How to Recruit and Retain Teachers and Other School Leaders in Hard-to-Staff Rural and Small School Districts

A Toolkit Including Procedures for Implementing a Systematic Approach for Attracting, Selecting, Appointing, Socializing, and Retaining Teachers and Other School Leaders in Hard-to-Staff Rural and Small School Districts

Written for SERVE by

Charles Ahearn, Ed.D.
Director of Special Initiatives
The SERVE Center at
the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Atlanta, Georgia

Hobart Harmon, Ph.D.
Education Consultant
Timberville, Virginia

John R. Sanders, Ed.D.
JRS Consulting
Greensboro, North Carolina

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SERVE
™
Improving Learning through
Research & Development

Produced by

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Written for SERVE by

Charles Ahearn, Director of Special Initiatives, SERVE
Hobart Harmon, Education Consultant
John R. Sanders, JRS Consulting

Design Team Members

Charles Ahearn, Director of Special Initiatives, SERVE
Steven Bingham, Director, Wake Leadership Academy
Kathleen Mooney, Evaluation Specialist, SERVE
Jerry Natkin, Senior Research Scientist, SERVE
John R. Sanders, JRS Consulting

Edited by

Christy Casbon, Editorial Consultant
Donna Nalley, Director of Publications, SERVE

Designed by

Jane Houle, Graphic Designer, SERVE

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Acknowledgments

Introduction and Rationale

Recruiting and retaining teachers and other personnel continues to be one of the most critical issues in rural schools (Harmon, 2003a). The need for teachers in the U.S. is expected to grow significantly as large numbers of teachers retire, many taking advantage of early retirement incentives (Heller, 2004). In searching for ways to meet new federal law requirements outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 regarding teacher quality, small and rural school districts will face pervasive recruitment and retention challenges as they struggle to compete in the teacher labor market (Southeast Center for Teacher Quality, 2004).

Research informs us that having a high-quality teacher is the single most important factor influencing student achievement (The Southeast Center for Teacher Quality, 2004). We must be concerned more than ever with hiring the best teachers and other school leaders, particularly if we want to close the achievement gap. Keeping teachers is also a major challenge toward this end (Harmon, N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, 2004). And keeping teachers and other school and district leaders requires a school district to make schools a better place for students to learn and professionals to work (Scherer, 2003).

Toolkit Development

This toolkit is a response to the needs expressed by superintendents in the Rural School District Superintendents' Network at SERVE, a network of high-performing superintendents form the six-state SERVE region. In a nominal group activity, superintendents cited "recruitment and retention of staff" as their top-ranked issue (Natkin, 2003). SERVE staff relied heavily on the expertise and experience of this network of superintendents and nationally recognized experts in rural education to select the topics and develop the contents of the tools in this systematic approach. Examples of surveys and other documents used successfully in the rural school districts to address teacher recruitment and retention issues also were collected and considered in the development of this toolkit.

As a part of SERVE's quality assurance process, a draft of this toolkit was completed, and a convenience sample of school districts from southeastern states participated in a developmental test. The test was conducted by SERVE staff using structured interviews with superintendents and administrators involved in hiring decisions to elicit their reactions to the toolkit—particularly their perceptions of its utility, value, and likely impact. Interviews were conducted both on-site and by teleconference. Using a different structured interview protocol, staff met with teachers and administrators and others in each district not involved in hiring decisions to learn about their opinions of personnel recruitment and retention in rural areas. Administrators (the likely users of the toolkit) received draft copies in advance of the interviews; teachers (because of the nature of their interviews) did not. Teachers interviewed were selected by district administrators with attention to ethnic and

gender diversity as well as representation from elementary, middle, and high school faculty. Interviewees were instructed that their responses would be reported anonymously and that the reports would be used by the authors of the toolkit to improve the utility, value, and impact of this toolkit.

Toolkit Contents and Use

While many topics are possible, six tools are included in the toolkit on critical areas that will enable small and rural school districts to address their personnel recruitment and retention issues. They are the following:

- ◆ Recruitment Brochure Tool
- ◆ Assessment of Community Resources Tool
- ◆ Applicant Portfolio Review Tool
- ◆ Applicant Interview Tool
- ◆ Personnel Retention Checklist Tool
- ◆ Personnel Exit Interview/Survey Tool

Each tool includes a brief description of its purpose, the premise on which it was developed, and procedures for using it effectively. A school district may choose to use the tools individually or collectively, based on circumstances specific to each district. However, the greatest success in addressing the district's recruitment and retention issues is more likely to occur if all six tools are integrated into district recruitment and retention practices and viewed and used as a system.

Why Use the Tools

School district leaders should consider using the tools in this toolkit if they are seeking answers to the following questions:

- ◆ Do district recruitment materials (e.g., a brochure) include the most appropriate information that best "sells" our rural schools and community to prospective teachers and other school leaders?
- ◆ How can we identify resources in the community that could support our school improvement agenda, especially student achievement in the core academic areas?
- ◆ How can we more effectively screen information from applicants?
- ◆ How can we conduct better interviews of applicants and select those with the greatest chance of being most successful in our school district?
- ◆ Do we know how our district's personnel retention record compares with those of surrounding districts and with those of other districts most similar to ours?
- ◆ How much do we objectively know about why personnel are leaving our school district before retirement?

