



VCU School of Education

Shoring Up the Leadership Pipeline

Cultivating Administrators in a Small, Rural School District:
Effective Identification, Selection, Development, and Retention Practices

Judy Anderson, Renee Honaker, Elizabeth Sanders, Carol Walsh



...rural school districts and communities can take positive steps toward the creation of systems that will promote principal stability which, in turn, will promote success for their most important asset—their children.



8.9M

50%

35%

Purpose of Study

- Explore how small, rural division school leaders are chosen, mentored, and retained
- Identify best practices for increasing school leader retention rates



Research Questions



How do small, rural, school divisions identify and cultivate teacher leaders and develop them into building administrators?



What are the components of an effective hiring process for teachers and administrators in a small, rural division?



How do you develop effective administrators in a small, rural school division?



How do small, rural school divisions retain effective administrators?

Data Collection & Analysis

Literature Review ○.....○

Research focused on best practices for identifying, hiring, developing, and retaining leaders in rural school divisions

Hiring Documents ○.....○

Review of hiring process and documents

Professional Development/Mentoring Plans ○.....○

Collection and review of school division plans

Focus Groups & Individual Interviews ○.....○

Interviews and focus groups, guided by research questions and designed to explore stakeholders' perceptions

Limitations



- Small Number of Participants
- Concerns Regarding Anonymity
- Focus Group Dynamics
- Relevance in Context of Pandemic and Political Climate

Literature Review on Rural Schools


- Complexity of the Problem
- Lack of Research
- Common Challenges
- Best Practices



Findings



Recruit & Grow



- Leadership Pipeline
- Leadership Attributes
- Leadership Opportunities
- Teacher Leader Mentoring



We're not growing our own people...we don't have a program...to strengthen people so that they can move up into these leadership roles. We're working ourselves to death...every time someone comes in, we start this process and cycle over again from scratch, trying to train people.





We are a small county...We need to get all of this written down. If we are in a fiery car crash tomorrow, nobody is going to know.



Recruit & Select



- Human Resources Focus
- Formalized Documentation
- Advertising Expansion
- Internal Candidates' Growth
- Selection Criteria Alignment
- Barrier Recognition

Train & Mentor



- Barriers to Administrator Support
 - Size of Division
 - Lack of Formalized Programs
 - Geographical Location



The superintendent has started doing some scenarios for professional development - training scenarios with both admin, both assistant principals and principals.





I mean, just being a principal...
that's kind of a lonely role...
but especially when you are
the only one of who you are in
a county...



Retain



- Strengths
 - Sense of Community
 - Professional Development
- Barriers
 - Compensation
 - Mentoring & Support
 - Isolation
 - Workload & Processes
 - Lack of Data

Recommendations



Recommendations

Recruit

- Evaluate current advertising practices
- Expand to increase candidate pool
- Showcase strengths of division
- Growth opportunities
- Tuition reimbursement

Develop a recruitment plan outlining processes and responsibilities

Create a structured grow-your-own leadership plan to expand candidate pool and increase retention

Grow

- Define and develop leadership pathways
- Establish culture that promotes staff transition to leadership roles
- Create a tracking system
- Provide leadership opportunities



Recommendations

Recruit

- Increase internal candidates' potential
- Mock interviews
- Leadership experiences

Institutionalize formal processes and procedures for candidate selection

Select

- Align selection criteria to division's leadership vision
- Develop consistent and equitable interview processes

- Form diverse interview committees
- Identify, document, and communicate desired leadership attributes



Recommendations

Mentor

- Provide and evaluate teacher leadership opportunities
- Ensure confidentiality
- Partner with other districts
- Utilize university and state cohorts to provide mentoring opportunities

Execute a formal mentoring plan that provides support within and across divisions

Implement a professional development plan that increases principal effectiveness and sense of efficacy

Train

- Provide on-the-job professional development
- Allocate time to collaborate
- Schedule on-going, job-specific professional development
- Utilize scenarios and problem-solving sessions



Recommendations

Mentoring

- Formalized Program
- Selection of Mentors
- Across and within division

Establish and communicate systematic strategies that promote a supportive work environment and job satisfaction

Relationships

- Supportive relationships with central office staff
- Positive peer relationships
- Positive school climate

Compensation

- Competitive Salaries

Work Environment

- Formalized work processes
- Manageable workload



Questions

