols, 2018). Recruitment and hiring with limited support from school administrators may occur at the district level in rural districts. In larger school districts, the school administrators would take more responsibility for hiring teachers (DeFeo & Tran, 2019).

### **Teacher Quality**

Quality education motivates students to achieve their highest potential (Amtu et al., 2020). To complete quality education, a school must have quality teachers. Teacher quality is defined in the previous No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as content knowledge

and licensure (Saultz et al., 2017). Every Student Succeeds Act changed the language from teacher quality to teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness is defined as student outcomes resulting from the teacher's performance (Saultz et al., 2017). Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers wondered what makes a good teacher (Kim et al., 2019). Although different studies have identified characteristics of a good teacher, there is no guiding framework to identify specific traits of a good teacher.

The teacher is at the heart of the school. Pareek and Gyanvihar (2021) explained that success in school could only occur when teachers are effective and competent in their content. Still, the school system will fail when teachers are not trained and passionate about teaching. Teacher quality affects student achievement (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Lee, 2018; Schleicher, 2018; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Pareek and Gyanvihar (2021) described effective teachers as responding rather than thinking about what is occurring with students. Effective teachers maximize their instructional time, create learning opportunities, facilitate the learning process, and create a safe, positive learning environment that encourages students to take chances, collaborate, and work together (Pareek & Gyanvihar, 2021).

Effective teachers know their students. Professional standards, including the state's teacher evaluation tool, identify teacher knowledge of students as an indicator of teacher effectiveness. Based on the results of previous studies, teachers who know their students provide effective instructional strategies, pace lessons appropriately, check for understanding, provide relevant academic feedback, and monitor students' progress (Hill & Chin, 2018).

Lee (2018) found students who consistently have high-quality teachers usually have higher student achievement and earn a bachelor's degree. Rueschhoff and Palma (2021) conducted a study to explore the connections between geography achievement with eighth-grade students and measures of teacher quality. Based on the study's results, there is a link between student achievement, teaching experience, training, and professional development.

Certification is considered a measure of teacher quality in special education (Gilmour, 2020). In addition, special education is regarded as a critical needs area due to a shortage of special education teachers. Therefore, Gilmour (2020) conducted a study to investigate if students with learning disabilities or emotional/behavioral disabilities performed better on English Language Arts or mathematics assessments when taught by a certified special education teacher and certified general education or dual certification teacher. Based on the results, dual-certified teachers have more high-performing students and students with learning disabilities. Low-performing students with emotional/behavioral disabilities benefited more from a certified general education or dual certification teacher.

School districts and government agencies have consistently sought ways to improve teacher quality. Hill and Jones (2020) disclosed that state and federal government and local school districts often use performance pay to enhance teacher effectiveness. Performance pay consists of providing a monetary incentive based on student outcomes. Hill and Jones (2020) discovered that gender played a role in how teachers respond to performance pay. Over time, male teachers value-added scores

remained the same while female teachers value-added scores decreased. In addition, the teacher retention rate for male teachers was higher than for females in performance pay schools.

### **Student Achievement**

Research has consistently shown that teacher quality has the most significant influence on student achievement. In addition, teacher attrition and turnover have a long-term effect on student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Therefore, teacher retention is critical to improving student achievement and decreasing the financial obligations of recruiting and hiring new teachers (Maready et al., 2021).

Teacher attrition and teacher turnover affect student outcomes and teachers' and students' ability to establish relationships (Boulden & Schimmel, 2021). Frankland (2021) clarified that 29% of rural students had experienced two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACE). Frankland (2021) defined ACE as "violence, mental illness, substance abuse, psychological, physical, sexual abuse, and neglect." ACE increases the negative effect on student outcomes (Frankland, 2021). Rural students need access to mental health counselors and guidance counselors. Unfortunately, rural schools may not provide mental health counselors, and guidance counselors are often overloaded with additional responsibilities (Boulden & Schimmel, 2021).

The state included in this study has one of the nation's most significant gaps in student achievement between rural and non-rural students and rural students living in poverty, and rural students not living in poverty (Showalter et al., 2019). In addition, high-poverty and high-minority students are most likely to receive instruction from

inexperienced, unqualified teachers (Nguyen et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). Compared to the nation, the state has the highest rate of rural students of color and is among the lowest with low student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in math and reading (Showalter et al., 2019). In addition, the state has "lower graduation rates" and "lower dual enrollment credit rates" compared to the national rate for rural students (Showalter et al., 2019).

Handa (2020) examined students' and teachers' perceptions of differentiated instructional strategies, student engagement, and the teacher's use of students' voices. The findings were that teachers and students have different perceptions of the intended learning. When students do not perceive what they are expected to learn, student achievement may suffer (Handa, 2020). In addition, students may not understand the lesson's objective, creating difficulty in mastering the goal.

According to research, there is a history of the strong influence that Black teachers have on minority students' achievement. Black teachers have more minority students meeting the qualifications for the gifted and talented program, increasing student achievement and decreasing dropout rates (Stanley, 2021). In addition, black teachers have high expectations for minority students (Stanley, 2021). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) explained that Black students learn and perform well with teachers of color. Although Black teachers are underrepresented in the education system that serves approximately 54% of students of color, Black teachers strongly influence students of color academic achievement.

Low student achievement draws negative attention to a school or district. As a result, there may be a school closure or school turnaround. Redding and Nguyen (2020) conducted a meta-analysis to determine the relationship between school turnaround and student outcomes such as attendance, standardized test scores, and graduation rates. After analyzing the results of 35 studies, Redding and Nguyen discovered that school turnaround did not significantly affect student outcomes within the first year. Still, there was a positive relationship between school turnaround and student outcomes after the first year.

School administrators may experience difficulty hiring qualified teachers, particularly in rural schools. As a result, class sizes may increase, or inexperienced teachers may be employed. Increased class sizes and inexperienced teachers negatively affect student achievement (Arviv Elyashiv & Navon, 2021). School administrators do not provide instruction, but they strongly influence student outcomes. School administrators establish a positive culture that promotes teaching and learning and provide professional development for teachers to enhance teaching and learning (Young et al., 2017). School administrators who can hire and retain effective teachers lead schools that yield high student achievement (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature review was evidence of the various studies conducted on teacher attrition. An analysis of the literature review specified that teachers are leaving the profession or moving to another school district at an alarming rate. Some researchers referred to teacher attrition as the "silent crisis" that plagues our nation's education



system. Teacher attrition has a lasting effect on national education systems, the economy, and students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Schools with high teacher attrition rates have low student achievement (Crouch & Nguyen, 2021) and inequitable distribution of teachers.

Several factors contributed to teacher attrition in the literature, such as low pay, a lack of respect for the profession, increasing workload, and working conditions. Several key terms emerged as a result of the literature. Key terms were rural schools, teacher attrition, teacher shortage, equity, factors for teacher attrition (job satisfaction, burnout, and leadership), teacher quality, and student achievement. The literature indicated that administrators play a vital role in retaining teachers by providing professional development, building relationships of trust, providing favorable working conditions that lead to job satisfaction, and alleviating work stress that leads to teacher burnout. Although the literature offers extensive research on teacher attrition and why teachers leave, there is not much literature on administrators' perceptions of why teachers leave. This study will add to the current literature and address a gap in practice.

This qualitative case study was based on the lived experiences of the school and district administrators. School and district administrators shared their experiences by participating in a semistructured interview. The interview intended to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was the conceptual framework used to guide this study to understand how the elements from the research contribute to teachers leaving. If administrators

understand the factors that cause teachers to leave, they can decrease teacher attrition and increase retention.

The next chapter provides details about the study's research method. The information consists of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The trustworthiness explains how validity and reliability are established. The ethical procedures clarify the safety and procedures used to maintain confidentiality and protect all parties involved in the study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative case study aimed to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Although based on current research, teacher attrition is a national and international problem (Holmes et al., 2019), teacher attrition is more prevalent in rural and urban school districts (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Common factors contributing to teacher attrition were low pay, increasing workloads, job satisfaction, working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017), lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices (Holmes et al., 2019).

In this chapter, I focused on the research method for this qualitative case study. The chapter includes the research questions, an analysis of the research design, the rationale for using a qualitative case study research design, and the role of the researcher. The methodology section consists of participant selection, instrumentation, and procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. I explained credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to establish the study's trustworthiness. The purpose of the ethical procedures section of this chapter is to describe the procedures to maintain the participant's safety and the institutional review board (IRB) guidelines. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the main ideas and a transition to Chapter 4.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

RQ1: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

RQ2: What are K-12 district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

The two research questions in this qualitative case study guided the study's key objective of exploring K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Based on the current research, I identified several factors that cause teachers to leave: low pay, increasing workload, job satisfaction, and working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). Other factors included lack of respect, student behavior, and district practices as reasons teachers leave (Holmes et al., 2019).

