EDUCATORS’ VALUES AND EDUCATOR TURNOVER IN RURAL COMMUNITIES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Angela Dawn Michaels
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how former educators of a rural school district in the Northeastern Appalachian Mountain Range in the United States described their values and their perceptions of the values of the rural school district where they formerly worked. Eight participants were interviewed when data saturation was reached. Research questions attempted to reveal similarities and differences in the values of former educators and their perceptions of the Woodstown community’s values. The guiding theories of this study were sociocultural theory, cognitive dissonance theory, and culture of poverty theory. Sociocultural theory supported the connection between environment, cognition, and behavior, while cognitive dissonance theory helped elucidate how dissonance between environmental factors and cognition might lead to a specific behavior such as leaving the rural school setting. Culture of poverty theory provided a framework for understanding the relationship between the demographics and culture of the rural community and the perceived educational values of said community compared to the educators’ educational values. A review of the literature indicated a need for research in the area of rural education. Data collection was triangulated using semi-structured interviews, participant surveys, focus groups, and documents such as school board meeting minutes and published reports of those meetings, student achievement scores, and demographic information. A seven-step phenomenological data analysis process was used to identify common themes and perceptions. Three themes were uncovered from the data collection including (a) the development of positive interpersonal relationships, (b) the pursuit of lifelong growth and learning, and (c) the desire for a certain level of security and stability. Educator values were found to differ from rural community values which sometimes led to turnover.

Keywords: rural, values, education, sociocultural theory, educator
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family. Mom and Dad, where would I be without you? You have picked me up off the ground more times than I can count and held me up when I couldn’t stand on my own. You have supported my decisions. You have taken care of me and my babies when I couldn’t do it myself. I hope that I can be as good of a parent to the boys as you have been to me. I would never have accomplished this task without your love and support.

Owen and Douglas, you are my whole world. I don’t know who I would be if I didn’t have you. You keep me going when things are hard. You make me laugh when I’m down. You are both growing up to be such mature young men, and I couldn’t be more proud of you. Thank you for your patience while I worked; I know it wasn’t always easy! I will make it up to you!

Shasta and Shawna, your support and encouragement and complete faith in my ability to do this has kept me going even when I thought about giving up. You may have had the hardest job of all! Thank you for reading and listening and rereading and listening some more, all without complaint or criticism. I am blessed to have you as sisters.

Finally, I dedicate this work and my life to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through the strength and courage that He has given me, I have completed this work. I pray for His guidance as I continue my journey.
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I would like to thank the participants of this study for their time and honest reflections. It was an honor to have the opportunity to hear your stories. Your dedication as educators to your work and those you work with is an inspiration.

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List of Abbreviations

Advanced Placement (AP)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
National Council for Accreditation of Colleges of Teacher Education (NCATE)
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Office of Rural Health Policy (OHRP)
Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA)
Woodstown School District (WSD)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter one reviews the background for this inquiry which is the historical struggle of rural education in America and the challenge of sustaining qualified educators in rural areas. Educator values were found to play a role in educator turnover. This chapter discusses the role of the researcher; as an educator in a rural school district for the past 16 years, I am interested in how educator values impact educator turnover. The problem and purpose of this study are defined. The problem is that educator turnover may impact student achievement. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how former administrators and teachers of a school district, Woodstown School District, in the Northeastern Appalachian Mountain Range in the United States, describe their values and their perceptions of the values of the school district where they formerly worked. Chapter one also reviews the significance of this study and the research questions. The study is significant because it sought to describe an aspect of educator turnover, values, that has not been thoroughly investigated in the literature, and the results may be useful for decreasing educator turnover. Four research questions were developed to guide this hermeneutic phenomenology. This chapter concludes with definitions for key terms.

Background

Contemporary compulsory public education in the United States faces extreme controversy; this controversy partially results from the number of stakeholders involved, including parents, students, educators, politicians, business owners, and college/university administrators, all of whom have substantiated and unsubstantiated views on the purpose and value of education (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014; Tekniepe, 2015). Educator turnover in rural school districts has been shown to correlate with the differing expectations between educators
and rural communities (Yarrow, Ballantyne, Hansford, Herschell, & Millwater, 1999). Furthermore, research indicates that “values” play an important role in the lives of educators, the school community, and pedagogy (Sunley & Locke, 2010). Values are difficult to measure and definitions vary from source to source. As such, research tends to neglect the possibility that conflicting educator and community values could play a role in educator turnover. Pantic and Wubbels (2011) posited, “teacher . . . beliefs about values are often left out of the efforts . . . because of the conceptual ambiguity and the complex question of justifiability of inculcating certain values as educationally worthwhile” (p. 451). This study sought to (a) understand how former educators of Woodstown School District in the northern Allegheny Mountains described their personal values, (b) how those educators perceived the values of the community where they no longer work, (c) if there was tension between those values, and (d) if tension existed, how, if at all, it impacted the educators’ decisions to leave Woodstown School District.

The term “rural communities” often recalls a nostalgic picture of farmland, forests, and dirt roads; research characterizes “rural communities” as poor, uneducated, and unemployed (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). Rural culture and urban culture are on opposite ends of a continuum; yet, research on rural education has lagged research on urban education, leaving a gap in the literature (Collinson, 2012; Court, 1991; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008; Pajares, 1992; Yarrow, et al., 1999). Thus, when educators are essentially prepared to teach in urban settings because that is where educational research has focused, rural students lose in terms of achievement and opportunities (Theobald & Howley, 1997; Thompson, 1990). Educators are unprepared to meet the challenges of rural education (Yarrow, et al., 1999).

Bandura’s sociocultural theory supports the assumption that rural educators and rural communities face challenges that play out in different ways than those in urban schools and
communities (Bandura, 2012). Further, Lewis’ (1975) culture of poverty theory and Payne’s (1995) continuing investigation of this theory clarify rural community values, bringing to light the potential for opposing values between educators and rural community members. Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory highlights how conflicting values between educators and rural school districts may lead to increased educator turnover. Pantic and Wubbels (2011) indicated, “Critics argue that the teaching profession cannot maintain the same social distance as other professions” (p. 457). This would suggest that educators must somewhat conform to the social culture and values of the community wherein they work or potentially face conflict. Uncovering the stated values of educators and their perceived values of the rural community could assist educational reformers, curriculum designers, teacher educators, and school administrators in rectifying the high educator turnover and low student achievement in rural areas.

**Situation to Self**

As an educator in a rural school district, I have observed significant educator turnover; I have also observed educators and community members asserting certain values but taking actions which were contradictory to those values. Although I have chosen to remain in a rural district, I was interested in why educators have left rural districts and if that decision was related to values and beliefs. Using an axiological constructivist approach, I came to understand the values of teachers and administrators who left the Woodstown School District (WSD), their perception of the values of Woodstown community, what role values played in their decision to leave the district, and the relationship between espoused values and actual actions of educators, school board members, and community members (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2015; Miller, 2013; Pantic & Wubbels, 2011).
Problem Statement

The problem was that students face significant challenges to their educational achievement, including teacher and administrator turnover (Miller, 2013; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). Specifically, the WSD has faced problematic teacher and administrator turnover. For example, between 2008 and 2015, the single superintendent position has been filled by three full-time superintendents and one interim superintendent; the current superintendent recently accepted a job in another school district. Four principals have filled the high school principal position in the past eight years; of the seven principal positions in the district, only one individual has consistently remained in his position since 2008. The student services department has seen five directors during this time. Recently, the district also lost their director of food services, director of human resources, and director of maintenance. The director of public relations resigned in 2012, and the school board dissolved the position. Additionally, a review of the school board meeting minutes revealed teacher turnover was more significant at the secondary level than the elementary level, with a 4:1 ratio (Woodstown School District, 2008; Woodstown School District, 2009; Woodstown School District, 2010; Woodstown School District, 2011; Woodstown School District, 2012; Woodstown School District, 2013; Woodstown School District, 2014; Woodstown School District, 2015). Clearly, administrators and secondary teachers in the Woodstown School District contributed to statistics on educator turnover.