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Notes

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Purpose, Premise, and Procedures

The purpose of this tool is to provide school district leadership with an "idea guide" for developing a comprehensive brochure that appeals to persons seeking a teaching or other leadership position. The ideas in this tool may be appropriate for use in either a district or school recruitment brochure.

This tool is based on the assumption that the school district will conduct the research and make use of factual information and available state, regional, and national networks to market the school district and schools to prospective candidates. All such information should be placed in an attractive brochure that reveals the desirability of the district as a place to live, teach, grow professionally, and belong.

Use the ideas in this tool to draft a recruitment brochure for the school district and/ or school(s). Consider each heading in the tool and collect relevant, up-to-date facts that, collectively, would set a positive tone and provide a realistic picture of the school district and community.

Observations from school district administrators who have reviewed this tool:

Reflect districtwide strengths such as university partnerships, professional development opportunities, and recruitment incentives such as dedicated use of a laptop (and technical support), tuition support, or opportunity to work on extra-curricular activities. If you are interested in attracting minority candidates, make sure your literature reflects that in photos, partners, names, and stories presented.

Asking a team of new teachers in the district(s) to assist in developing the brochure's contents might provide valuable and up-to-date information. (Be sure to include teachers who are from the local area and teachers who are not. If the school district relies heavily on a targeted list of colleges and universities for recruitment purposes, be sure to include new teachers from these institutions on the brochure development team.) Perhaps consider putting together a traveling recruitment team that includes articulate new and veteran teachers to promote the district—maybe with an accompanying display. Give copies of the brochure to board members, ministers, business people, and others for help in recruiting.

Present the district as a place where you can come for high-quality teaching. Keep in mind that some teachers and their spouses are attracted to a district because it is a great place to live and bring up the kids. (One teacher-interviewee commented, "I came here because this district had the services my child needs, even though I had to take a pay cut.") Assessment of community resources (see Community Resources Tool) could be presented as a service that supports the high quality of teaching in the district.

Change the brochure's contents as often as needed to keep it relevant and responsive to the targeted population of prospective teaching candidates for your rural school district. (For economy, this might be accomplished by using brochure inserts for information that changes often.) Consider using the brochure in combination with a website that could be updated, supported, downloaded, and printed as needs dictate.

A Great Place to Live

Describe the strengths of the small town, rural area.

- Great place to raise a family
- Small town or rural values
- Neighbors who care
- Low crime/safe area
- Outdoor recreational amenities (parks, rivers, mountains, etc.)
- Slower pace of life
- Internet technology access
- Lower cost of living
- Safe highways
- Location (close to ?)

Provide appropriate census data for area, particularly revealing "small town" facts.

A Great Place to Teach

Describe advantages of teaching in a rural school/district.

- Friendliness of small schools
- Small class size
- Respected by community as a professional
- Among highest paid in community
- Few discipline problems
- Few "urban" school problems
- Less bureaucracy
- Opportunity for individualized instruction
- Opportunity to know students and parents well
- Administrative and collegial support

A Great Place to Grow

Describe professional development and leadership opportunities.

- Opportunities for professional development
- Induction program
- Mentoring program
- Opportunity to be a mentor
- Opportunity to lead change efforts
- Opportunity to pursue grants and direct programs
- Opportunity to be heard
- Opportunity for professional practice (innovation)
- Contact with higher education professors
- Support for National Board Certification
- Personalized leadership academy

A Great Place to Belong

Profile facts about accomplishments of people and programs.

- Schools accredited
- Teachers and administrators (and support staff) who have received regional, state, or national recognition
- Teachers holding National Board Certification, advanced degrees
- Students who have been recognized for excellence
- Highly accomplished graduates of the school system
- Recognition of system innovation, such as grants awarded and special programs implemented

School District Profile

Describe vision, mission, or goals of school district. List names of schools in districts, the number of educators, students, etc.

Give website address for school district and individual schools.

Give map profiling district's location, towns, significant amenities.

Program Highlights

Describe the vast array of current educational offerings.

- Pre-K Program
- Art, music, foreign language
- Honor's/Advanced Placement Programs
- Career & technical education
- Dual credit or joint enrollment programs with colleges

Describe extra-curricular activities.

Describe facilities and technology available, especially for teaching.

Employee Benefits

Describe benefits:

- First Year: 13-month prorated salary for beginning teachers
- Signing bonus (for critical fields)
- Teachers retirement
- Major Medical and Hospital Insurance

- Sick leave
- Other group insurance (e.g., life, accidental death and dismemberment insurance, short-term disability)
- Local supplements
- Tax sheltered annuity program
- Dental insurance
- Credit union membership
- Workman's Compensation Insurance and Social Security
- Stipends for completing professional development, including college courses
- State of the art computer network system with high-speed Internet connection and e-mail addresses for all certified staff
- Flexible scheduling (job sharing with benefits)
- Personal leave days for professional development
- Unique "local" benefits district provides

Notes

Purpose, Premise, and Procedures

The purpose of this tool is to enable the school district to develop an up-to-date list of community resources, particularly people, who can contribute their talents in ways that give educators maximum capacity for effectively teaching all students. While the tool may be used for any instructional area, it is specifically designed to address resource needs for improving teaching and learning in the core academic subjects; namely, English/language arts, math, science, and social studies. However, a section for "other instructional areas" is also provided in the tool.