This qualitative case study phenomenon was teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Teacher attrition, a local problem in the school district, is also a state and national crisis (Holmes et al., 2019), contributing to several challenges that negatively influence student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). First, teacher attrition is one of the major causes of the teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; See et al., 2020). Teachers are leaving the profession, but there are not enough new teachers entering teacher preparation programs (With, 2017). Secondly, if administrators do not have a pool of candidates to select when hiring (Saultz et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2020), it increases the likelihood that administrators may hire

“unqualified” or “ineffective” teachers to fill vacancies (Sutcher et al., 2019). Lastly, it is important to note that teacher quality influences student achievement (Lee, 2018; Schleicher, 2018; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). As a result of teacher attrition, students who need the most instructional support in hard-to-staff schools with high poverty rates are often left without a good teacher. Administrators of hard-to-staff schools often hire long-term substitute teachers, teachers applying for alternative certifications, new teachers, or ineffective teachers leading to an issue of inequitable distribution of teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019). Therefore, it was essential to understand K-12 administrators’ perceptions of factors contributing to teachers leaving to decrease teacher attrition, increase teacher retention, and promote high student achievement.

Exploring administrators’ perceptions sets the stage for a qualitative case study design. Quantitative research uses numbers; hence, qualitative research uses words and images, making it more appropriate. In order to understand how people perceive, approach, and interpret their experiences, situations, and the world, qualitative research employs structured and contextualized research methods. (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that people do not experience reality directly; instead, they experience phenomena. Each participant may have something different to share based on their own experiences with teacher attrition. Due to the nature of this study, a case study was more appropriate than other qualitative designs such as ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded research.

### ***Ethnography***

Ethnography is used to explore a phenomenon, but it requires the researcher to immerse into the study with a particular cultural group long-term. This study did not focus on a specific cultural group. I was not immersed in the study, nor did the study take place over a long time (Burkholder et al., 2020). Therefore, ethnography was not appropriate for this study.

### ***Phenomenology***

Phenomenological studies focus on individuals' lived experiences with the phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). Although case studies delve into lived experiences, case studies do not focus on individual experiences like phenomenology. Furthermore, this study explored administrators' perceptions, not individual perceptions. Therefore, phenomenology was not appropriate for this study.

### ***Grounded Theory***

The grounded theory focuses on a phenomenon like all other qualitative research designs. However, the grounded theory differs from case studies, ethnography, and phenomenology because it focuses on theory development (Burkholder et al., 2020). This study did not seek to develop a theory but used a conceptual framework to guide the study. Therefore, a grounded theory research design was not appropriate for this study.

### ***Case Study***

A qualitative case study research design explores the interactions of a bounded unit with a phenomenon (Swedberg, 2018). Multiple data sources were used to collect data and learn about K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher

attrition. In a case study, the researcher studies a phenomenon in a particular location (Burkholder et al., 2020), such as a rural school district in this study. I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews with school and district administrators and analyzed the deidentified teacher supply and demand report. Therefore, a qualitative case study was the most appropriate research design to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the people (the researcher and the participant) play a vital role in the research process (Burkholder et al., 2020). I was the researcher in this study. As the researcher in this study, my role was to analyze the deidentified teacher supply and demand report and to use a self-designed interview protocol to capture K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. As the researcher, I used purposeful sampling to identify potential participants, developed a self-design interview protocol, collected and analyzed data, and reported the findings. I also protected the integrity of the research, managed bias, and safeguarded the participants' identity, confidentiality, and information.

Bias can occur in all research methods, but since qualitative research is influenced by experience, qualitative researcher needs to be aware of their values and beliefs that could cause bias in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To manage bias, I used purposeful sampling to identify potential participants for the study. Specific guidelines such as two years of experience and state certification were used to select the participants. I do not

supervise any of the administrators participating in the study. I have served as an administrator at the district level for three and a half years, but not in a capacity that requires administrators to report to me.

After IRB approval to conduct my study, I used email to contact the participants asking them to participate. In the email, I attached expectations and guidelines for participating. I did not offer incentives for participating, but I asked all participants to consent using Walden's Leader Interview Consent Form before participating in the study.

Since I am an administrator in the rural school district involved in the study, I realized that my experiences might cause a bias towards participants' responses. I used bracketing and member checks to manage this bias. Member checks allowed me to get the participants to validate their responses to the interview questions. After the interview, I shared the transcripts and recordings with each participant and asked them if they wanted to make any changes, add any information, or clarify any misconceptions. Using member checks provided credibility and conformability to ensure trustworthiness.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative case study was a methodology and research design for this study. The study occurred in a rural school district in the Southeastern United States. Purposeful sampling was used to select five principals and three district administrators to participate in the study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews. The data were analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and concepts to share the K-12 administrators' experience of factors contributing to teacher



attrition. Finally, I compared the study results to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the conceptual framework.

### **Participant Selection**

The participants in this qualitative case study were administrators who knew about the phenomenon (factors contributing to teacher attrition) and could provide data during the interview to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I used purposeful sampling to select participants knowledgeable of the content needed to respond to the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Purposeful sampling permitted collecting the most information about teacher attrition from a small sample of participants. Since an adequate sample would include eight to ten participants, the qualitative case study consisted of five school administrators and three district administrators participating in the semistructured interview. Purposeful sampling and qualitative research do not rely on sample size for results. Instead, the goal was to answer the research questions ethically from various valid and contextualized perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). All of the participants were certified state administrators with a minimum of two years of experience as an administrator in the rural school district. The administrators were close to the phenomenon because teacher attrition was not isolated to particular schools but was a district-wide concern. Due to their experiences, the administrators contributed to the study by sharing their perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district.

The rural school district superintendent provided written permission to collect the qualitative case study data. I applied and received approval from Walden's Institutional

Review Board (IRB) to collect data. The participant selection was aligned with a qualitative case study approach to collect data that answered the research questions ethically in a valid and contextualized manner.

### **Instrumentation**

I used individual, semistructured interviews to collect data to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The qualitative researcher was the instrument, but the individual semistructured interviews were the data collection tool. I conducted the virtual interviews individually because of the ability to maintain confidentiality in individual interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Semistructured interviews enabled me to ask school and district administrators open-ended questions to understand their perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district in the study. I used qualitative interviews to gain insight into the participants' lived experiences and how those experiences helped make sense of the phenomenon and related to the experiences and understandings of other participants or research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The data collected was used to answer the research questions and positively change the rural school district and the community.

An interview protocol provided consistency in the interviewing process (Burkholder et al., 2020). A self-designed interview protocol with logistical details was used to confirm the requirements to participate (state-certified, minimum of two years of experience as an administrator), introduction to the study, interview questions, and a closing statement. A self-designed interview protocol allowed the flexibility to ask

different questions to different participants, discuss topics in-depth, and examine the participants' attitudes, opinions, and feelings. An interview protocol was created for school administrators with questions consistent with the principals' lived experiences (Appendix C) and an interview protocol for district administrators (Appendix D) based on their lived experiences. The self-designed interview protocol contained a list of open-ended questions and potential follow-up questions. The interview questions were designed based on research and aligned to the research questions and purpose. I asked additional questions and deviated from the script while maintaining consistency with a semistructured interview. The interview provided the flexibility to adjust the questions based on the participant's responses without interfering with the integrity of the study.

To establish the content validity of the interview protocol and semistructured questions, I solicited three administrators from surrounding school districts to review the interview protocol and questions to ensure the questions would elicit sufficient data to answer the research questions. The administrators provided feedback on the clarity and validity of the questions in capturing information to answer the research questions and the alignment between the interview protocol and questions with the research questions. I used the feedback and suggestions to improve the interview protocol and semistructured interview questions.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I used semistructured interviews to collect data and gain a deeper understanding of K-12 administrators' perceptions of the factors contributing to teacher attrition (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This qualitative case study explored K-12 administrators'

perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The participants included state-certified school and district administrators with a minimum of two years of experience in their current roles. Participants were recruited based on their roles and experiences. I used purposeful sampling to select participants knowledgeable of the phenomenon because the participants' responses are needed to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). After receiving IRB approval, I requested a list of state-certified school and district administrators with two years of experience in their current roles. The checklist was used to identify potential participants and contact the administrators through email. The email consisted of information about the study and its purpose, along with Walden University's Leader Interview Consent Form included in the body of the email (Appendix B). Participants responded to the email with "I Consent," as indicated in the Leader Interview Consent Form. Upon receipt of consent to participate, I scheduled individual interviews based on the convenience of the participants' time. I notified participants through email, and at the beginning and end of the interview protocol, all information will be confidential, including their participation. Therefore, I will safeguard their information and interview responses. The participants will never be identified in the study.