Gathering the perspectives of the educators who have left was needed to identify mitigating factors of teacher and administrator turnover. To focus the study on one possible factor rather than all possible factors for educator turnover, I chose to investigate the personal values of educators and their perceptions of the values of community members to determine if a
conflict existed and played a role in rural educator turnover. Sunley and Locke (2010) suggested that there is “little empirical evidence to support current understanding about the values that teachers hold, and how these fit with the organizational values of the school in which they work” (p. 421). There was no research giving a voice to educators’ values and how those values intersect with rural community values (Sunley & Locke, 2010).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how former administrators and teachers of a school district, Woodstown School District, in the Northeastern Appalachian Mountain Range in the U.S. described their values and their perceptions of the values of the district where they formerly worked. I utilized interviews, documents, surveys, and focus groups to collect data. A “value” is understood as an “enduring belief” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 16) that leads to actions and behaviors which are “personally and socially preferable” (p. 16). The theories that guided this study were Bandura’s sociocultural theory (2012), Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory, and Lewis’ (1975) culture of poverty theory. These theories supported the connection between educator values and the perceived values of rural communities.

**Significance of the Study**

This study sought to build upon the literature relating to educator turnover, education in the rural community, and the values and beliefs of educators and rural communities (Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Robinson, 2004; Court, 1991; Devine, Fahie, & McGullicuddy, 2013; Pajares, 1992). An abundance of research exists on educator turnover (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karellitz, 2012; Moore & Johnson, 2015; Ost & Schiman, 2015). Additionally, research acknowledges that various educational
stakeholders hold different values (Yarrow, et al., 1999). However, little research is readily available that brings together aspects of rural education, the values and beliefs of educators and community members, and educator turnover. This study sought to add to this dearth of empirical evidence using a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences, as related to values and beliefs, of educators in rural environments.

Tirri (2011) suggested “values and purposes can be identified as important aspects of school pedagogy” (p. 164). Studies that investigate possible links between rural community culture, values and beliefs, and educator turnover are necessary to improve the state of education in rural communities, and further, to improve the climate of poverty that exists in rural areas. Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service (2014) states, “[The] degree of poverty and degree of rurality are linked. More than 35 percent of the people living in completely rural counties live in high-poverty counties and more than 26 percent live in persistent-poverty counties” (para. 6). Poverty can partially be overcome by education and high-quality teachers (Strange, et al., 2012); thus, investigating if and how values and beliefs impact educator turnover in rural school districts can guide solutions to the problem.

The results of this study are applicable in the practical, day-to-day decisions of those governing rural school districts, potentially lowering problematic teacher turnover and increasing student achievement. If educators leave rural school districts due to discrepancies with the community concerning values and beliefs, then stakeholders can begin to negotiate the discrepancies more readily. The results of this study both support and are supported by Bandura’s (2012) sociocultural theory, which suggests that a bidirectional relationship exists between environment, behavior, and cognition, and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory, which suggests that dissonance between beliefs, attitudes, and values drives decisions. If
Bandura’s theory holds true, then the educator’s perception of the environment, as impacted by the community’s values, likely played a role in the educator’s decisions.

**Research Questions**

Literature revealed both the importance of educator values and the lack of research in this area. Four questions have been developed to guide this research:

1. How do former educators (participants) of Woodstown School District describe their values?

   Research shows that educator attitudes, beliefs, and values have not been made explicit (Court, 1991; Pajares, 1992; Willemse, Lunenberg, and Korthagen 2008), yet are important to student achievement (Pantic & Wubbels, 2011; Sunley & Locke, 2010). Thus, I first attempted to establish the tacit values of the participants as Question (1) suggests.

2. How do participants describe their perception of the values of the Woodstown community?

   To find the intersection between educator values and the perceived rural community values, I used academic literature, documents, and the data collected from interviews with former educators to identify the perceived values of the rural community (Carlson, 1990; Fowler, 2012; Holloway, 2002). Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory suggests that environment impacts decisions.

3. How do participants’ values compare with the perceived community values?

   Question (3) is also guided by Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory, particularly triadic reciprocal determinism wherein cognition, behavior, and environment bidirectionally impact one another. This question helped identify the similarities and differences in values between the community and the educators. For example, if the community and school
environment changed, then perhaps the educator behavior, in this case, leaving the school district, may have changed or vice versa.

4. What reasons do participants identify for leaving and how, if at all, do those reasons relate to their perception of attitudes and actions?

Question (4) was supported by Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory which posited that individuals prefer to maintain cognitive balance in their beliefs, attitudes, and values (Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, 2006). When the balance is upset by opposing information, the individual may experience dissonance leading to behaviors or actions to alleviate the dissonance, such as leaving the problematic environment. If the educator’s perception of the school or community environment was negative, then the subsequent behavior may have been leaving the position for an environment with less perceived dissonance.

**Definitions**

1. **Belief**- “understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (Richardson, 1996, p. 103).

2. **Rural**- any area not included in the definition of urban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

3. **Self-efficacy**- “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994, p. 1).

4. **Urban**- 50,000 or more people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

5. **Value**- an “enduring belief” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 16) that leads to actions and behaviors which are “personally and socially preferable” (p. 16).
Summary

This chapter reviewed the background for the study, the role of the researcher, the significance of the study, the problem and purpose statements, and the research questions. The background for this study relates to the historic struggle of rural school districts, specifically, the problem of educator turnover. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how former administrators and teachers of a school district in Northeastern Appalachian Mountain Range in the United States described their values and their perceptions of the values of the district where they formerly worked. This study was significant because educator turnover may negatively impact student achievement. Four research questions were developed to guide the study. Finally, key terms were defined.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter two reviews the theoretical framework for this study and synthesizes the related literature. Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory supported an understanding of the values and beliefs that educators hold and the subsequent behaviors and actions of those educators in comparison to the perceived values of the rural school community. A review of the literature revealed significant research in educator turnover; educator turnover has been attributed to a wide variety of factors including low salary, high stress, and lack of autonomy (Battle & Looney, 2014), but very limited research exists on both rural education and the impact of educators’ and community’s values and beliefs on educator turnover. This gap in the literature must be filled to improve the quality of education for rural school students. Numerous veins of research were pursued to reach the heart of the topic at hand, including educator values, educator preparation programs, rural communities, education within the rural community, rural community values, and the costs associated with educator turnover.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory investigated the factors which impact the beliefs and behaviors of individuals (Bandura, 1991, 2012). For example, Bandura (1991, 2012) suggested that as individuals experience social interactions, these interactions influence their subsequent behavior both consciously and unconsciously, leading the individual to an understanding or representation of their environment. As the social interactions integrate with previous schema, individuals develop cognitive categories which determine their actions. These cognitive categories include response-outcome expectancies, self-efficacy perceptions, and standards for self-evaluation.
Further Bandura determined that reciprocal triadic determinism, or the interaction between environment, behavior, and cognition, bidirectionally impact one another. Essentially, an individual’s beliefs and values can both impact and be impacted by his or her environment and actions. The purpose of this research, which was supported by Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory, was to determine how the values and actions of specific educators interacted with the values and actions of the rural community and the result of that interaction.