This tool is based on the assumptions that the school has completed or is in the process of completing a planning process that makes available a strategic plan, school renewal plan, school improvement plan, or similar document to users of this tool. A second assumption is that the district will maintain a database of local resources, including people who can teach or assist teachers in their professional roles—people who support teacher beliefs and expectations—and people who believe that supporting excellent public schools is part of their community responsibility.

Completing and updating the assessment of community resources tool is a four-step process.

Step One
A teacher, committee of teachers, or other appropriate persons determine the three greatest needs for improving student achievement in each subject. These should be listed in rank order for each major area in each core academic area. Setting priorities will require a review of the school's improvement or educational plan or other document(s) that reveals teaching and learning needs of the school.
Step Two
The committee of teachers or other school leaders, with parent and community representation, should brainstorm the "people, places, and things" in the community that could serve as a resource for accomplishing the three prioritized needs.
Step Three
Complete the Community Resources for Teaching and Learning form, and attach it to the school's improvement or educational plan.
Step Four
Community resources used by the school should be evaluated periodically based on results achieved in enabling the school to help all students meet achievement standards.

Assessment of Community Resources Tool

Identifying Resources

While the local phone book (both white and yellow pages) can be extremely helpful in identifying resources in your area, members of the PTO, city-/county-planning departments, the chamber of commerce, school volunteers, and placement agencies are other possibilities. School festivals such as a Shakespeare Festival or other activities where the community is involved is another way to tap into community knowledge and talent through getting to know business people, leaders, volunteers from civic organizations, and many talented people involved in community arts groups. If you let these knowledgeable community members know what you're doing and your motivation, many will pitch in and help. Be sure to keep a list of the name, address, and phone number of each contact person and information on how each can or will assist in this endeavor.

Clubs and Civic Organizations

American Legion Post	Rotary
Garden Club	Rotary Club
Kiwanis Club	Women's Club
Knights of Columbus	4-H Club
Lion's Club	Other civic organizations
Masons	

Grass Roots or Citizen's Associations

All local community or countywide organizations
Community centers
Farm or agricultural associations or groups
Local officials, politicians, and leaders
Seniors' groups

Institutions

Cooperative extension service
Local public or private schools, community colleges, and universities
Local volunteer fire department(s)
Parks and town pools
Police officers and other emergency personnel
Public hospitals or clinics
Recreation resources like golf courses or other rural amenities
State or federal agencies
Town, county, or regional libraries

Community-Based Organizations (local or county-wide)

Advocacy groups for environment, safety, drug abuse reduction

Clinics and counseling centers

Domestic violence assistance

Faith-based organizations

Food programs/banks

Housing organizations

Parent-teacher organizations (PTO)

Private Sector

Banks	Farms
Business associations	Local businesses
Chambers of commerce	Real estate agencies

Other populations

Athletes

College students

Ethnic groups

Local crafts people/musicians/artists/dancers/dramatists

Local professional (e.g., doctors, dentists, veterinarians,
  lawyers, pharmacists)

Senior citizens

Youth

Observations from school district administrators who have reviewed this tool:

This tool might be given to principals to implement at the school level. If so, principals could assess their needs first, before the community-wide assessment.

Consider how the PTO and community could help in identifying resources.

This tool could be incorporated into a strategic planning process; perhaps start with a school improvement plan and do the survey for just one subject—science; another use for this tool might be to assess community resources to support the teaching of music, art, coaching—not just the core subjects.

Community Resources for Teaching and Learning
English/Language Arts

Subject/Ranked Needs	People	Places	Things
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			
21.			
22.			
23.			

Community Resources for Teaching and Learning
Math

Subject/Ranked Needs	People	Places	Things
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			
21.			
22.			
23.			

Community Resources for Teaching and Learning
Science

Subject/Ranked Needs	People	Places	Things
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			
21.			
22.			
23.			

Community Resources for Teaching and Learning
Social Studies

Subject/Ranked Needs	People	Places	Things
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
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11.			
12.			
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17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			
21.			
22.			
23.			

Community Resources for Teaching and Learning
Other Instruction Areas

Subject/Ranked Needs	People	Places	Things
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
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19.			
20.			
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22.			
23.			

Purpose, Premise, and Procedures

The purpose of this tool is to facilitate the efficient screening of applications, resumes and other supportive materials submitted by applicants for positions in the school district.

This tool is based on the assumption that the school district seeks to interview only applicants who submit appropriate applications and support materials revealing that they are highly qualified for the position advertised.

The Director of Personnel/Human Services, designee, or assigned reviewer(s) indicates a "yes" or "no" for each item in the checklist. All application materials submitted for a specific position are screened by the same person(s). This completed form is placed in the applicant's file and used in the interview process. In the "comments" section for an item, describe any fact or issue that should be further investigated in the interview. At the end of the form, the reviewer indicates if the applicant warrants an interview. If a review criterion is inappropriate for the school district's employment requirements, mark "NA" (Not Applicable) in the comments section.