I used a self-design interview protocol, including open-ended research questions and potential follow-up questions, to maintain consistency in the interview process among the different participants. Interviews were scheduled in one-hour increments and held via an online platform. With the participants' permission, the interviews were

recorded on the online platform with a voice recorder used as a backup to ensure accurate information for transcription. I took notes during the interview. At the end of the interview, I notified the participants that a copy of the recording and transcript would be sent for their review. The participants could make suggestions for editing or clarify any information they provided during the interview. I established the precedence to schedule a follow-up call if needed. Participants were encouraged to contact me if they needed additional information or had questions.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The key objective of this qualitative case study was to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The following research questions guided the data collection to understand school and district administrators' perceptions of the phenomenon:

RQ1: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

RQ2: What are K-12 district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

Purposeful sampling was used to select five school administrators and three district administrators knowledgeable of the content needed to respond to the research question. In addition, I used individual semistructured interviews to collect data that explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. I scheduled the interviews at a

convenient time for the participant, and the interviews were conducted using videoconferencing in a safe and secure environment where their identities and information remain confidential.

After collecting the interview responses, I used a transcription program to transcribe the interviews. First, I listened to the recording and read the transcription in the transcription platform to ensure accuracy. Next, I analyzed the interview transcriptions using open coding with thematic analysis to determine themes and concepts. Ravitch and Carl (2021) described coding in qualitative research as tags or labels that organize data in smaller parts in connection to the research questions, findings, and themes across the data set. I used first cycle coding to identify concepts and second cycle coding to determine patterns among the data.

### ***First-Cycle and Second-Cycle Coding***

After gathering data from the semistructured interviews, the first-cycle coding began (descriptive and concept codes). During first-cycle coding, I used single words or short phrases to identify what was expressed in the text. Then, another look at the qualitative data for coding based on meaning or concepts. Concept coding is interpretive. The next step was to begin making meaning of the qualitative data.

During second-cycle coding, the data was compiled from all participants and placed in a spreadsheet separated by the research questions. The next step was to look for patterns. Actions or data that occurred more than twice formed a pattern. Pattern coding enabled the ability to interpret the data from a different point of view and look for

similarities in words, phrases, and shared meaning from various participants. Finally, I used the patterns to identify categories in second-cycle coding.

### ***Themes***

Themes were formed as a result of coding, categorization, or reflection. Similar coded information was used to identify themes. Finally, I compared identified themes with the conceptual framework for commonalities.

### **Trustworthiness**

Validity refers to the research measuring what was intended. In other words, did the data answer the research question? Validity refers to the quality and rigor of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In qualitative research, validity is trustworthiness. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained, “Trustworthiness is the degree to which you, as a researcher, can have confidence in your sources as well as the methods used to gather your sources” (p. 189). I assessed the study’s trustworthiness using member checks because my presence could affect the participants’ responses or behaviors. Member checks allow the opportunity to note the potential effects of the researcher's presence on the participants’ responses and behaviors (Burkholder et al., 2020) and check with other group members. I used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure validity.

### **Credibility**

Credibility or internal validity is how the researcher uses data and data collection tools (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I implemented several strategies, such as member checking and triangulation, to ensure the study’s credibility (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Member

checking is a strategy that could ensure validity and credibility. After the interview for member check, I shared each participant's interview transcript with the participant. The interviewee's opportunity to review the transcript to determine if their words match what they intended to say ensured credibility (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Triangulation was another strategy to ensure validity. Triangulation is using multiple sources to find patterns or themes. I collected data from two different groups of administrators through individual semistructured interviews.

Researcher reflexivity is an integral part of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Reflexive refers to providing information about my demographics, discipline, training, and any information that may influence the data collection or analysis (Burkholder et al., 2020). Personal experiences may affect the study and cause bias; therefore, reflexivity is essential for the research. Maintaining a reflexive journal with my values and preconceptions minimized the risk of bias. Recording notes in the interview protocol to reflect on personal thoughts and feelings limited bias.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is when the researcher can apply or transfer the information to a broader context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). For example, I used research literature to learn what was studied and what was missing about the phenomenon. The research study will contribute to the literature and add to the existing literature. In this study, the implications for positive social change are addressing teacher attrition, promoting teacher retention, improving teacher quality, and increasing student achievement. The positive social change will enhance the school district and provide equitable learning opportunities and



resources to improve student achievement, ultimately improving community growth.

Transferability is a way to ensure external validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To ensure transferability, I aligned and explained the study in a way that could be transferred and replicated.

### **Dependability**

“Dependability refers to the stability of the data” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 171).

I ensured dependability by ensuring that the research could be used to answer the research questions. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), “The methods of achieving dependability are the triangulation and sequencing of methods and creating a well-articulated rationale for these choices to confirm that you have created the appropriate data collection plan given your research question” (p. 171). Thus, I created a rationale for the study, ensured alignment, used three administrators not associated with the investigation to review the interview protocol to ensure validity, and triangulated the data between the data sources.

### **Confirmability**

The ontological assumption is that you cannot separate the researcher from reality (Burkholder et al., 2020). There is more than one truth, and the truth is subjective rather than objective. Therefore, the data must be confirmed since the qualitative researcher does not look for objectivity. I achieved confirmability by explaining the researcher’s role, triangulating data, and conducting external audits.

### **Ethical Procedures**

When conducting the research, I adhered to the US Federal Regulations and the ethics code and guidelines within the discipline of study. As a part of the U.S. Federal Regulations, Walden University's Institutional Review Board approved my plan to conduct the research and collect data. The IRB was responsible for reviewing the research proposal and evaluating the ethical compliance of the study. The IRB protects the participants, the researcher, and the learning institution. Therefore, the IRB ensured that I had safeguards to obtain consent and protect the participants' privacy. I received the IRB approval (03-21-22-0095937) to conduct the study as planned and collect data. The study was not undertaken, and no data was collected until the IRB provided approval. Once approval was granted, I safeguarded the safety of participants by requiring signed consent forms from each participant and instilling procedures to protect their identity. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that informed consent shows the participants willingly decide to participate in the study. To further protect the participants' identity and provide additional privacy, I did not include the study's school or school district name. The participants were referred to as a letter and a number in the study.

I am a district administrator in the school district where the study was conducted; however, I do not supervise any administrators participating in this study. Therefore, I have extra precautions in place to minimize the risk of bias. Since this is a qualitative case study with interviews as a data tool, data cannot be collected anonymously, but I removed all identifying information to protect the participants (Burkholder et al., 2020). I

used member checks to minimize bias, and I used concepts such as credibility, reflexivity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure validity. After the interview, I sent a copy of the transcript and recording to the participants and provided an opportunity for the participant to add more details, ask for edits or changes, or provide approval. This strategy establishes credibility, builds trust between the researcher and the participant, and includes confirmability.

### **Summary**

The underlying problem addressed in this qualitative case study was the high teacher attrition rates in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. This qualitative case study explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. A qualitative case study was the selected research design because it allowed a deep dive into the topic of interest to learn something new about the phenomenon (Swedberg, 2018). The methodology explained in this chapter provided details of how this study was conducted. A qualitative case study design and semistructured interviews to collect data were the chosen methods to gain an in-depth understanding of K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Purposeful sampling was used to intentionally select knowledgeable participants of the content needed to respond to the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A self-designed interview protocol was used to provide consistency in the interview process. I ensured the validity and rigor of the study while

minimizing bias and maintaining ethical procedures. The IRB approved the research proposal and ensured the safety of the participants, the researcher, and the institution.

In Chapter 4, I will describe the results or findings of the study. The chapter will include an introduction, the setting, data collection, data analysis, the results, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary. The next chapter will go into how the data was gathered, how the data was analyzed, and the results. After presenting the study results, I will explain how trustworthiness was established throughout the data collection and findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative case study aimed to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to the high rates of teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. In rural schools, teacher attrition challenges rural administrators to hire quality teachers to fill vacancies and ultimately negatively affects student achievement. The following research questions guided the data collection and focus of the research:

RQ1: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

RQ2: What are K-12 district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

In this chapter, I present the results of this qualitative case study. Chapter 4 includes the setting, which describes any personal or organizational changes that may have influenced participants' experiences and affected the study's results. The settings include information about the demographics relevant to the study. The data collection is thoroughly explained and contains details on collecting and recording the data, while the data analysis section focuses on how coding was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study are grouped according to the research questions. The results section contains tables and figures to display the results visually. The implementation and adjustments to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies are described in the section on evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary of the main ideas and a transition to Chapter 5.

## Setting

This qualitative case study was conducted in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The southeastern state is significant because of the challenges of teacher attrition in rural schools in the state. The state has a Rural Recruitment Initiative that provides funds for rural school districts with an 11% or higher annual teacher turnover rate (CERRA, 2021). The site selected is a public rural school district located within the state that qualifies for the Rural Recruitment Initiative.