A tacit element of Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person’s belief in his or her ability to produce certain outcomes based on certain actions and behaviors (Bandura, 2012); self-efficacy functions on a continuum, from strong belief in one’s abilities to weak belief in one’s abilities. Regarding self-efficacy, people tend to avoid tasks which they are less comfortable with; in other words, their personal beliefs about competence impact their behaviors (Pajares, 1996). Bandura (2012) posited, “Efficacy beliefs are strengthened by reducing anxiety and depression, building physical strength and stamina, and correcting the misreading of physical and emotional states” (p. 13). In their study of teacher self-efficacy, Ross, Cousins, and Gadalla (1996) asserted that teachers’ reported behaviors and teachers’ actual behaviors are not the same. When a state of dissonance occurs, self-efficacy and ability to perform effectively may decline. For example, the increased anxiety associated with conflicting educator values and community values may decrease performance. Even if a person holds certain values, his or her actions may not match those values when in a state of dissonance.

Bandura (as cited in Pajares, 1996) found that self-efficacy is lowered in situations where significant barriers, outside of the individual’s control, impede performance. For example, student self-efficacy may be negatively influenced if a school did not have effective teachers or
lacked resources students perceive as necessary for their education (Bandura as cited in Pajares, 1996). This example can relate to educators working in rural schools as well; when support or resources are lacking due to limited finances or certain beliefs and values held by the community, educators, even those with high self-efficacy, may find themselves unable to reach a necessary level of satisfaction with their work and choose to leave the district or the teaching profession.

Applying the framework to this study indicated that as teachers and administrators experience rural school environments, they made judgements about their self-efficacy and evaluated their standards and beliefs about education against those of the rural school environment. In response, the educators fell on a continuum of aligning and assimilating their standards and beliefs with those of the rural community, actively working for or against the standards and beliefs of the rural community (perhaps with the goal of changing the environment) while remaining in the environment, or leaving the school for an environment that more closely mirrored their standards and beliefs. To increase the self-efficacy needed to feel personal satisfaction, a level of consonance between values and actions was necessary.

In cognitive dissonance theory, individuals prefer to maintain cognitive balance in their beliefs, attitudes, and values (Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, 2006). When cognitive balance was upset by contradictory information, the individual experienced discomfort, or dissonance. Leon Festinger, the primary theorist, suggested four types of dissonance: post-decision dissonance, forced compliance dissonance, maximized dissonance/consequent attitude change, and social support system dissonance (Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, 2006). Festinger (1959) stated,
One example of such a situation comes about if pressure is put on a person to overtly do or say something which is contrary to what he really believes. If the pressure, in the form of promised rewards or threatened punishment, is sufficient to force the person to engage in overt behavior, he will then be uncomfortable about the discrepancy between what he has done and what he privately believes. One way in which he may reduce this discomfort and justify to himself what he has overtly done is to change his private belief so that it actually agrees more closely with his overt behavior (p. 389).

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1959) can be applied to research on educator turnover when values and beliefs are taken into consideration as a possible factor in the decision to stay in or leave the teaching profession.

**Related Literature**

To understand the impact of values and beliefs on educator turnover, a common understanding of values and beliefs must be developed. Pajares (1992) stated, “. . . researchers have avoided so formidable a concept” (p. 308), “belief does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation” (p. 308), and belief is “so steeped in mystery that it can never be clearly defined” (p. 308). Beliefs are not well-defined, and the literature certainly reveals a wide array of definitions for the term (Campell, et al., 2004). While Aspin (2007) indicated a broad definition of values that included opinions, purposes, judgments and more, Bektas and Nalcaci (2012) narrowly defined values as “the mental representation that shapes many different attitudes affecting an individual’s reaction to a certain situation” (p.1244). Conversely, Collinson (2012) argued that attitudes are related to values, but are not the same. Richardson (1996) defined beliefs as “understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (p. 103). Court (1991) explained that values are a set of beliefs, or a “collective term for those
principles that one holds dear and that one sees as having worth” (p. 389), but at the same time suggested that values and beliefs are not interchangeable terms. Rather, values are normative, but beliefs may or may not be. Court (1991) suggested,

Most values could be stated as beliefs (“I believe that physical punishment of children is wrong”), but the reverse is not the case (“I believe that the sun is a star in the Milky Way” and “I believe that he will return home safely”) (p. 389).

Rokeach (1968), however, used values and beliefs interchangeably when he defined two types of values: terminal and instrumental. Terminal values are ideals, while instrumental values are perceptions about behaviors and beliefs that society deems acceptable (Rokeach, 1968). Rokeach (1968) defined an instrumental value as one that relates to a “mode of conduct” and is “personally and socially preferable,” while a terminal value relates to an “end state of existence” that is “worth striving for” (p. 17). Clearly, an understanding of values and other associated terms must be agreed upon before the gap on the relationship between educator values and educator turnover can be effectively closed.

This study relied on Rokeach’s (1968) understanding of value, belief, and attitude. Rokeach (1968) defined a value as an “enduring belief” (p. 16) that leads to actions and behaviors which are “personally and socially preferable” (p. 16). When a value has become internalized, it is used to make judgements and guide behavior, as well as assert influence over others (Rokeach, 1968). In this definition, the term belief is a kind of precursor to a value; it is an initial, guiding idea that evolves into a permanent value if it tests to be true. Rokeach (1968) defined attitude as “an organization of several beliefs focused on a specific object (physical or social, abstract or concrete) or situation” (p. 16). Therefore, an attitude about X may be internalized and perceived as true, thus developing into a specific value, Y; value Y then leads to
Z actions or behaviors. When these definitions were applied to Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural and self-efficacy theories and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory, I found a discrepancy between value Y and action Z, as a result of triadic determinism, which lead to dissonance and lowered self-efficacy.

**Definition of Teacher Turnover**

Levy, et al. (2012) defined teacher turnover in a district as “(a) a departure from the district for any reason, (b) a change of status from teaching to a non-teaching position *within* the school, and (c) a long-term leave” (p. 110). Additionally, Levy, et al. (2012) defined teacher turnover at the school level as “a teacher exit from a school—moving either within or outside of the school district—because each school departure represents disruption and associated costs for students, remaining teachers, and building administrators” (p. 110). For rural school districts, “the greatest concern is the loss of high-quality teachers who have the potential to provide substantially higher quality classroom education to American students” (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010, p. 23). Borland and Howson (1999) found that educator shortages and turnover are greater in rural schools possibly because of accountability measures that are meant to improve success rates for low-performing students but unintentionally steer high-quality educators away from at-risk schools (Watlington, et. al, 2010). Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) found that achievement declined with constant replacement of educators. A catch-22 is created when high-quality educators leave or avoid districts with low-performing students, but low-quality teachers and constant teacher replacement lead to low-performing students.

**Teacher Preparation and Teacher Values**

Teacher preparation programs are charged with preparing future teachers for the classroom; yet, these programs may not be preparing teachers for all teaching environments,
particularly the rural school setting. Teachers, through their education and experiences, are expected to develop certain beliefs and values that will guide their decisions in the classroom.

Theobald and Howley (1997) found that universities, and consequently their teacher preparation programs, focus on preparing students to meet “cosmopolitan needs” (abstract) such as “industrialization, urbanization, and, today, globalization” (p. 6). Philosophical questions such as “What does it mean to be educated?” and “What is the purpose of education?” are overlooked in teacher preparation programs (Theobald & Howley, 1997). Rather than healthy debate, the answers to such questions seem to be decided in favor of global economy, potentially eroding rural beliefs and values (Theobald & Howley, 1997). Pre-service teachers should experience rural school districts first hand, receive education and practice in strategies specifically for rural students, and fully understand the idiosyncrasies of rural communities (Azano & Stewart, 2015) to be prepared to teach in such environments.