Observations from school district administrators who have reviewed this tool:

The checklist might be helpful to use in place of or in addition to the application or file that goes to principals. Sometimes HR loses track of the file and are in the dark; sometimes a principal will go around HR in identifying candidates.

Consider including a writing sample as part of the final interviewing process.

Applicant Portfolio Review Tool

Portfolio Review Checklist

Name _____

Mailing address _____

E-mail _____

Phone number (home)_____ (cell) _____

Position applied for _____

Portfolio Review Checklist

Review Criterion	Yes	No	Comments
1. Submitted required application?			
2. Met submission deadline?			
3. Holds valid certificate or passed Praxis I / II?			
4. Is certificate temporary?			
5. Has certificate in subject(s) needed?			
6. Provided official college transcript(s)?			
7. Provided reference?			
8. Authorized background check?			
9. Has background of experiences (e.g., rural) indicating successful "fit" in our school system and community?			

Recommended for Interview: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Reviewer(s):

    Name   Position   Date

1. _____ _____ _____

2. _____ _____ _____

3. _____ _____ _____

Purpose, Premise, and Procedures

The purpose of this tool is to facilitate the efficient and effective interviewing of applicants.

This tool is based on the assumption that the school district seeks to select highly qualified persons who have the education and experiences that would result in their success and retention as a teacher or other school leader in a small or rural school and community environment.

Use this checklist in interviewing applicants for teaching or other leadership positions in the school district. Follow the interview guidelines criteria when conducting the interviews and rating the applicant. The form is to be completed by the person(s) conducting the interview—preferably two or more persons will conduct the interview, each completing their own form and then summarizing on one form. Signature of interviewer(s) and date of the interview are to be placed at the end of the form. A copy of the applicant's "Applicant Portfolio Review" must be considered in the interview process. The interviewer(s) should particularly attempt to clarify evidence for making a judgment for any item with comments noted on the Portfolio Review Checklist. It is recommended that the scores not be totaled in that various questions have various values.

Interview Guidelines Criteria

The interviewer(s) should use the following criteria when interviewing and recommending personnel for teaching or other leadership positions:
1. Choose the person best qualified for the position, with a view toward suitability for further advancement.
2. Adhere to federal, state, and local laws and regulations regarding equal employment opportunity.
3. Follow procedures that prevent race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, or membership from being a consideration in any employment opportunity.
4. Fill teaching vacancies by upgrading or promoting from within whenever staff members in the school district meet necessary qualifications described in the job announcement.

Observations from school district administrators who have reviewed this tool:

Remember that you determine what and how many questions are asked under each of the categories. (The questions might change depending on the experience level sought.) One district administrator reminded, "We hire the person who is the best fit for the position, not necessarily the one with the highest score."

Also, you can weight items that are more important. For example, you can decide that you are going to double candidates' scores on item 7, at-risk students.

If the five-point Likert-rating-scale (form A) is not to your liking, use one of the alternate forms of the instrument. Alternate form B is pass-fail; alternate form C is high-medium-low.

Applicant Interview Tool

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Applicant Interview Questionnaire (Form A)

Instructions

Form to be completed by interviewer of applicant. Please note the interview guidelines criteria on previous page. Rate each item regarding the degree to which the applicant possesses knowledge and skills appropriate for the position. Use the following rating scale to rate each item: 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Average, 4=Good, 5=Superior, and "?" if you cannot judge. (Items of your choosing can be weighted.)

1. Education Preparation: 1 2 3 4 5 ?

Please explain how your professional education and experiences prepare you to teach successfully or serve in another leadership role in a school district like _____ (school district), especially one that is located in a small town/rural area.

2. Certification: 1 2 3 4 5 ?

Please explain how your areas of certification appear to match the needs of our school district.

3. Persistence: 1 2 3 4 5 ?

Question: Suppose you had a student from a migrant farming family who often missed school, had learning deficiencies, and exhibited minor behavior problems. How would you help this student be successful in the subjects you teach?

4. Organization and Planning: 1 2 3 4 5 ?

Describe how you would arrange a classroom to effectively teach 20 students with various learning styles and with one-half of the students coming from impoverished home circumstances.

5. Values Student Learning: 1 2 3 4 5 ?

Question: If most of the students in a class have rural backgrounds with little reason to value making good grades because few jobs in the area require it, how might you enable them to know your highest priority as a teacher or other school leader is to help them be successful academically?

6. Theory to Practice: 1 2 3 4 5 ?

Question: If you reviewed test scores of students in a class and found they needed extra help in learning a particular topic, how would you select or recommend an instructional "best practice" to help them learn better (i.e., improve test scores)?

7. At-Risk Students: **1   2   3   4   5   ?**

Question: In small schools, you have the best students and the extremely challenged students in the same class. What would be your approach to connecting with the abilities of all the students in a class when teaching a lesson or other activity?

8. Approach to Students: **1   2   3   4   5   ?**

Question: How would you approach solving a problem where the single parent, working mother of a student asked you for help in improving her child's performance academically and socially?