There were no organizational conditions that influenced the participant's experiences in this study; however, there were recent changes in administration. The rural school district has a new superintendent in his first year as a superintendent. The superintendent is new to the position but not new to the rural school district. There were no other changes that would affect the study's results.

The participants in the study consisted of five principals and three district administrators. The participants had various levels of experience in administration with a minimum of two years of experience in their current position. All participants consented to participate in this study and agreed to complete their interview through videoconferencing as outlined in the consent form.

All participants were assigned a unique identifier ranging from P1 – P5 for principals and DA1-DA3 for district administrators. The unique identifier was used throughout the study to maintain confidentiality and ensure participants' privacy. Table 1 contains the participant's demographics, including position, total years of experience in

administration, and years in the current position. Gender and race are not included to protect the identity of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Participant's Demographics*

Participants	Position	Total administrative experience (years)	Years in current position
P1	Principal	7	7
P2	Principal	13	8
P3	Principal	7	2
P4	Principal	9	3
P5	Principal	4	2
DA1	District Administrator	10	2
DA2	District Administrator	11	2
DA3	District Administrator	17	9

**Data Collection**

The participants in this qualitative case study were selected using purposeful sampling. The five principals and three district administrators provided data during the open-ended, semistructured virtual interviews to answer the research questions. All of the participants were state-certified administrators with a minimum of two years of experience in their current position. The participants were close to the phenomenon because teacher attrition was not isolated to particular schools but was a district-wide concern. Due to their experiences, the administrators contributed to the study by sharing their perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in the rural school district.

The primary data collection tool was two self-designed interview protocols used to collect data from school administrators (principals) and district administrators. Both interview protocols were designed with open-ended, semistructured questions with the

opportunity to add probing questions as needed. In addition, the two protocols made it possible to ask different questions to each group of administrators individually to gather data from the perspectives of school administrators and district administrators.

All individual interviews were conducted virtually using a videoconferencing program. All interviews were scheduled in 1-hour intervals explaining that the interview may take less than 1 hour but not more than 1 hour. The length of the interviews varied based on the participants' responses to the open-ended, semistructured interview questions. There were also opportunities to ask follow-up questions to gather additional information.

The videoconferencing platform can record video or audio-only. Although all participants consented to video recording, an audio recording was used as permitted by the Consent form. A voice recorder app on a mobile device was also used to capture the audio to ensure the data was captured for transcription. Interviews were transcribed using a subscription-based transcription program that transcribes audio recordings. To ensure the accuracy of the transcription, I listened to the recording while reading the transcription and made edits as needed. All transcripts were deidentified to maintain confidentiality and privacy. Audio recordings, transcripts, and interview notes were saved to a password-protected universal serial bus (USB) device and locked in a safe in my home office.

Data were collected after receiving approval from the school district included in the study and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB approval 03-21-22-



0095937). The data collection occurred as planned in Chapter 3. There were no variations in the data collection. No unusual circumstances were encountered.

### **Data Analysis**

Coding is a data analysis strategy used to organize data into manageable parts to identify themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The data collection consisted of school and district administrators' responses to interview questions that captured their perspectives about teacher attrition in the rural school district. I followed multiple steps of the open coding process to analyze the data in this study. First, I analyzed the data collected from the school and the district administrators separately.

#### ***First-Cycle Coding***

First-cycle coding (descriptive codes and concept codes) began with individual transcripts. The descriptive codes are the single words and short phrases from the participants' responses to label the data. The participants' words or phrases were then examined to ascertain the significance of what they said, and concept codes were created. Numerous key terms were identified from the individual transcripts. The qualitative data were reviewed again for meaning and concepts. *Teacher preparation, workload, long commute, location, and housing* were among the concept codes that resulted from RQ1. The following concept codes emerged from the mixed replies of district administrators in RQ2: *belonging, respect, stress, commuting, administrative support, and teacher support*. The concepts code related to the rural area, such as *commute and housing*, were identified among school and district administrators.

### ***Second-Cycle Coding***

During second-cycle coding, the data were compiled from all interviews and placed in an Excel spreadsheet. The data was generated and evaluated independently since each study topic addressed the opinions of a distinct group of administrators, and a different interview protocol was employed for each group. The next step was to look for patterns among the data collected from school administrators and to look for patterns among the data collected from district administrators. School and district administrators had different perspectives and interview questions; therefore, some patterns were the same, and some were different. Actions or data that occurred more than twice became a pattern. The patterns were identified as categories. Based on RQ1, fifteen categories were determined, whereas RQ2 yielded fourteen. The following categories emerged from RQ1: *teacher efficacy, building relationships, environment, value, workload, rural community, and lack of support*. The following categories arose from RQ2: *not belonging, relationships, respect, support, positive environment, teacher efficacy, and leadership*.

### ***Themes***

Based on the coding, categorization, and reflection, themes were formed. Then, on an excel spreadsheet, categories were sorted to make sense of the coded data and find themes for each research question. *Building capacity, climate and culture, resources, and rural concerns* were the four topics that emerged from RQ1. Four themes developed in RQ2: *building capacity, climate and culture, relationships, and resources*. I compared and contrasted the themes based on the responses from school administrators (principals) for RQ1 and the responses from district administrators for RQ2. Finally, the themes

based on each research question were compared to the conceptual framework and literature for commonalities. There were no discrepant cases identified during the data analysis. Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of the data analysis process using first and second cycle coding.

**Table 2**

*Data Analysis Process (RQ1-School Administrators)*

First-cycle coding (descriptive)	First-cycle coding (concept)	Second-cycle coding (categories)	Theme
Evolving and growing. Want to move to another position	Growth	Teacher efficacy	Building capacity
Teacher education programs need improvement	Teacher education programs		
Working together	Collaboration		
Ongoing professional development and PLC for support	PLC		
Recognize stressors	Know your teachers	Building relationships	Climate and culture
Not vested in the community	Belonging		
Check on teachers; feel supported	Check-in with teachers	Environment	
Family-oriented	Family environment		
An environment where you want to be	Positive environment	Valued	
Don't feel valued	Not valued		
Focus on teacher morale	Teacher morale	Workload	
Overwhelmed	Stressed		
Increased workload during the pandemic	Increased workload		
May not feel supported	Not supported	Lack of support	Resources
Lack administrators support	Administrative support		
I don't want them dealing with anyone disrupting the lesson	Discipline		
Intentional PD schedule and agenda	Respectful time	Time	
Provide time to get caught up on paperwork and grades	Time		
Commute too far	Long commute	Long commute	Rural
Desire to work closer to home	Location	Rural community	Challenges
Rural area; lack of things to do	Community		

**Table 2***Data Analysis Process (RQ2-District Administrators)*

First-cycle coding (descriptive)	First-cycle coding (concept)	Second-cycle coding (categories)	Theme
Provide professional development for administrators Invest in teachers Job-embedded professional development Lack of opportunity for upward mobility for growth Induction; mentoring	Administrative support from the district level Invest Professional development Lack of growth opportunity Programs for new teachers	Teacher efficacy	Building capacity
Help all Family-oriented Create a culture and environment where teachers want to stay Not alone	Work together Family environment Inviting culture and environment Belonging	Environment  Relationship	Climate and culture
People to support and model lessons; provide feedback Instructional coach, literacy coach, CTs for support Readily available	People to support  Support  Available	Human resource  Time	Resources
Feel love, connected, and valued Felt disconnected or isolated; not supported by administrators Nothing keeping them here	Belonging; respected Disconnected; isolated; not supported Not vested	Belonging Not belonging	Relationship

**Results**

This qualitative case study's results were derived from data collected during interviews with five school administrators (principals) and three district administrators. The two research questions explored the phenomenon from the perspectives of school and district administrators, and two separate interview protocols were used to gather data about their experiences. The following research questions guided the data collection when exploring the K-12 administrators' perception of factors contributing to teacher attrition in the school district included in the study.