Educators are expected to understand and comply with certain values, beliefs, and attitudes established by state education departments, teacher unions, and other educational organizations and further emphasized by teacher preparation programs. For example, “professional dispositions” are defined as “professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities” (National Council for Accreditation of Colleges of Teacher Education, 2015, definition); Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, and Wood (2010) recommended a focus on these dispositions as defined by the National Council for Accreditation of Colleges of Teacher Education (2002):

(a) We believe that all students can learn.

(b) We value and respect individual differences.
(c) We value positive human interactions.

(d) We exhibit and encourage intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm about learning, and a willingness to learn new ideas.

(e) We are committed to inquiry, reflection, and self-assessment.

(f) We value collaborative and cooperative work.

(g) We are sensitive to community and cultural context.

(h) We engage in responsible and ethical practices.

The beliefs and values of the educator, as above, should “address the nature, scope, and ends of education, and the system of schooling used to pursue our educational ends” (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011, p. 575). However, beliefs, values, and attitudes cannot simply be taught or assessed. In an extensive review of the literature and research on teacher beliefs, Pajares (1992) found numerous research-supported assumptions to consider when studying how humans develop their beliefs. For example, humans develop beliefs at a young age, and beliefs tend to self-perpetuate and persevere even considering contradictory evidence (Pajares, 1992).

Furthermore, Pajares (1992) suggested that humans develop a “belief system” (p. 325) composed of all their beliefs, many of which are cultural in nature.

Educator values and beliefs can be influenced by family and friends, life experiences, teachers and role models, experimental or accidental actions, professional development, colleagues, religion or philosophy, reflection, other careers, imaginative life, trauma, inquiry, government, and multicultural experiences (Collinson, 2012). Additionally, educators value honesty and confidentiality (Bektas, 2012). Yet, a teacher’s beliefs about an educational topic are difficult to separate from their concurrent beliefs about society, race, and so on (Pajares, 1992); therefore, an understanding of educational beliefs within the educator’s larger system of beliefs
is important (Pajares, 1992). Furthermore, many educators may find it difficult to put their values into words (Court, 1991; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2008); educators must make their values explicit and match their actions to their values if they are to find consonance within their belief systems. A teacher might hold specific values but under certain circumstances in the classroom, he or she might contradict those values (Court, 1991); humans often have contradictory, subconscious, and inconsistent values (Schutz, 1967). Devine, Fahie, and McGillicuddy (2013) suggested that research explore the difference between educators’ beliefs and their actions. To assess if teachers are meeting dispositions such as National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (2015), teachers’ words, actions, and behaviors must be considered as a whole (Pajares, 1992); this broad overview of teacher values takes into account Bandura’s (1978) theory of triadic reciprocal determinism.

Sharing common values within a school is more important than the personal values of individual educators; although this argument rings true, it may also lead to the dissonance that makes educators leave rural communities (Bektas, 2012). If an educator does not espouse the attitudes, values, and beliefs appropriate in a specific setting, it is possible for the educator to make a gestalt shift, or change in perception, but this is rare and not necessarily beneficial to the educator or students (Nespor, 1987).

**Educator Turnover and Values**

Educator turnover is a well-researched and documented phenomenon in education (Collinson, 2012; Court, 1991; Pajares, 1992; Pantic & Wubbels, 2011; Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2011; Sunley & Locke, 2010; Vartuli, 2005; Yarrow, et al., 1999). Educator turnover has been attributed to many factors including low salary, high stress, lack of support from administrators, lack of preparation and knowledge from college courses, and disempowerment
(Battle & Looney, 2014; Ingersoll, 2001). Educators indicated guilt when students underachieve, uncertainty about how to improve student achievement, and increased challenges in the classroom such as pressure to perform, poor student attendance, and lack of discipline as further factors leading to burnout and teacher turnover (Devine, et al., 2013).

Grayson and Alvarez (2008) cited both individual and contextual factors leading to educator burnout and turnover. For example, individual factors might include gender, age, and unrealistic personal goals and expectations; while contextual factors might include “power struggles with school administration” (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008, p. 1351) and “federal laws impacting teacher responsibilities” (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008, p. 1351). Educator turnover, because of burnout, increases the cost of schooling, which particularly impacts low income areas (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Although numerous sources acknowledge the beliefs and values of teachers as a factor impacting burnout and turnover, little research has been conducted in this area (Collinson, 2012; Court, 1991; Pajares, 1992; Rokeach, 1968; Vartuli, 2005; Yilmaz & Dilmac, 2011).

Specific to administrators, political conflict with the school board has been a major factor in rural superintendent turnover, including power struggles within the board and micromanaging by the board (Tekniepe, 2015). Limited finances and resources negatively impacted rural superintendent tenure (Tekniepe, 2015). School boards have traditionally used one-year superintendent contracts as a form of control; this leads to lack of commitment on the parts of both the board and the superintendent (Tekniepe, 2015). Multi-year contracts would increase leadership and stability but also decrease board power (Tekniepe, 2015), a factor which is important to rural communities that feel disenfranchised by the government. If school board members receive the training and knowledge to make effective decisions, the relationship
between the superintendent and board might improve and the likelihood of turnover may decrease (Tekniepe, 2015). However, when trust does not exist and school boards micromanage the day-to-day internal functions of the school through power, advantage, and influence, rural superintendent turnover may increase (Tekniepe, 2015). Although there are both similarities and differences in turnover for teachers and administrators, one constant remains: students suffer as a result.

While research indicated that school and educator values greatly impact the learning environment, analyses of educator and school values has been lacking (Campbell, et al., 2004). Court (1991) mentioned that “values are an element of practice often mentioned but seldom focused on, and investigating them should further our understanding of teaching practice” (p. 391). Not only is the lack of research on educator values troubling, Hardre and Sullivan (2008) found that “although 30% of US students attend rural schools, as few as 6% of studies on teachers and learning are done in rural schools and classrooms” (p. 2059). This discrepancy leads to practices researched only in urban schools being applied equally to students in rural schools without confirming that such practices are effective with students from rural backgrounds; Hardre and Sullivan (2008) warned, “…it is important not to generalize the urban and suburban schools research to rural settings, without taking research questions directly into the schools for investigation” (p. 2060).

Little and Miller (2007) cited the lack of research concerning rural values and personnel selection; if rural values and educator values were more explicit, then the hiring process could be more effective. Values impact cognition and decisions including career choice; investigating educator values that conflict with rural community values could be a key to understanding teacher turnover (Bektas & Nalcaci, 2012). Pajares (1992) suggested three reasons that
educators’ beliefs remain largely unstudied: discrepancies in defining “beliefs,” a lack of conceptualization, and varying understandings of beliefs and related structures. Furthermore, echoing Bandura’s (1991, 2012) theory of self-efficacy, Bektas and Nalcaci (2012) found a positive correlation between educators’ personal values and their attitudes toward their job and asserted that a person’s actions are a result of their values. Collinson (2012) acknowledged,

If, as the literature suggests, values and attitudes define personality and behavior, and if self-knowledge of one’s values, along with the capacity to integrate and live those values, is a hallmark of exemplary teachers, then the paucity of research into sources of teachers’ values represents a significant gap in understanding that could potentially result in neglect of valuable professional development opportunities for teachers (p. 342).

A wide variety of sources acknowledge values as a critical element in educator effectiveness and retention but that acknowledgment has not led to empirical research in educator values, rural school environments, or the intersection between the two. Thus, a thorough investigation of educator values and beliefs could lead to an increase in educator satisfaction and school effectiveness and a decrease in educator turnover.