9. Thrive in School Culture: **1   2   3   4   5   ?**

Question: What kind of school culture do you expect to find in a small (or large) rural school? How does this culture affect your effectiveness as a teacher? How would you go about understanding and improving the learning culture in a school?

10. Success as a Teacher: **1   2   3   4   5   ?**

Describe a previous teaching experience where you were very successful in motivating a poor (low-income family) minority student to excel academically.

11. Student Success: **1   2   3   4   5   ?**

Question: If a student had a job to earn money to support the family (i.e., parents, siblings), how would you help the student be successful academically in school? How would you reward such a student for doing his/her best?

12. Thrive in Community Culture: **1   2   3   4   5   ?**

Question: Are there any particular features about our community or rural area that make you interested in a position in our school district? How does the school district and area help you accomplish both your professional and personal career goals?

13. Are there any additional comments you would like to make to help me/us consider your qualifications for the teaching or other leadership position?

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Interviewer(s) Summary Comments: _____

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Interviewer(s) Recommendation (check only one):

☐ Should not be considered, poor applicant

☐ Endorse with reservations, inferior applicant

☐ Should be considered, average applicant

☐ Good first impression, strong applicant

☐ Exceptional potential, outstanding applicant

Name of Interviewer(s)_____

_____

_____

_____

Date of Interview: _____

Applicant Interview Questionnaire (Form B)

Instructions

Form to be completed by interviewer of applicant. Please note the interview guidelines criteria previously stated. Rate each item regarding the degree to which the applicant possesses knowledge and skills appropriate for the position. Use the following rating scale to rate each item PASS, FAIL and "?" if you cannot judge. (Items of your choosing may be weighted.)

1. Education Preparation: PASS   FAIL   ?

Please explain how your professional education and experiences prepare you to perform successfully in a school district like _____ (school district), especially one that is located in a small town/rural area.

2. Certification: PASS   FAIL   ?

Please explain how your areas of certification appear to match the needs of our school district.

3. Persistence: PASS   FAIL   ?

Question: Suppose you had a student from a migrant farming family who often missed school, had learning deficiencies, and exhibited minor behavior problems. How would you help this student be successful in the subjects you teach?

4. Organization and Planning: PASS   FAIL   ?

Describe how you would arrange a classroom to effectively teach 20 students with various learning styles and with one-half of the students coming from impoverished home circumstances.

5. Values Student Learning: PASS   FAIL   ?

Question: If most of the students in a class have rural backgrounds with little reason to value making good grades because few jobs in the area requite it, how might you let them to know that your highest priority as is to help them be successful academically?

6. Theory to Practice: PASS   FAIL   ?

Question: If you reviewed test scores of students in a class and found they needed extra help in learning a particular topic, how would you select or recommend an instructional "best practice" to help them improve?

7. At-Risk Students: **PASS   FAIL   ?**

Question: In small schools, you have the best students and the extremely challenged students in the same class. What would be an approach to connecting with the abilities of all the students in a class when teaching a lesson or other activity?

8. Approach to Students: **PASS   FAIL   ?**

Question: How would you approach solving a problem where the single parent, working mother of a student in asked you for help in improving her child's performance academically and socially?

9. Thrive in School Culture: **PASS   FAIL   ?**

Question: What kind of school culture do you expect to find in a small (or large) rural school? How does this culture affect student and teacher performance? How would you go about assessing and improving the learning culture in a school?

10. Success as a Teacher: **PASS   FAIL   ?**

Describe a previous professional experience where you were very successful in motivating a poor (low-income family) minority student to excel academically.

11. Student Success: **PASS   FAIL   ?**

Question: If a student had a job to earn money to support the family (i.e., parents, siblings), what would you recommend to help the student be successful academically in school? What would you recommend as a reward for a student doing his/her best?

12. Thrive in Community Culture: **PASS   FAIL   ?**

Question: Are there any particular features about our community or rural area that make you interested in a position in our school district? How does the school district and area help you accomplish both your professional and personal career goals?

13. Are there any additional comments you would like to make to help me/us consider your qualifications for the position?

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Rating Summary:

Number of PASS ratings: _____

Number of FAIL ratings: _____

Number of "?" _____

Interviewer(s) Summary Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Interviewer(s) Recommendation (check only one):

☐ Should not be considered, poor applicant

☐ Endorse with reservations, inferior applicant

☐ Should be considered, average applicant

☐ Good first impression, strong applicant

☐ Exceptional potential, outstanding applicant

Name of Interviewer(s)_____

_____

_____

_____

Date of Interview: _____

Applicant Interview Questionnaire (Form C)

Instructions

Form to be completed by interviewer of applicant. Please note the interview guidelines criteria previously stated. Rate each item regarding the degree to which the applicant possesses knowledge and skills appropriate for the position. Use the following rating scale to rate each item: HIGH=Superior, MEDIUM=Average, LOW=Poor, and "?" if you cannot judge. (Items of your choosing can be weighted.)

1. Education Preparation: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Please explain how your professional education and experiences prepare you to teach or perform successfully in another leadership position in a school district like _____ (school district), especially one that is located in a small town/rural area.