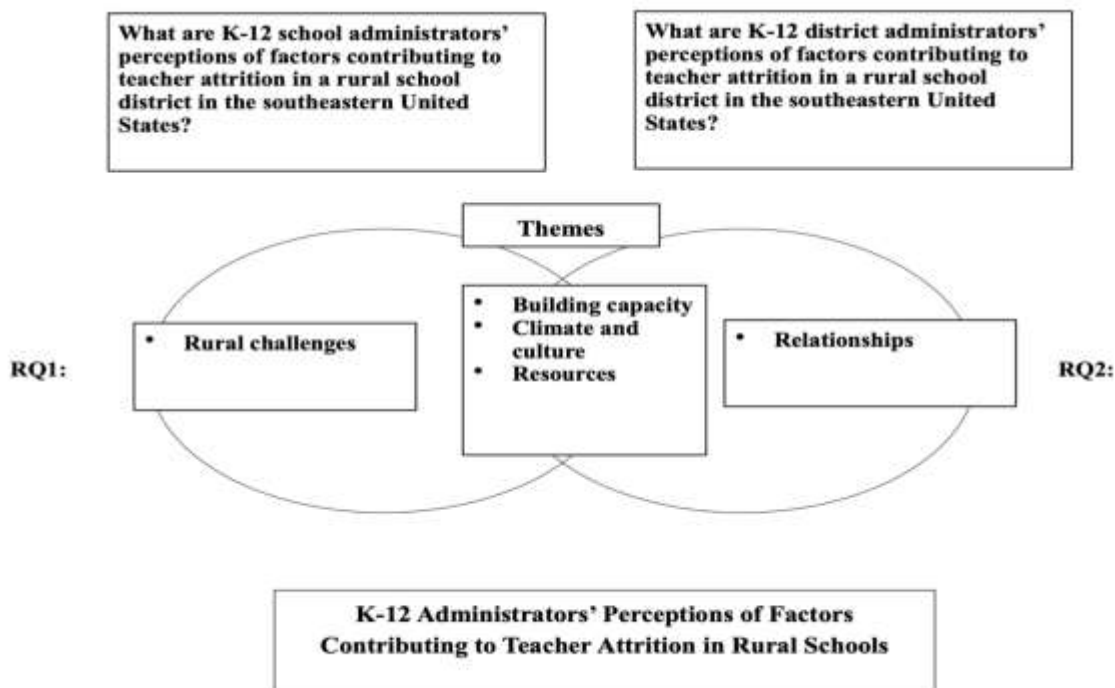
RQ1: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

RQ2: What are K-12 district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States?

As a result, four themes emerged from RQ1, and four themes developed from RQ2. Some of the themes were the same, and some were different among the two research questions. Figure 2 visually represents the overall themes aligned to each research question.

**Figure 2**

*Themes by research questions*



## **Research Question 1**

RQ1 inquired: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States? This inquiry led to a series of interview questions that allowed participants to express their perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in their rural schools. The overall themes that emerged from the responses are as follows: *building capacity, climate and culture, resources, and rural challenges*.

### ***Building Capacity***

Building capacity refers to teacher efficacy or supporting teachers' professional growth to enhance student outcomes. School administrators expressed new teachers struggle in the classroom due to a lack of teacher preparation through traditional and alternative certification programs. P1 stated, "I also think the traditional programs leave out some important things teachers need when teaching." P3 shared,

They're getting in, but the programs are not giving them all the support they need.

So then that leaves for frustration on their part, leading to them wanting to leave.

That's been my experience of teachers coming in through the non-traditional programs not receiving the training they need to succeed in the classroom.

College programs also need to improve their preparation plan.

In alignment with research, school administrators expressed that teachers leave within the first three years of teaching. P1 shared, "Typically, all new teachers want to leave in the first few years of their careers." The state department of education requires a mentor program to support new teachers in getting acclimated to the teaching profession.

School administrators described the mentor program that is in place to support new teachers. P5 stated, “First of all, we have mentors. The state trains them. But we pair them up with someone on their grade level.” Each new teacher is assigned a mentor teacher in their school. P4 spoke about the induction program for new teachers.

Another reason teachers leave is because of a lack of opportunity for growth. For example, teachers may want a leadership position, but the job may not be available in a rural district. As a result, teachers may leave to seek opportunities in other places. P5 states, “I think it depends on if people are evolving and growing and want to move to another position.”

School administrators expressed that teachers desire to know that student outcomes are improving due to their teaching. P4 shared an experience with supporting a teacher desiring to leave the profession. P4 stated, “It was beneficial to the teacher to see her data and understand that her students were making progress.” School administrators support teacher efficacy by providing professional development, professional learning communities (PLC), opportunities to collaborate and work in teams, and mentor programs. P3, P4, and P5 offered weekly PLC in addition to ongoing professional development. P4 explained, “We took advantage of the opportunity to provide resources for planning and professional development for teachers by seeing what they felt they needed to align their needs to specific PD sessions that would be beneficial for them.”

### ***Climate and Culture***

Climate and culture encompassed many different facets, and school administrators addressed the various factors contributing to teacher attrition. Climate and culture

consisted of *relationships, discipline, value and respect, voice, environment, and workload*. P5 revealed, “They leave because the climate of that particular school is not what they want.” Therefore, the climate and culture of the school can be a determining factor in teachers leaving or staying. P5 declared, “I think it's important for the culture and the school's climate to have teachers who want to be at the school, want to stay and work with the students.”

Understanding what was going on with their teachers and having empathy was at the forefront of school administrators' efforts to develop relationships. P4 declared, “Then I think you will recognize when a teacher is at a critical point, and this is a tough spot sometimes for your leaders because we have to be an advocate for the teacher and the students in the school community.” P3 informed, “I am empathetic.”

Discipline affects the climate and culture of the school and influences teachers to leave. P4 stated, “I don't want them to be dealing with anybody who's disrupting your ability to get your job done.” P3 said, “I support them with discipline because I tell the students the worst thing you can do is disrespect one of the teachers. Disrespecting the teacher will get you out of the door.”

Teachers want to feel valued and respected. P5 said, “I think it's sometimes because they feel that they are not valued.” P5 also said, “We need to treat teachers with respect.” P4 stated, “And then giving them the autonomy to let you know when there is an issue or need additional help.” P1 explained, “Retention is all about, you know, treating your folks right. If you take care of your teachers, they will care for your



students.” P4 declared, “So that is a high priority for me, of making sure that you enjoy what you do, number two, you enjoy where you work, and then we keep it a priority.”

School administrators referenced surveys to solicit feedback and input from teachers. P1 stated, “I need input because I can't run a building by myself, or the administration can't learn to build by themselves. It takes the whole community.” Administrators were sure that you should use the survey results to make decisions once you've gathered information. P4 declared, “So try to keep a good pulse on what teachers need—providing them opportunities to share ideas and suggestions—and then incorporate them consistently.” Continuous improvement requires all stakeholders to work together. P1 revealed,

You don't just want teachers and staff working in the school, but you want them working on the school. By that, I mean they're all considered teacher leaders, and they all have a valuable voice moving the school forward—so getting their input.”

P2, P3, P4, and P5 acknowledged the environment as a factor that contributes to teacher attrition in rural schools. P5 said, “They leave because of colleagues, but on the flip side of that, sometimes teachers leave because of administration.” The participants explained how they establish environments where teachers want to stay. P4 declared, “Creating an environment where it is a community, and no one is left alone to do anything.” P3 revealed, “I can think of making sure that it's a homely environment where everyone is hospitable to one another.” Establishing a family-oriented environment was prevalent among the participants. P5 revealed, “We're very family-oriented at our

school.” P2 stated, “Family tries to take care of us and make sure that we're all supportive.”

The participants believed that workload contributes to teacher attrition in rural schools. P1 said, “Especially during the past couple of years in the pandemic, the workload has increased.” P1 also stated, “I think one of the biggest reasons teachers leave is because they're overwhelmed.” Since the pandemic, teachers now have additional tasks, such as cleaning up, serving breakfast and lunch, following COVID policy, and various other activities, such as lesson plans, grading assignments, and administering Fountas Pinnell to each kid individually, according to the participants.

### ***Resources***

Resources such as time and support emerged from the data. Teachers want and need help. P1, P3, and P5 expressed that teachers leave because of a lack of support, including not feeling supported by administration. P1 declared, “They may not feel supported by their administrators, parents, or community members.” P3 revealed, “I guess the main thing I have heard about teacher attrition with people staying or leaving is probably not feeling like administrators support them.” P5 asserted, “Sometimes, teachers leave because of administration.” P3 shared a story based on experiences from the first year as the school administrator in the current school. P3 expressed,

Okay, so when I first started here, I did have many teachers who did leave. I thought it was because of a change in administration and changing the things they were used to doing. I came in with a different mindset that we got to get the job done. Everybody's grown, and you got a job to do. Let's go ahead and get it done.

I am not going to be mean about it. I had different expectations. And so I think some of them didn't want to, you know, comply with the changes. They wanted things to remain the way it was, so I think that was one reason teachers left. I have learned that I have to take some accountability. So I had to reflect and say, I don't want to do that because I saw how teachers were leaving here. I was saying it was because I was a new administration, but that was what I was thinking. So I had to reflect, and I believe in assuming some responsibility. I asked myself, "What can I do differently because you can believe that it is somebody else. Part of the problems could be you too.

Support may look like providing professional development and support from reading or instructional coaches and the tools required to do the job. P5 stated,

They are not supported and given the tools, the resources, and the support to do what they need to do for their students. I know that's one of the questions new teachers ask in interviews. They ask what kind of support is provided to them.

P5 shared an experience about a teacher who wanted to leave because the teacher did not feel supported. However, once the principal explained what support would be provided, the teacher decided to stay.