**Cost of Teacher Turnover**

Barnes, Crowe, Schaefer (2007) found educator turnover costs are extensive, particularly in at-risk schools. Conversely, educator retention programs in at-risk schools could save money and, more importantly, raise achievement (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). Levy et al. (2012) estimated that the Boston school district, where their study was conducted, lost nearly $4 million in costs associated with teacher turnover. Their study revealed an approximate cost of $3,400 lost per teacher departure (Levy, et al., 2012); school districts facing the most turnover are most often the districts which can least afford these heavy costs.
Three specific areas of cost that result from educator turnover included “separation costs, replacement costs, and training costs” (Watlington, et al., 2010, p. 25). Separation costs included separation pay, sick leave pay, and exit interviewer’s pay (Watlington, et al., 2010). Replacement costs included advertising, administrative costs such as setting up interviews and checking references, and hiring incentives such as relocation costs and signing bonuses (Watlington, et al., 2010). Training costs included induction programs, professional development, substitutes, and training materials (Watlington, et al., 2010). Although each cost individually may seem negligible, the total cost multiplied by the number of educators who leave can be significant.

**Rural Characteristics and Values**

Although there are various theoretical perspectives through which the term rural can be viewed, including spatial-geographical and political-economic, this study used a socio-cultural frame through which to view the rural community (Koziol, Arthur, Hawley, Bovaird, Bash, McCormick, & Welch, 2015). In other words, this study will acknowledge spatial-geographical and political-economic aspects, but special attention will be given to the common beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions which represent a socio-cultural lens.

Rural communities across America are very diverse in nature, but they share several characteristics, including a general decline in prosperity. DeYoung (1995) explained that as “household economies” (p. 170) were replaced by consumerism and the principles of industrialization such as efficiency, specialized labor, and organizational hierarchy, rural communities began to suffer. “The number of stable agricultural counties continues to decline in the U.S., while the number of persistently impoverished, mining-independent, and retirement-income-dependent counties continues to grow” (DeYoung, 1995, p. 172). One prominent feature of the Woodstown School District is the presence of abandoned mines and stripped land; the coal
industry declined significantly after World War II, leaving only a few coal operations still in business (Woodstown Historic District, n.d.).

Gjelten (1982) defined five types of rural schools. The “stable rural community” is “prosperous, peaceful, and traditional” (Gjelten, 1982, p. 3). The “depressed rural community” (Gjelten, 1982, p. 3) features poverty, repressed economy, and limited opportunities. Gjelten (1982) indicated that “high growth rural communities” (p. 3) have experienced an influx of new jobs, often as a result of industries such as oil drilling or “energy development” (p. 3). The economic boom is good for the community, but new jobs require new skills and attract new people; hence, the essence of the community inevitably changes. According to Gjelten (1982), “reborn rural communities” (p. 3) are respites for former city folk, those who are seeking a quieter, more tranquil lifestyle than what was experienced in the urban environment. As with the high growth area, new people and new ideas are introduced into the rural community; this can cause a division between traditional values and progressive values (Gjelten, 1982). Finally, Gjelten (1982) explained that the “isolated rural community” (p. 3) is remote and inaccessible, often because of geographical barriers. Although the isolated community experiences strong, positive bonds, the geographical barriers severely limit access to resources and experiences (Gjelten, 1982). The Woodstown community features characteristics of the depressed rural community; recent drilling activity has led to some increased opportunities, but the drilling boom is declining after a period of approximately five years. Additionally, as the nearby Glad Valley University continues to grow, with the suburbs creeping ever closer to Woodstown and creating new jobs, the chasm between traditional and progressive values becomes ever more contentious.

As seen in Gjelten’s (1982) description, general characteristics of rural communities might include: small size, sparse population, limited access to and choice of services,
prominence of agriculture and tourism, distance from populated areas, an aging population, high job loss and limited job opportunities, consolidated school districts, and poverty (Monk, 2007). Nonetheless, there are positive characteristics that attract people to rural settings such as solitude and beauty (Monk, 2007). Furthermore, DeYoung (1995) emphasized that “familism, place, tradition, and religious fundamentalism” (p. 181) are often valued in the rural community.

Ruby Payne (1996), in her theory of the hidden rules of economic class, asserted that people in poverty (many rural communities) view the world locally rather than internationally, prefer casual language rather than formal, value the present rather than traditions, history, or the future, believe in fate rather than choice, value humor and entertainment over social, financial, and political connections, and believe education is abstract and unrealistic rather than crucial for success. Contrary to the National Council for Accreditation of Colleges of Teacher Education’s (NCATE) teacher disposition statements, rural community members may not believe all children can learn because intelligence is based on fate. Rural communities tend towards homogeneity; therefore, differences and networking are not necessarily valued. Because survival in the rural community requires immediate attention to the present, reflection and self-assessment are often overlooked. Survival in poverty conditions tends to trump moral and ethical concerns.

Carlson (as cited in Yarrow et al., 1998) suggested eight factors of rural communities which may pose challenges for more urban-oriented educators:

- Verbal communications substitute for written communications,
- Validity of information is based on who said it,
- Social relations are more tightly knit and people are known as individuals,
- Small town society is more integrated with individuals performing multiple roles,
- Values of rural communities are traditional and centered on the family,
• People in rural communities learn to ‘make do’ and they take pride in self-sufficiency,
• Rural citizens experience direct democracy, have a sense of making a difference and experience a need for interdependence,
• Rural community organizations are less bureaucratic, more accessible and more flexible than urban/suburban community organizations (p. 9).

Comparing Carlson’s (as cited in Yarrow, et al., 1998) factors to NCATE’s dispositions, there are both similarities and differences. Individuality is valued, yet “tightly knit social relations,” “validity of information based on who said it,” and “small town society” might be difficult for an educator to reconcile with “intellectual curiosity,” “willingness to learn new ideas,” and “collaborative and cooperative work” (NCATE, 2002, bullets d & f).

**Education in Rural Environments**

In the 1800s, one-room schoolhouses dotted the American countryside. Teachers of varying ability, most often young, unmarried women, taught children of varying ages who attended when their parents could spare their labor on the farm; one might picture Miss Beadle teaching Laura and Mary Ingalls in *Little House on the Prairie*. The main purpose of these one-room schools was to achieve basic levels of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and perhaps a bit of history; the main methods of purveying this knowledge were lecture, memorization, and recitation. Such schools provided no transportation, limited resources, and were built and supported mainly by farm families; if the population was large enough perhaps there would be a general store and a few other small businesses to provide additional support. With the dawn of industrialization and compulsory education, came the demise of these quaint, locally-controlled rural schools (Mydland, 2011).
Early school-reform enthusiasts considered modernization, progress, and industrialization to be primarily urban-oriented and therefore neglected rural areas as outdated and uninformed (DeYoung, 1987). Rural methods of school governance and structure were considered inefficient, unstructured, and archaic (DeYoung, 1987). Although very little research was done in rural environments to prove or disprove beliefs, departments of education were quickly overrun with urban policies and practices that were passed on regardless (DeYoung, 1987). Eugenicists believed that rural schools were populated with children of lower intellect and often cited low test scores as evidence that the bucolic lifestyle was a hindrance to society (DeYoung, 1987).