2. Certification: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Please explain how your areas of certification appear to match the needs of our school district.

3. Persistence: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: Suppose you had a student from a migrant farming family who often missed school, had learning deficiencies, and exhibited minor behavior problems. How would you help this student be successful in the subjects you teach?

4. Organization and Planning: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Describe how you would arrange a classroom to effectively teach 20 students with various learning styles and with one-half of the students coming from impoverished home circumstances.

5. Values Student Learning: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: If most of the students in a class have rural backgrounds with little reason to value making good grades because few jobs in the area requite it, how might you enable them to know your highest priority as a school professional is to help them be successful academically?

6. Theory to Practice: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: If you reviewed test scores of students in a class and found they needed extra help in learning a particular topic, how would you select/recommend an instructional "best practice" to help them learn better (i.e., improve test scores)?

7. At-Risk Students: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: In small schools, you have the best students and the extremely challenged students in the same class. What would be your approach to connecting with the abilities of all the students in a class?

8. Approach to Students: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: What approach would you recommend to solve a problem where the single parent, working mother/guardian of a student in a class asked you for help in improving her child's performance academically and socially?

9. Thrive in School Culture: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: What kind of school culture do you expect to find in a small (or large) rural school? How does this culture affect your effectiveness as a school professional?

10. Success as a Teacher: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Describe a previous teaching or supervisory experience where you were very successful in motivating a poor (low-income family) minority student to excel academically.

11. Student Success: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: If a student had a job earning money to support the family (i.e., parents, siblings), how would you help the student be successful academically in school? What would you recommend as a reward for such a student for doing his/her best?

12. Thrive in Community Culture: HIGH   MEDIUM   LOW   ?

Question: Are there any particular features about our community or rural area that make you interested in a position in our school district? How does the school district and area help you accomplish both your professional and personal career goals?

13. Are there any additional comments you would like to make to help me/us consider your qualifications for the position?

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Rating Summary:

Number of HIGH ratings: _____

Number of MEDIUM ratings: _____

Number of LOW ratings: _____

Interviewer(s) Summary Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Interviewer(s) Recommendation (check only one):

☐ Should not be considered, poor applicant

☐ Endorse with reservations, inferior applicant

☐ Should be considered, average applicant

☐ Good first impression, strong applicant

☐ Exceptional potential, outstanding applicant

Name of Interviewer(s)_____

_____

_____

_____

Date of Interview: _____

Purpose, Premise, and Procedures

The purpose of this tool is to provide a basis for school district officials to audit their policies and procedures as vehicles for improving employee retention. The items in the Retention Checklist come from the interviews with teachers, principals, superintendents, and other school officials involved in the development of this toolkit as well as research reviewed on the topic.

This tool is designed based on the assumption that school officials periodically review their policies and procedures to see what can be done to improve the retention of their teachers and other employees. The Personnel Retention Checklist is a tool to aid school officials with that review.

At least once a year, the superintendent and key staff should individually complete the checklist and then meet as a group to discuss their answers. This discussion can be used as important input to decisions about how to improve retention in the coming school year through improved policies and practice.

Retention Checklist Tool

Personnel Retention Checklist

Note: *The following is a recommended script or written introduction to the personnel retention checklist.*

As you know, we are trying to improve our teacher and other school leader recruitment and retention activities. In an effort to move that agenda forward, I would like you to consider the following Retention Checklist. You may want to begin by reading over the five sets of questions in this Checklist. The answer column provides a place for you to record your response (Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory) and to note any outstanding examples that confirm your response. Bring your responses with you to the next staff meeting so that we can compare notes and factor any conclusions that come from our discussion into our planning for next year. Your examples may provide us with fodder for improving our recruitment efforts. Thank you.

	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Example
Professionalism and Growth			
Do we encourage the professional growth of our teachers and other staff?			
Do we encourage employees' use of up-to-date research-based practices?			
Do we treat all employees as the professionals they are?			
Do we help pay for advanced degrees?			
Do we have partnerships with nearby higher education institutions where our professional staff can get advanced degrees?			

	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Example
Do we provide teacher and administrator mentors with adequate time to support their assigned new teachers?			
Do our new employees express the belief that they have a bright future here?			
Are we providing new and veteran employees adequate incentives to stay in the district?			
Do we give our employees preference for key jobs in the district?			
Do we encourage our employees to be active in the community?			
Do we help employees find satisfactory housing in the community?			
Site-Based Decision Making			
Do we invite and encourage our employees to work on school improvement issues?			
Do we emphasize how much we value collegiality in this district when we talk with employees?			

	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Example
Are we responsive to employees' suggestions about improving the instructional program?			
Do we remind ourselves and staff that every hire is critical and can affect our culture positively or negatively—especially in our small, rural school district?			
Support and Tools for Effective Teaching			
Do we maximize teaching/learning time?			
Do we minimize non-instructional duties like bus supervision?			
Do we maximize planning time?			
Do we offer teacher aides or "floaters" who can help with paperwork?			
Do we provide special support to lateral entry personnel?			
Effective Communication and Consistent Discipline			
Do we explain changes in the instructional program to those affected?			
Do we explain decisions that cause changes in assignments?			