Providing time is also a resource. Not providing the time for teachers to fulfill their responsibilities could become overwhelming. P3, P4, and P5 expressed that they know to respect the teachers' time. P4 declared, "And then we allowed them to get caught up on necessary deadlines, paperwork, and grading." P3 said,

I'm very intentional about the professional development schedule and agenda, making sure there's time for them to laugh at each other and go to each other's room to share different things. We're still getting the work done, and then I'll say okay, we will leave at two o'clock.

School administrators identified the need to provide support, time, and the resources teachers need to do their jobs.

### ***Rural Challenges***

Rural schools have unique challenges contributing to teacher attrition. Some of the factors participants identified as to why teachers leave rural schools were isolated areas, long commutes, and inadequate housing. Participants expressed that some of the challenges in rural areas are beyond their control. For example, P3 revealed, "Now, as far as rural, I don't know that I can do anything to handle the rural. It is what it is."

Rural places are remote and have few attractions. Teachers who reside in the community may not have things to do outside of work unless they travel to a neighboring city. P4 asserted,

In most cases, rural areas lack enticing things to do. So it can make recruiting difficult, especially with younger teachers. They want to move to a place with a social scene and a nightlife scene, which they can do outside of work. And most times, in your rural areas, that's not prevalent."

The long commute is a challenge in rural areas. Teachers often do not realize the length of the commute when they accept the job. Due to the long journey to and from work each day, they begin to want a position closer to home. P4 stated, "The long

commute again, without housing and attractions in rural communities. Often, those who work in rural communities commute long distances. And so that can get taxing.” P5 shared, “So, of course, commute, especially with these gas prices, people want to be closer to their home.” P1 declared, “They just started looking elsewhere, getting closer to home, which we certainly understand is always a positive for a teacher to be closer to home.”

A lack of adequate housing in rural areas contributes to the long commutes and potentially influences teachers to leave. P4 stated,

Housing in rural areas is an issue. Being able to provide housing, but then providing a level of housing that you will want to live in that's remodeled or newer or in line with what teachers may be or what some teachers may be used to living in.

Rural communities have a unique challenge. Although there are some benefits of living and working in a rural area, it is not what everyone desires. The challenges of rural areas can make recruiting and retaining teachers a challenge for administrators.

### **Research Question 2**

RQ2 inquired: What are K-12 district administrators’ perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States? This research question prompted district administrators to respond to interview questions about the factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district. Four themes supported the participants’ responses: *building capacity, climate and culture, relationships, and resources*. District administrators acknowledged that teachers leave

when they feel like they do not belong, are not respected, lack the resources and support to do their job, and when the climate and culture do not meet their needs. Whereas school administrators focused on supporting teachers, district administrators focused on supporting principals. District administrators depended on principals to provide information about teacher attrition in individual schools.

### ***Building Capacity***

District administrators expressed building capacity with principals translates into building capacity with teachers and ultimately decreases teacher attrition. District administrators provide professional development, coaching, and support for principals with the expectation that principals will use what they learn to support teachers and student outcomes. DA1 said, “We have monthly professional development seminars with our principals.” DA3 mentioned that they partner with a company that administers teacher engagement surveys to engage teachers' job satisfaction. If the survey results warrant concern about teacher attrition, they bring a retired superintendent from another state to provide coaching sessions or debriefing sessions with principals. The retired superintendent works with the teachers collectively or individually based on needs to interpret their survey results and use the results to make decisions for school improvement. During the coaching sessions, they discuss strategies and professional development to mitigate the challenges addressed in the survey responses. The district administrator admitted this was provided in a previous district and is not implemented in the rural district in this study.

In addition, district administrators have procedures to support incoming teachers, such as mentoring and induction, linked with statutory mandates. DA3 revealed,

We have an induction and a mentoring program in this district because the state guidelines require that. So we provide induction for our novice teachers, initial contract teachers, regardless of whether it is induction one, two, or three, and then our annual formative teachers.

DA2 expressed the need for additional training and support for new teachers to support their acclimation into being teachers. DA2 claimed, “What I learned from my personal experiences is what they teach you in college is not necessarily what you see in the classroom in your first year.” DA2 also emphasized job training or job-embedded professional development for new teachers. DA2 state, “We have professional development geared towards them and their needs—job-embedded PDs for those first-year teachers.”

District administrators also acknowledged the teacher shortage. A teacher shortage makes it difficult to replace teachers when they leave. DA1 declared, “There's a teacher shortage out there. So it's not like we're just trying to get rid of folks because we don't have people to replace them.” One of the participants shared a story about attending the fall graduation ceremony at one of the local universities, and only one graduate received a degree in education. The participants believed that we have to build capacity and keep the teachers we have. DA2 said, “Even if they're not so great, you still want to enhance or build them up.” When marginal veteran teachers require extra assistance, they are placed on an improvement plan. DA1 stated, “We had a couple of teachers who

needed an improvement plan because some teachers need guidance to get better.” District administrators provide training and support for new teachers, but principals are responsible for supporting veteran teachers. DA3 stated, “Support for marginal veteran teachers is handled at the school level.”

### ***Climate and Culture***

District administrators identified categories of climate and culture as a supportive environment. The participants shared that teachers want to stay in a positive, supportive environment. DA2 said, “You have to create that culture in an environment that wants the teachers wishing to stay regardless of how bad it may get because of the environment and the climate.”

District administrators supported establishing a family-oriented environment that is conducive to learning. DA2 revealed,

I found out that if you create that environment in your school, kind of like a family environment, because just like with families, you may disagree, you may argue. But, still, you're staying together at the end of the day because you are family.

Another aspect of a supportive environment is letting your teachers know that they are valued. The participants identified that teachers leave when they are not valued. DA2 asserted, “The key to keeping teachers engaged and in the profession is to make them feel valued. Because if someone doesn't feel valued, they're not going to stay.” DA1 shared a story about an experience with a teacher wanting to leave because she wasn't feeling valued. DA1 stated,



I was just on the phone this past week with an educator that is a veteran educator, and she was saying, "I think this is just going to be it for me. I don't know if I can continue doing this. The district probably wants some younger fresh blood here." So I just spent time speaking with her helping her understand that we appreciate the experience you bring to the table. But, until it is time for you to go, we want everything you have. So I listened, first of all, to her and let her get it out. Then reiterate to her and reaffirm that she is who our kids need.

Providing opportunities to solicit feedback from teachers can make them feel valued. District administrators expressed that they expect principals to solicit input from teachers through survey responses. DA3 stated, "Authentic feedback from teachers is invaluable for principals to make changes within their building that they may or may not be aware of."

### ***Relationships***

The participants expressed that teachers leave when they do not feel connected; therefore, establishing relationships is invaluable. DA1 declared, "I've been reading what they're saying about leaving, and most of them were due to either personal health reasons with their families or feeling that disconnect." DA1 revealed,

I found out that most people quit because they felt disconnected or isolated and didn't feel supported by the administration. Once they get connected in the communities, schools, and parents, they'll have a better reason to stay. The love of teaching gets most people into teaching, but having someone and something to share it with helps them stay.

District administrators indicated a strong belief that principals influence the climate and culture in their schools; therefore, district administrators' practices focused on principals. DA3 stated, "Some teachers leave because of their relationships with the administration. Maybe the relationship is not as positive as they would like for them to be." DA1 revealed, "So a few things that we do is encourage our principals to make sure that their school's climate and culture are conducive to people wanting to come to work.

School administrators identified strategies to build positive relationships and retain teachers while district administrators discussed strategies to support administrators. DA3 revealed, "Coaching sessions and debriefing sessions are scheduled individually with principals to discuss the results of the teacher engagement survey." DA2 said, "Making sure that to the best of their ability, that they're helping their staff members." DA1 stated,

And so I think for us, we try to support and develop our principals so they can help build their teachers if that makes sense. Because if the principals don't know what is available, they're not going to know what to do for their teachers. If the teachers don't know what to do, they're not going to know what to do for the kids.

### ***Resources***

In their comments, district administrators mentioned human resources and time as resources. Teachers are supported by district administrators who offer human resources. "Also, we have instructional coaches in every building," DA2 explained. "We have literacy coaches, we have CTs, which are geared towards our science and math." The participants explained that they ensure principals know the resources and tools available

to support teachers. DA1 stated, “I try to make sure that my principals understand their resources to help their teachers.”

Time is considered as being available with an open-door policy and enabling time for teachers to do their duties. They want their principals and district administrators to be available and visible. "Having that open-door policy for administrators," DA3 explained, "so that teachers feel comfortable that administrators are seen as resources rather than adversaries." DA1 declared, “So we try our best to ensure that we're always readily available, give them things to help them understand you're not alone, provide them with that space to talk, and then help them know that it's okay not to know.” The district provides time for mentors to support teachers. District administrators understand that teachers serving as mentors need time to work with their mentees while fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. District administrators shared that they compensate teacher leaders for serving as a mentor.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to establish trustworthiness. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained, “Trustworthiness is the degree to which you, as a researcher, can have confidence in your sources as well as the methods used to gather your sources” (p. 189). Ravitch and Carl (2021) declared that the study’s rigor is determined by its trustworthiness or credibility.