Today, 75% of U.S. school districts are in small town and rural locations; these small school districts educate about 36% of the country’s students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). DeYoung (1987) stated that the term “rural” is not well-defined and the characteristics of rural schools are very diverse. Of these school districts, those that function in Gjelten’s (1982) stable rural communities are prosperous. Education is both well-supported and successful in this type of community; however, Gjelten (1982) indicated that the pressures of consolidation and “school finance equalization” (p. 5) from the state and federal governments threaten the well-being of these communities and their schools. Consolidation has been a major theme in the history of the Woodstown School District. Gjelten (1982) further explained that education in the “depressed rural community” (p. 5) faces many challenges. Schools are poorly funded and academically unvalued, educators may not be highly-qualified, and access to resources are limited (Gjelten, 1982). Despite this, the community likely has a strong identity, and the school serves as a purveyor of pride and tradition, rather than a source of academic excellence (Gjelten, 1982); this undervalue of education and overvalue of pride and tradition can be seen in many rural school districts when budgets cut programs like music and art but continue
to adamantly fund athletic programs. Gjelten (1982) suggested that educators in high growth rural communities must find ways to adjust to the influx of diverse people and ideas and prepare students with the skills to be successful in new industries (Gjelten, 1982). Reborn rural communities have similar challenges; teachers must be prepared to negotiate between the traditional and the progressive (Gjelten, 1982). Education in the isolated rural community is particularly challenging; teachers must be prepared for seclusion and extremely limited resources (Gjelten, 1982). Isolated districts may not feel the need to offer a high-quality education because there is little competition (Monk, 2007). The diversity of rural communities and their schools is evident; educators in these environments will require a different approach to education.

Broomhall & Johnson (1992) developed a model of seven possible factors impacting educational performance and achievement for students in many rural school districts. These include limited local job opportunities and access to information about those opportunities, lack of local economic actors, controversial or uninformed community education decisions, inconsistent school quality, low socioeconomic characteristics, parents’ varying valuation of education, and student’s personal tastes, preferences, and characteristics (Broomhall & Johnson, 1992). Similarities to Gjelten’s model of rural communities are evident. Prominently missing from Broomhall and Johnson’s (1982) model of factors that impact educational performance is the quality of educators and the impact of their values and beliefs.

Unlike urban schools, rural schools often serve as the focal point for community life. In addition to education, rural school districts must often provide health care, entertainment, venues for community activities, and service projects (Rey, 2014). These additional responsibilities outside of education can stretch already short finances and detract from the focus on academics. Finances in rural schools tend to be spent differently than in urban schools. For example, some
rural schools are forced to spend less on instruction and more on transportation than urban schools (DeYoung, 1987). Student mobility tends to be higher in rural school districts than urban districts (Monk, 2007); Monk (2007) observed,

> Instability in the student population of rural areas, however, is not limited to the comings and goings of migrant farm workers. It can also stem from poverty and the tendency of impoverished families to move from community to community to escape creditors and abusive spouses and to try to find work in economies where jobs are not stable” (p. 166).

Student mobility creates a wealth of problems for rural districts including increased expenses and difficulty tracking student attendance and achievement. Rural schools are often hard-pressed to respond to the needs of highly mobile students and provide appropriate services for them. The prominent low-income housing throughout Woodstown seems to promote the significant student mobility faced by the district. Clearly, rural communities and their schools have different needs, serve different purposes, and house different populations than their urban counterparts.

Public education tends to create cookie-cutter people who are suited for employment anywhere and anytime rather than individuals who have emphasized and honed their own special skills and talents; indeed, the purpose of a national common core curriculum is to ensure that all students attain a minimal level of knowledge in the same content areas. Unfortunately, this type of standardized curriculum often fails to connect to the rural student’s environment and experiences. Groenewald (2008) stated “. . . critical pedagogy emphasizes social and urban contexts and often neglects the ecological and rural scene entirely” (p. 309). Conversely, a strong sense of place builds character (Theobald & Howley, 1997); without a connection to their roots, students lose their identity. DeYoung (1995) suggested that rural school parents, often through the locally-elected school board members, struggle to “control schools rather than be
controlled by them” (p. 181) as standardization at the national level has usurped local power over many elements of schooling.

A distinct struggle between vocational training and academic training exists in rural school culture (DeYoung, 1995). Many rural school cultures also hold gender roles as valuable; girls traditionally take family-consumer science (more commonly known in rural communities as home ec) and boys enroll in industrial technology or shop (DeYoung, 1995). For many rural parents, “. . . physical work remains more often understood as real work, while book learning and academic pursuits are less frequently valued as suitable for able-bodied boys” (DeYoung, 1995, p. 183). “Coming of age in rural Appalachian places . . . often involves firearms and all-terrain vehicles, especially for boys” (DeYoung, 1995, p. 184). Indeed, many rural schools dismiss school entirely for several days of deer season (DeYoung, 1995). Also troubling to the rural parent, “. . . success in an academic curriculum implies college attendance and careers away from home and family and this is often viewed with mixed local emotions” (DeYoung, 1995, p. 183); this phenomenon of academic persons leaving a particular environment never to return is known as brain drain, and is cited as a core problem in the rural economy (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The honorable values of the rural community including strong family ties, traditional gender roles, and self-sufficiency, are threatened by today’s progressive, standardized educational trends that do not allow room for the nuances of the rural lifestyle.

**Rural Hiring Practices**

School boards tend to select teachers whose values most match the values of the school district, rather than selecting those who are most qualified (Little & Miller, 2007); Little and Miller (2007) called these conflicting ideals the idiosyncratic, or most harmonious, fit and the universalistic, or most proficient, fit. Unfortunately, in the rural environment, this idiosyncratic
selection method is likely to maintain the status quo and perpetuate the problems of poverty and lack of opportunity in rural communities (Little & Miller, 2007). Hiring only local educators is another problem cited in the literature.

Thus, it is not unusual to find entire rural and small-town districts comprising individuals born and raised locally. In fact, more than one generation of a family will often be represented on the same faculty. Officials who harbor rural values seem especially susceptible to hiring people who perpetuate this cycle (Little & Miller, 2007, p. 120). Monk (2007) further confirmed, “Teacher labor markets, in general, are highly localized” (p. 163). For example,

In a study of Pennsylvania, Robert Strauss found a dysfunctional penchant for hiring candidates with local ties, which he traced to the minimal limits in school code on indirect conflicts of interest in hiring relatives or friends. Strauss faulted the willingness of school authorities to sacrifice academic credentials in favor of ties to the local area and even called into question the nation’s commitment to local school board authority for governance (Monk, 2007, p. 164).

For example, in the Woodstown School District, the current superintendent, his wife, the high school principal, his wife, and the high school assistant principal and his wife, all work in the school district. In 2011, two Woodstown board members were spouses of teachers, two were retired teachers from the school district, one was the mother of a teacher, one was the uncle of a teacher, and another was a previously furloughed teacher. Strauss, Bowes, Marks, and Plesko (2000) found a significant degree of nepotism in Pennsylvania school hiring practices. Willingness to participate in extra-curricular activities was considered as important as content knowledge in applicants. On average, 40% of the teachers in a school district had graduated from
that district. Finally, school districts were found to make very limited attempts to widely advertise open positions (Strauss et al., 2000).

Rural values are impacted by four factors which in turn impact hiring practices: community-centrism, traditionalism, primary group preferences, and social conservatism (Little & Miller, 2007). Ethnocentrism, or viewing one’s own race or culture as superior, is considered yet another problem of rural communities (Little & Miller, 2007). Further, when hiring teams make decisions on personnel, personal variables, such as each team member’s personal background and position, and organizational variables, such as school district size and racial composition of the community, play a role. Additionally, the hiring process employed by the district impacts personnel decisions via variables including recruitment practices, credential preferences, and district hiring perceptions (Little & Miller, 2007).