	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Example
Do we let employees know that administration is working on community-wide problems such as drugs and violence?			
Do we monitor the use of consistent discipline across central office staff and across principals?			
Offer Students an Education that Meets High Standards			
Do we emphasize our plans for offering more honors and advanced placement courses?			
Do we emphasize our plans for decreasing the number of dropouts?			
Do we acknowledge the need for correcting the shortcomings in our facilities?			
Do we remind ourselves that teachers and other school leaders and board members enroll their children and grandchildren in this school district and that they want the best for those children?			

Other Important Factors That Contribute to Retention

◆ Factor one _____

◆ Factor two _____

Notes

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Purpose, Premise, and Procedures

The purpose of this tool is to facilitate efforts of school district leadership in collecting information from personnel who exit the school district. This information can be used to inform decisions regarding recruitment and retention.

This tool is designed based on the assumption that the school district seeks to use information from those who exit the school district to improve working conditions and inform future recruitment and retention decisions that could reduce turnover and increase employee satisfaction. Such information is critical as satisfaction, retention, and related productivity have a significant influence on overall student success and school performance.

This tool can be used as an interview (phone or face-to-face) or as a survey (e-mailed or sent via U.S. Postal Service). You will note that, after the interview/survey form, there is a sample cover letter as well as sample introductory remarks that could be used at the beginning of an interview done via phone.

Observations from school district administrators who have reviewed this tool:

Consider offering the exiting professional a choice between versions: "Please fill this out, or, call me and we'll do it together." A deadline might motivate respondents to complete the questionnaire. If the respondent has not returned the form (or called) in 15 days, for example, perhaps a follow-up call might be part of the standard operating procedure. Another strategy would be to include the tool on the school website, with proper attention to confidentiality of responses.

The key is to establish a standard operating procedure so that the exit interview will not be threatening to recipients.

A final observation: as you might expect, some respondents will be more straightforward than others when completing this interview/survey.

Exit Interview Tool

Exit Interview/Survey

It is our practice to gather information from departing employees. Information you provide will enable the school district to better meet the needs of our teachers, other professional staff, students, and our community. Please answer each item. Your candid responses are very important to us. We will treat all information you provide as *strictly confidentia*l.

1. What grade level(s) did you teach or what position did you hold at the time of leaving our school district?
_____

(Circle all that apply.)   Pre-K   K   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12   Adult classes

2. How many years did you work in our school district? _____

3. At what school did you teach or which position did you hold ? _____

4. How many years did you work at a school? _____ At the district level? _____

5. Why did you leave the district? (Check all that apply.)
   ☐ Better salary
   ☐ Better benefits package
   ☐ Better opportunity for professional advancement
   ☐ Better parent and community support for student achievement
   ☐ Better personal fit with community's culture
   ☐ Better social and cultural opportunities in the area
   ☐ Better housing available in area
   ☐ Better job opportunity for spouse
   ☐ Better higher education opportunities for my children
   ☐ Better job opportunities for my children
   ☐ Pursue advanced education

   ☐ More flexible salary schedule with compensation for performance of extra duties
   ☐ Fewer instructional demands (e.g., teaching multiple subjects or grade levels)
   ☐ Too great an emphasis on teaching to the text
   ☐ More reasonable teacher certification standards

☐ More supportive superintendent

☐ More supportive Board of Education

☐ Less scrutiny of my job by parents and community members

☐ Less local politics and bureaucracy influencing teacher's effectiveness

☐ Dissatisfaction with supervisor

☐ Dislike or unsuited for assigned duties

☐ Family/personal reasons

☐ Health or physical condition

☐ Career opportunity in private sector

☐ Lack of personal privacy in a small rural community

☐ Desire to live in a place more like where I grew up

☐ Retirement

☐ Relocation

☐ Temporary position ended

☐ Reduction in force due to downsizing/declining student enrollment

☐ Other (specify): _____

6. Please rate your *degree of satisfaction* with the following characteristics while employed in *your last position* with our school district. For each characteristic, place an "**X**" in the appropriate column. For any item rated "Very Dissatisfied," briefly explain why in the comments box or in the white space below.

Characteristic	5 Completely Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	3 Fairly Well Satisfied	2 Some- what Satisfied	1 Very Dissatisfied	Comments
1. District-level leadership and decision making						
2. School-level administrative support						

Characteristic	5 Completely Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	3 Fairly Well Satisfied	2 Some- what Satisfied	1 Very Dissatisfied	Comments
3. Faculty input to decision making						
4. Curriculum offered to students						
5. Quality of teaching in this school						
6. Quality of student counseling in school(s)						
7. Behavior and discipline of students						
8. Teacher expectations for student achievement						
9. Parent involvement to support student achievement/ success						
10. Community involvement to support student achievement/ success						
11. Classroom facilities and instructional support materials						

Characteristic	5 Completely Satisfied	4 Very Satisfied	3 Fairly Well Satisfied	2 Some- what Satisfied	1 Very Dissatisfied	Comments
12. Professional duties and responsibilities assigned						
13. Extracurricular activities beyond classroom						
14. Salary and compensation for position						
15. Opportunities for professional development (continuing education)						
16. Workplace environment						
17. Community as place to live						

7. What did you *like most* about the last position you held in our school district?

8. What did you *like least* about the last position you held in our school district?

9. If the opportunity arises in the future, would you consider employment again in our school district?

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Would you recommend our district as a place of employment to a friend?