### **Credibility**

Credibility or internal validity is how the data and data collection tools are used in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity were

used to ensure credibility. Participants were informed that their willingness to participate was voluntary, and they could withdraw consent during the data collection or data analysis process. Their rights were shared in the Leadership Consent Form and the self-designed interview protocol at the beginning and end of the interview.

Member check was used to ensure credibility. The participant's experiences and ideas were accurately depicted by audio-recording the interview, transcribing the audio, and coding the data. A copy of the transcript was emailed to the participant after the interview for member check. The participants were allowed to review their transcripts to determine if their words matched their intended expression. The participants could revise the transcript to accurately capture their thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and experiences. The participants were satisfied with their transcribed interview responses and did not request changes.

Triangulation was another strategy used to ensure trustworthiness. I used first and second-cycle coding to code the data. The transcription program also provided a summary of key terms and the transcriptions based on the audio recordings. The summary of key terms was a list of words that frequently occurred throughout the individual transcripts. The key summary of terms and the first and second-cycle coding were compared for similarities between identified words.

Reflexivity is an integral part of qualitative research due to the risk of bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I maintained a reflexive journal to minimize bias. I also recorded notes on the interview protocol to capture my thoughts during and after the interview. After each interview, I reflected on the interview and considered how the experience

could influence future interviews. The interview protocol ensured consistency throughout the different interviews.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is when the researcher can apply or transfer the information to a broader context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This qualitative case study is transferable because of the details used to explain the problem, purpose, research questions, research method and design, participant selection, setting, data collection, and data analysis. The elements of the study are aligned and can be replicated.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to stability of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I created a rationale for the study, ensured alignment, used three administrators not associated with the investigation to review the interview protocol to ensure validity, and triangulated the data between the data sources. During the data analysis process, I aligned the interview questions to the research questions and followed the data collection process outlined in chapter 3 of this study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to confirming the qualitative data because we cannot separate ourselves from reality (Burkholder et al., 2020). Our reality is based on our experiences and can unintentionally cause bias. I achieved confirmability by explaining the researcher's role, triangulating the data, and conducting external audits.

## Summary

Teacher attrition can be a challenge for any school or district administrator in rural school districts. This qualitative case study aimed to explore K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to the high rates of teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Five school administrators and three district administrators participated in the study, providing their perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools.

In a rural school district in the southeastern United States, school administrators highlighted rural challenges. District administrators identified relationships. School and district administrators recognized building capacity, climate and culture, and resources as factors contributing to teacher attrition. School administrators admitted that they did not know what to do about rural challenges such as the long commute, housing, and isolated areas but realized that these are reasons teachers leave. District administrators declared that teachers leave when they do not feel a sense of belonging, and relationships are a means of ensuring that everyone feels connected.

Although building capacity, climate and culture, and resources were determined as factors contributing to teacher attrition by both school and district administrators, their perspectives about the factors differed. School administrators focused on building capacity with teachers, whereas district administrators focused on building capacity with principals and new teachers. The participants agreed that increasing capacity necessitates continual professional development and on-the-job training. School administrators defined climate and culture as relationships, discipline, value and respect, voice,

environment, and workload. Still, district administrators were solely focused on providing a supportive environment for climate and culture. Finally, resources consisted of time for school and district administrators, but school administrators also identified support as a resource while district administrators identified human resources.

Chapter 5 will begin with an introduction that restates the purpose and nature of the study. Then, using the conceptual framework as a guide, I will analyze the study and explain how or if it will advance knowledge in the field. After that, I will go over the study's limitations and provide some recommendations. Finally, before I wrap up, I will discuss the influence of positive social change and end with a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative case study aimed to learn about K-12 administrators' perspectives on the factors contributing to high teacher attrition rates in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The study was designed as a qualitative case study, inviting five school administrators (principals) and three district administrators to draw on their own experiences to understand the factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools. This research study was built around two research questions aimed at school and district administrators. First, the K-12 administrators participated in a virtual semistructured interview. Second, I used interview questions to extract K-12 administrators' opinions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools. The interview questions were designed to enable K-12 administrators to reflect on their personal experiences to understand the factors that lead to teacher attrition in rural school districts. As a result of the study, the findings among school and district administrators were *building capacity, climate and culture, and resources*. In addition, school administrators identified *rural challenges* while district administrators emphasized *relationships*. Overall, the key findings may help K-12 administrators in rural school districts reduce teacher attrition and increase retention.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The conceptual framework used to explain the findings of this qualitative case study was Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs human motivation theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory of human motivation is utilized in school settings to encourage employees in the workplace. Maslow developed this theory based on the belief



that people acquire human motivation when their five-tier hierarchy of needs is met. The ultimate goal is to become self-actualized. *Physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization* are the five levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the literature review validated this study's findings. According to K-12 administrators, factors contributing to teacher attrition were lack of adequate preparation and support, unsupportive environment, limited fiscal and human resources, not belonging, and rural challenges. Rural challenges consisted of inadequate housing, long commutes, and isolated areas, and a lack of fiscal and human resources. Low compensation, increased workload, job satisfaction, and working environment are all variables that contribute to teacher attrition, according to the literature (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2019; See et al., 2020; With, 2017). Holmes et al. (2019) revealed teachers depart for various reasons, including a lack of respect, student behavior, and district policies. Based on Maslow's motivation theory, teachers may not be motivated to stay if they do not receive appropriate support to improve their job performance and student progress, work in a positive, supportive environment, and feel valued or connected. They may also leave due to rural areas' long commutes and solitude. When we build capacity, create a good, supportive climate and culture, give resources, address rural difficulties, and build relationships, I believe we can reduce teacher attrition and enhance teacher retention. Furthermore, the results of this study supported the findings of the literature review and verified the conceptual framework.

***Research Question 1***

RQ1 inquired: What are K-12 school administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States? The main themes arose from the research question: *building capacity, climate and culture, resources, and rural problems*. These themes are connected to the conceptual framework and literature review.

**Building Capacity.** The category of teacher efficacy led to the development of building capacity. Administrators believed that instructors were not effectively prepared or supported by their program to succeed during their first few years of teaching, which led to teacher attrition. In addition, teachers and administrators in rural areas have limited access to professional development opportunities, decreasing growth potential (McConnell et al., 2021). Administrators recognized the need for PLC, professional development, job-embedding training, induction, and teacher mentorship programs to support incoming teachers. In an interview, a teacher applicant inquired about the type of training and support provided for new instructors, according to an administrator. Opoku et al. (2020) indicated teachers in rural schools need relationships and opportunities for growth for teacher retention. In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, building capacity allows for forming relationships.

**Climate and Culture.** Several categories such as *building relationships, environment, rewards, not valued, voice, and workload* formed culture and climate. Building relationships and environment relate to Maslow's love and belonging needs. A factor contributing to teacher attrition is teachers feeling like they do not belong, are not

connected, or do not have job satisfaction. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) explained teacher attrition was low in schools where teachers reported satisfactory working conditions. Building relationships and promoting positive, supportive environments motivate teachers to stay.

The words "*rewards*," "*not respected*," and "*voice*" all refer to the need for esteem. Respect is Maslow's esteem need. According to the findings of the study, teachers are driven to leave when they do not feel valued and respected. Holmes et al. (2019) identified lack of respect as a factor contributing to teacher attrition. Administrators conduct surveys and recognize teachers' work performance to show instructors that they are valued and respected and encourage them to stay.

Workplace stress is a real possibility. Due to the high demands of the job, many teachers develop burnout (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Stress is linked to teacher turnover and increases job dissatisfaction (Farmer, 2020). (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Stress has an impact on one's physical and emotional well-being. A teacher's mental health might be affected by stress (Farmer, 2020). Stress obstructs the ability to meet Maslow's physiological needs.

**Resources.** Support and time are examples of resources. The study findings revealed a need for support and time to meet the job's duties. Support consists of administrative support and support from colleagues, including reading and instructional coaches. Support also aligns with Maslow's love and belonging need.

**Rural Challenges.** Rural challenges consist of adequate housing, long commute, and isolated areas in rural communities. In addition, teachers in rural schools may face

challenges such as working in a high-poverty area, low pay, limited amenities, and geographic isolation, contributing to teacher attrition (Azano & Stewart, 2016). Maslow's first need is physiological needs, which comprise our basic needs such as food, water, and shelter. Inadequate housing in rural communities would challenge teachers to meet their basic needs residing in a rural community. As a result of insufficient housing, teachers commute from surrounding areas.

### **Research Question 2**

RQ2 inquired: What are K-12 district administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States? Four themes supported the participants' responses: *building capacity, climate and culture, relationships, and resources*. These themes relate to the conceptual framework and the literature review.