Rural schools face difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers (Beesley, Atwill, Blair, & Barley, 2010). However, staffing problems in rural districts are not a result of teacher shortages (Ingersoll, 2001), but rather lower compensation in rural school districts may lead to fewer qualified applicants to consider (Monk, 2007). Hiring practices show that rural school districts are more likely to accept less qualified teacher applicants, such as those who did not pass the Praxis exam (Monk, 2007). Specific rural teacher characteristics included inexperience, lack of advanced education, and primarily Caucasian background (Monk, 2007).

**Intersection between Educator Values and Rural Community Values**

Ferdinand Tonnies (2011) first explored the idea of a dichotomous culture in his text *Community and Society*. Rural areas and urban areas have different qualities and therefore, rural dwellers and urban dwellers have different values (Tonnies, 2011). Fowler (2012) applied Tonnies’ (2011) dichotomous cultural theory to his anecdotal understanding of the differences
between both being educated and being an educator in urban cultures versus rural cultures. Educators are traditionally taught in colleges located in urban areas and are taught to cater to urban communities and urban students; yet, these same educators tend to begin their careers in rural communities (Fowler, 2012). In rural schools, teachers and students often know each other outside of school by living in the same neighborhoods, attending the same churches, and participating in the same community events, religion and patriotism are embraced openly and without question, high school graduation is considered the upper limits of educational attainment, and the school building itself has historical and nostalgic value to the community (DeYoung, 1995).

Numerous problems associated with education in the rural community lead to educator turnover (Holloway, 2002). Monk (2007) found many organizational characteristics impacting the quality of education in rural school districts including specific teacher characteristics, teacher workloads, and teacher compensation. Rural teachers must often be multi-certified and teach multiple content areas and grade levels (Holloway, 2002). For example, during the researcher’s fourteen-year tenure in a rural school district, while holding a certificate in Secondary English and Communications, she has taught drama, gifted education, computer basics, Advanced Placement Language, Advanced Placement Literature, photography/journalism, and 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade English.

Teachers indicated that the limited options, role models, and experiences available in rural communities make it difficult for rural students to make connections and value education (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Although small class sizes, fewer discipline problems, and greater autonomy are benefits of working in rural schools, rural teachers are faced with teaching a far wider range of courses (Monk, 2007), as suggested above. “The federal government’s definition
of a highly-qualified teacher, including a requirement for full certification, a bachelor’s degree, and demonstrated competence in all subject areas being taught, can create substantial problems for small rural schools, where teachers must teach in many different subject areas” (Monk, 2007, p. 170). Rural school districts struggle to provide resources and support for specialized populations (Monk, 2007); teachers may find themselves unable to meet the needs of their students which could lead to greater job dissatisfaction. Because college preparatory programs are infrequent in rural school districts due to less demand (Monk, 2007), teachers may be less attracted to these schools. The characteristics of student populations in rural school districts may impact educator retention. These characteristics include a higher than average number of English as a Second Language, special education, and highly mobile students and a low rate of college attendance for students after graduation (Monk, 2007).

The intersection between educator values and characteristics and rural community values and characteristics is complex. “Rural communities represent a distinct segment of the educational community, and as such, their views of what constitutes valuable forms of knowledge and education can differ significantly from the established national norms and values” (Rey, 2014, p. 509). Teachers and administrators place value on educational aspirations such as college and increased job opportunities, while rural communities focus on vocational aspirations and local job availability (Rey, 2014). “In these disputes, teachers may be seen to represent a relatively cosmopolitan outside world juxtaposed against other community leaders whose status and authority lie in more conservative religious and traditional habits” (DeYoung, 1987, p. 136). Educators in rural districts are viewed either “as the ‘problem’ within the rural teaching context or as the people working to address the ‘problem’ of the rural context” (Burton, Brown, & Johnson, 2013, p. 8); in reality, the challenges of the rural school district are much
more complicated. “Working within rural regions, therefore, requires that educators remain sensitive to these distinctive institutions or risk encountering what Padfield has called rural fundamentalism (1980): a grassroots backlash against those who challenge social constructs of local origin” (Ritchey, 2000, p. 38). Numerous leaders, both teachers and administrators, within Woodstown School District have faced this type of backlash from the community; this has been such a prominent theme in the district that it will be further discussed below in an independent section on resistance to change.

From an analysis of the literature, four common themes in rural educator turnover were uncovered (Burton, et al., 2013). First, rural educators felt isolated from peers, resources, and support systems (Burton, et al., 2013). Second, educators did not embrace rural culture (Burton, et al., 2013). A disconnect exists between the values espoused by middle-class teachers and the values espoused by lower income students and their families which leads to resistance, disengagement, and misunderstanding in the rural school environment (Hendrickson, 2012). Educators often perceive rural students as having a general lack of education and a lack of caring about education (Winter, 2013); both educators and students suffer from the dissonance they experience in rural education environments. A third common theme uncovered in the research indicated that educators in rural districts do not have the same educational attainments and experiences as non-rural teachers (Burton, et al., 2013). Finally, rural educators were characterized as resistant to change (Burton, et al., 2013); resistance to change, on the part of both the educators and the rural community, is a recurring theme in the literature which will be discussed in further depth below.
Specific Challenges for Rural School Administrators

High turnover in rural superintendents negatively impacts rural education; Woodstown School District has had five superintendents in the past 15 years. Rural school districts experience increased superintendent turnover because of factors including “political conflict, insufficient employment contract provisions, internal and external stakeholder pressures, and fiscal stress” (Tekniepe, 2015, abstract). The financial strain in these communities, often populated with retired and senior citizens, prevents superintendents from providing students with needed resources (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Superintendents frequently look outside of the rural community for more prestigious, higher-paying, and satisfying opportunities (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014).

Conflicting values between the superintendent and the community frequently leads to turnover; many superintendents leave rural school districts “under duress or by nonrenewal of their employment contracts” (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 1). This turnover impacts school stability and performance (Tekniepe, 2015). In a study on rural superintendent turnover conducted by Kamrath and Brunner (2014), the rural community members noted that it takes many years to become accepted in the community; yet, they did not make a connection between the isolation and stress experienced by the superintendent with his/her decision to leave the area (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Rather, the community members perceived that compensation was the most likely reason for turnover (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Superintendents, in the Kamrath and Brunner (2014) study, were perceived by the community as outsiders, educated in urban environments, who lack a complete understanding and acceptance of rural values. Rural communities prefer their leaders, such as superintendents, to possess traditional traits of power
and authority, while those studying to become superintendents are taught to value democracy, shared leadership, and conflict resolution (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014).

It is often difficult for rural superintendents to negotiate among the various stakeholders, such as school board members, business owners, and parents, and their often-conflicting expectations (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Internal pressure from teachers, principals, and other staff, and the expectation of shared governance, require significant interpersonal skills (Tekniepe, 2015). Tekniepe (2015) indicated that even when a superintendent has exceptional interpersonal skills, specific aspects of the job, including “decisions that involve personnel matters, such as staff reductions or program eliminations” (p. 3) may give the superintendent a negative image.

Just as rural teachers find themselves with many responsibilities and roles within and even beyond their content areas, rural superintendents must often serve in many capacities and with fewer resources than their urban counterparts (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Maintaining adequate communication while negotiating many roles and responsibilities is challenging for the rural superintendent (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Another factor impacting rural superintendent turnover is conflict with external community stakeholders, such as special interest groups, who may want to “influence how a superintendent manages his or her school district” (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 3). Although it is important for the rural superintendent to create a positive working relationship with community stakeholders, it is impossible to please everyone, leading to increased conflict (Tekniepe, 2015). Finally, rural communities expect their superintendents to be highly visible and active in all aspects of community life whether that is realistic to the superintendent’s circumstances or not (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). The community members also perceived that the superintendents needed to increase their communication with the
community, but they did not acknowledge any need on behalf of the community to communicate with the superintendent or be more active in their children’s education (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Researchers have found that friction between the school board and the superintendent most often leads to turnover (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014).