☐ Yes ☐ No If no, why not?_____

11. If you have accepted employment elsewhere, please describe briefly the type of employment and location:

Occupation	Position Title	Private or Public Sector	Job Location (State)

12. If you are going to seek employment in another school district, will you be in the same type of position that you held in our school district?　☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Does not apply.

13. What one thing needs to be improved the most in our *school district*?

14. What one thing needs to be improved the most in the *school* where you last taught?

Name: _____　Phone:_____
(**Note:** Your **name is not required**, but we would appreciate your name and phone number in case we would like to follow up and obtain additional feedback from you.)

**THANK YOU for helping us better understand why teachers might leave our
school district and, consequently, improve our teacher recruitment and retention efforts!**

Exit Interview: Sample cover letter for mailed survey

The following is an example of a cover letter to be sent to the exiting professional by the superintendent or human resources official. *Note the sentence stating that a "stamped, return envelope is provided."*

Enclose the Exit Interview for respondent to fill out and return.

Dear _____:

We understand that you will soon be leaving employment with our school district. While the memories are still fresh in your mind, we would like to collect your impression of your time here. It will take only a few minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire. We have enclosed a stamped return envelope.

We will treat your responses as strictly confidential. Your opinion will help us improve our efforts to recruit and retain the best educators for our school district. Thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

_____(school official)

Exit Interview: Sample introductory remarks for phone interview

The following is an example of introductory remarks that could be made to begin a phone interview using the Exit Interview (preceding). Recommendation: Complete items 1–4 of the Exit Interview before you call so you can confirm that information with the respondent.

Use the remaining Exit Interview questions as a guide.

For item 6: "Using a 1–5 scale with 5 being the highest, please rate your degree of satisfaction with the characteristics of this school district."

This is _____ with the _____ school district. I understand that you are leaving our school district. While the memories are still fresh in your mind, we would like to collect your impressions of your time here. It will only take a few minutes for me to ask the questions and record your responses. We will treat any information you provide as strictly confidential. Is this a good time to talk?

(If not, make an appointment.)

If the party is not willing to talk, check here _____.

Dr. CHARLES AHEARN is currently the Director of Special Initiatives for SERVE. In this position he facilitates the Rural School District Superintendents' Network at SERVE. This is a group of superintendents of small and rural school districts in a six-state region including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina who were instrumental in identifying the recruitment and retention of personnel as their number one need. Ahearn was formerly the Director of Publications for SERVE and has held other positions in education including senior high school principal and Director of the Center for Advanced Interdisciplinary Leadership Development and Renewal in the Florida Department of Education.

Dr. HOBART HARMON is a private consultant operating out of Timberville, Virginia. Harmon is currently involved in several evaluation studies sponsored by the National Science Foundation. These studies give him a close-up perspective of how mathematics and science are being taught in rural schools participating in NSF grant programs. As well, Harmon is working on evaluation studies of smaller learning communities in rural areas, innovative teacher education programs, and performance management systems for education cooperatives. He is also involved in the work of the National Rural Education Association and is a frequent contributor to the rural education literature.

Dr. JOHN R. SANDERS has worked extensively with rural schools and districts across the country. He began his career as a high school teacher and media consultant in Missouri and Wisconsin. Following the completion of his doctorate in education at Indiana University, Sanders joined the federally sponsored Regional Educational Laboratory Network where much of his work focused on implementing and evaluating school improvement strategies in rural schools across the country. Sanders recently retired from his Laboratory CEO position at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. However, he maintains an active consulting practice and is recognized for his work on behalf of the National Rural Education Association.

About the Authors

About SERVE

The SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, under the leadership of Dr. Ludwig David van Broekhuizen, is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. The organization's commitment to continuous improvement is manifest in an applied research-to-practice model that drives all of its work. Building on research, professional wisdom, and craft knowledge, SERVE staff members develop tools, processes, and interventions designed to assist practitioners and policymakers with their work. SERVE's ultimate goal is to raise the level of student achievement in the region. Evaluation of the impact of these activities combined with input from stakeholders expands SERVE's knowledge base and informs future research.

This rigorous and practical approach to research and development is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that support educational improvement and increase student achievement. In the last three years, in addition to its basic research and development work with over 170 southeastern schools, SERVE staff provided technical assistance and training to more than 18,000 teachers and administrators across the region.

The SERVE Center is governed by a board of directors that includes the governors, chief state school officers, educators, legislators, and private sector leaders from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

SERVE's operational core is the Regional Educational Laboratory. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast is one of ten Laboratories providing research-based information and services to all 50 states and territories. These Laboratories form a nationwide education knowledge network, building a bank of information and resources shared and disseminated nationally and regionally to improve student achievement. SERVE's National Leadership Area, Expanded Learning Opportunities, focuses on improving student outcomes through the use of exemplary pre-K and extended-day programs.