**Building Capacity.** Whereas school administrators focused on building capacity with teachers, district administrators concentrated on building capacity with principals and new teachers. District administrators viewed building capacity as providing professional development for principals and mentoring, induction programs, and professional development for new teachers. McConnell et al. (2021) declared that teachers and administrators in rural areas have limited access to professional development opportunities, decreasing growth potential. DeFeo and Tran (2019) explained that rural administrators face the challenge of providing professional development for new teachers. Building capacity also offers the opportunity to form relationships. One factor contributing to teacher attrition is a feeling of not belonging.

Building relationships supports Maslow's love and belonging need, but it may also improve the teacher retention rate.

**Climate and Culture.** District administrators perceived climate and culture as a supportive environment. Based on their responses, teachers leave when they do not feel supported by their administrators or colleagues. District administrators declared that administrators need to create an environment where teachers will want to stay, and climate and culture begin at the point of hire. Young et al. (2017) exclaimed administrators establish a positive culture that promotes teaching and learning. Maslow's loving and belonging needs suggest that teachers are motivated to stay when they feel connected and build relationships. Establishing a positive, supportive environment may be conducive to teachers feeling connected and developing a sense of belonging.

**Resources.** *Time* and *human resources* are factors that district administrators list as factors for teacher attrition. District administrators expressed that it is the district administrator's responsibility to provide human resources such as reading and instructional coaches, mentors, and interventionists to support teachers and students. Unfortunately, low funding is one of the most significant challenges for rural school districts (Lavalley, 2018). Without adequate funding, the district may not be able to provide the human resources needed to support teachers and students. Time consists of administrators being available when needed. Providing the resources required for teachers to meet Maslow's love and belonging needs.

**Relationships.** District administrators confessed that teachers leave when they do not feel connected or have a sense of belonging. Teachers build resiliency when accepted

(Morettini et al., 2020). Building relationships is vital to meeting Maslow's love and belonging needs.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were three limitations to this study, similar to all case studies. The limitations were limited representation, risk of bias, and the volume of data. First, although the study was intensive, the study had a limited representation of eight K-12 administrators employed in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Additional comments from K-12 administrators from other rural districts may have been added. Next, while bias can occur in any research approach, the likelihood of bias in a qualitative case study increases when the researcher is present. I work in the rural school district that was studied, but I did not interview any of the administrators with whom I oversee. The third limitation was the volume of data. There was a lot of information gathered from the participants. The depth of analysis may have been influenced by the vast amount of data to be analyzed in a short amount of time. I recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them using a transcription program. The information was organized in a spreadsheet, and I created a code book to aid with data analysis. To reduce the possibility of bias, I employed credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to ensure trustworthiness.

### **Recommendations**

This qualitative case study explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to the high rates of teacher attrition in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. My recommendation is that K-12 administrators conduct

more research into the effects of Maslow's hierarchy of needs on teacher attrition in rural schools. Relationships are a significant element leading to teacher attrition, according to K-12 administrators. Morettini et al. (2020) explained that teachers build resiliency when accepted. Opoku et al. (2020) indicated teachers in rural schools need relationships and opportunities for growth to consider returning to the job. My first recommendation is to explore the implications of fostering healthy, supportive relationships between teachers and administrators. My second recommendation is to study the effects of climate and culture on teacher attrition. My third recommendation is to explore the advantages of rural schools and teacher retention.

### **Implications**

This qualitative case study can lead to positive social change by reducing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention in rural school districts. With an emphasis on building positive relationships between teachers and administrators, establishing a climate and culture conducive to teachers wanting to stay, and building capacity by offering professional development to enhance student achievement, teacher attrition in rural schools may be reduced. The study has implications for decreasing teacher attrition, promoting teacher retention, improving teacher effectiveness, and increasing student achievement. The equitable learning opportunities and resources may improve the opportunities for students to graduate with the necessary skills for college or the workforce. Furthermore, the pupils will be able to be productive citizens who contribute to the growth of their community. The study is significant and can contribute to positive social changes.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, rural school districts face substantial teacher attrition rates, particularly in the southeastern United States. (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Attrition among teachers is a threat to student progress (Sutcher et al., 2019). This study explored K-12 administrators' perceptions of factors contributing to the high teacher attrition rates in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs motivation theory provided a conceptual framework for this study, allowing researchers to understand better how the components identified in the research contribute to teachers quitting. As a result of the study, the findings among school and district administrators were *building capacity, climate and culture, and resources*. In addition, school administrators identified *rural challenges* while district administrators emphasized *relationships*. After further analysis, teacher attrition in rural schools could be reduced by emphasizing strong relationships between teachers and administrators, creating a climate and culture that encourages teachers to stay and increasing capacity through professional development to improve student achievement. Reducing teacher attrition may potentially enhance teacher effectiveness and ultimately increase student achievement.



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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Principals

Date:

Time:

Interview Code #:

Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	<p data-bbox="586 764 1003 795">Good Morning/Good Afternoon!</p> <p data-bbox="586 837 1430 1310">I am Michelle McDonald. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your participation in this research study on factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools is critical to the study's success. It will help us understand why teachers leave, how to support teachers experiencing teacher attrition, and ultimately improve teacher retention, student achievement, and student outcomes.</p> <p data-bbox="586 1352 1430 1824">Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. The interview will last approximately one hour. Although you have provided consent, you can still decide not to participate at any time during the process. If I ask a question that you do not want to answer or decide that you do not wish to continue, let me know, and I will stop the interview. I will immediately destroy all of your information and properly discard it. I will audiotape the</p>



	<p>interview and take notes. I will share a copy of the transcript and my notes to review, make corrections, or clarify any of your thoughts to ensure that I capture what you want to say. This study may be published in the publication, but I will not use your name, the name of your school, or the name of our school district in this study. I will make every effort to maintain confidentiality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any questions?</li> <li>• Are you ready to begin?</li> </ul>
Interview Question #1	What does teacher attrition mean to you?
Interview Question #2	What are some factors that cause teachers to leave?
Interview Question #3	As a principal, share an experience with teacher attrition in rural schools.
Interview Question #4	Tell a story about a time when you supported a teacher experiencing teacher attrition in a rural school.
Interview Question #5	What are some things in place at your school to increase job satisfaction?

Interview Question #6	What is in place at your school to help teachers relieve stress and prevent burnout?
Interview Question #7	What are some of your ideas to decrease teacher attrition and increase teacher retention in rural schools?
Closing	Thank you for your time and participation. I appreciate your willingness to be a part of my student and provide your perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools. Do you have any questions for me? Within the next week, I will give you a copy of the interview transcript for your review. You may make any changes to the transcript that you feel are necessary to accurately capture your thoughts, ideas, perspective, and experiences. Again, thank you!

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol for District Administrators

Date:

Time:

Interview Code #:

Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	<p data-bbox="586 764 1003 795">Good Morning/Good Afternoon!</p> <p data-bbox="586 837 1430 1310">I am Michelle McDonald. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your participation in this research study on factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools is critical to the study's success. It will help us understand why teachers leave, how to support teachers experiencing teacher attrition, and ultimately improve teacher retention, student achievement, and student outcomes.</p> <p data-bbox="586 1352 1430 1824">Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. The interview will last approximately one hour. Although you have provided consent, you can still decide not to participate at any time during the process. If I ask a question that you do not want to answer or decide that you do not wish to continue, let me know, and I will stop the interview. I will immediately destroy all of your information and properly discard it. I will audio-tape the</p>

	<p>interview and take notes. I will share a copy of the transcript and my notes to review, make corrections, or clarify any of your thoughts to ensure that I capture what you want to say. This study may be published in the publication, but I will not use your name, the name of your school, or the name of our school district in this study. I will make every effort to maintain confidentiality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any questions?</li> <li>• Are you ready to begin?</li> </ul>
Interview Question #1	What does teacher attrition mean to you?
Interview Question #2	What are some factors that cause teachers to leave?
Interview Question #3	Share your experience with teacher attrition in rural schools in your district.
Interview Question #4	Tell a story about a time when you supported a teacher experiencing teacher attrition in a rural school in your district.
Interview Question #5	What systems or structures are in place to support new teachers in your district?

Interview Question #6	What systems or structures are in place to support struggling teachers in your district?
Interview Question #7	What are some things in place to support principals who have teachers experiencing teacher attrition?
Interview Question #8	What are some of your ideas to decrease teacher attrition and increase teacher retention in rural schools?
Closing	Thank you for your time and participation. I appreciate your willingness to be a part of my student and provide your perspectives on factors contributing to teacher attrition in rural schools. Do you have any questions for me? Within the next week, I will give you a copy of the interview transcript for your review. You may make any changes to the transcript that you feel are necessary to accurately capture your thoughts, ideas, perspective, and experiences. Again, thank you!