Kamrath and Brunner (2014) relayed four administrative challenges that are particularly applicable to the rural school district:

(a) Both parents and teachers struggle with the desire to be both autonomous and cooperative.

(b) Schools are expected to build a relationship with parents, while also seeking to change parental behaviors, potentially leading to distrust.

(c) Schools should be welcoming and open to community participation but instead have become increasingly difficult to penetrate for safety and political reasons.

(d) Teachers are expected to cooperate, communicate, and team-build in an institution that rarely provides the support or resources to do so.

Factors that decrease superintendent turnover include a relationship of teamwork, built with strong interpersonal skills, between the internal stakeholders in the school and a positive, communicative relationship with the community stakeholders that balances the interests of the community and the power of the superintendent (Tekniepe, 2015). Successful rural superintendents attempt to incorporate personal, professional, and community values into decision making (Jenkins, 2007).

The research clearly revealed a pattern of conflicts between rural community stakeholders, such as parents and school board members, and educational stakeholders including teachers and administrators. Factors such as differing values, strained resources, and ineffective
communication impact educator turnover in rural environments; while many reform efforts have attempted to address these factors, few have been successful.

**Rural School Reform**

Although school reform was meant to improve the quality of life for rural communities, the markedly urban reform efforts failed to take into consideration the unique qualities of rural communities. School reformers intended to use schools as an agent of social change, greatly expanding the purpose of schooling from primarily academic to all-encompassing, and forcing rural educators to provide services beyond their content areas (DeYoung & Boyd, 1986). Efforts to attract teachers to rural areas, such as bonus incentives, housing assistance for teachers, and loan forgiveness programs, have not proven effective (Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Attempts to change the rural community, change the educators, change the curriculum, and change the financial status of rural schools have unequivocally failed, while the government has ignored attempts to embrace and integrate rural culture into schools. “The accountability movement often focuses upon the content of teaching by linking standards, assessment and curricula but often ignores the local context and conditions in which children are taught” (Hartmann, 2013, p. 19). A one-size fits all approach to school reform simply will not work.

To change the rural family structure, clubs, afterschool programs, extra-curricular activities, and sports were created to entice students away from traditional family roles, and create a greater reliance on outside agencies, increase exposure to diversity, encourage global mobility, and essentially urbanize and normalize the rural culture. Greater access to technology and multicultural curricula would theoretically improve communication with the real world; thus, reform efforts often feature grants for programs that network students and resources. Although
rural school communities may resist the interference of outsiders, the promise of financial support is always enticing.

One popular reform effort is consolidation, or combining multiple small districts or schools into one; in theory, consolidation increases the network of people, ideas, and resources, while essentially making rural schools more like urban schools. There is debate both for and against consolidation of rural schools. Some argue that consolidation solves numerous problems of small schools; for example, larger schools allow more diverse course selection and greater teacher specialization (DeYoung, 1987). On the other hand, smaller schools seem to engage students as active participants in school life more readily (DeYoung, 1987). Smaller schools allow for a greater sense of community, more frequent and personalized home-school interactions, and cross-curricular and cross-grade level collaboration (DeYoung, 1987). Monk (2007) suggested that consolidation causes “the presence of multiple community identities within a school district” (p. 157), often leading to factions which detract from the educational environment. The setting for this dissertation has experienced ongoing consolidation, which may impact educator turnover.

“In 1930, there were 128,000 school districts and over 238,000 schools in America. By 1980, however, the number of school districts had dropped to 16,000 and the number of schools to 61,000” (DeYoung & Howley, 1990, p. 63). School consolidation is more prominent in rural areas and is traditionally considered to improve cost effectiveness and accountability (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). However, there is little research showing that consolidation does either and even less to show any benefits for student achievement. Tonnies (2011) believed that the community relationships that develop in rural areas, which he called Gemeinshaft, were slowly being usurped by the unnatural, mechanical, and calculated relationships of society, Gesellshaft,
because of industrialization and globalization. School consolidation essentially causes a similar phenomenon as close-knit relationships between parents, students, and educators are forsaken in the name of progress and efficiency.

A popular trend in reforming the curriculum to increase globalization is multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has traditionally highlighted minority races and languages, yet the term *culture* has broader implications (Reed, 2010). Culture includes specific behaviors and thoughts, artifacts and symbols, customs and traditions, and values and beliefs that are distinctive to a group (Reed, 2010). When multiculturalism *includes* rather than *excludes* the *majority* culture, students are more likely to embrace diversity and understanding (Reed, 2010). Reed (2010) articulated culture as adaptable, learned, shared, persuasive, dynamic, and membership-driven. Curriculum tends to focus on urban culture; even when multiculturalism is present, the rural context and history is neglected, leading rural communities to reject multiculturalism as a liberal and irrelevant idea (Reed, 2010).

Multiculturalism in rural schools has to be more than the assimilation of the exceptional and culturally different into America’s mainstream or dominant culture. It must take into account rural history, as well as the values and traditions of rural people. This is the culture that has eschewed rural life and created the unjust circumstances that currently define it. It has to be more than raising teacher consciousness regarding feelings and self-concept of students . . . Multicultural education in America’s rural schools must be about understanding the different ways different groups experience and make sense of the world and then applying that knowledge to the circumstances that surround these schools. It must begin with issues and perspectives that surround their own communities in relationship to a global community (Reed, 2010, p. 19).
Place-based education is an attempt to include the rural environment within the structure of multicultural curriculum. “Multicultural education will not find a place in rural education unless rural is found in multiculturalism” (Reed, 2010, p. 20). The essence of a rural community can be examined using six broad ideas: “connectedness, development of identity and culture, interdependence with the land and sea, spirituality, ideology and politics, and activism and civic engagement” (Budge as cited in Barter, 2008, p. 472). Similar to Friere’s (2000) recommended reform in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Smith (2002) suggested practical ways to take “place” into consideration when creating curriculum including studying local culture and local nature, investigating and solving locally-based problems, engaging students in local internships and entrepreneurship, and engaging students in local decision-making. “These community issues need to be studied in courses from social studies to mathematics for students to develop an understanding of how their own communities are connected to a global community” (Reed, 2010, p. 19). Family, church, and school are tightly interwoven into the construct of the rural community experience (Barter, 2008); yet, government decrees have attempted to distinctly separate these entities. “Place-based educators believe that education should prepare people to live and work to sustain the cultural and ecological integrity of the places they inhabit” (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Considering current national standardization in education, place-based curriculum efforts have failed to take hold.

Educator preparation programs provide little emphasis on the vocational and agricultural aspirations common in rural schools and appropriate to the geographical setting. “Educational ethnographies previously done in rural settings have almost invariably suggest that the understanding the community context(s) of schooling is indispensable for analysis of educational process and success in nonmetropolitan environments” (DeYoung, 1987, 131). If this is the case,
then perhaps reform needs to take place in educator preparation programs. For example, DeYoung (1987) highlighted an interesting discussion concerning whether student teachers preparing for rural environments should be taught in colleges of education or colleges of agriculture. At the very least, preservice educators need to overcome the assumption that education is the sole solution to poverty in rural environments, accept that there are multiple reasons for rural school failure, understand the values of the rural community, overcome rural stereotypes, and support change to better student outcomes (Eddy, 1991).

When teachers, administrators, and parents work together, student motivation increases (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Reform in rural education, and improved outcomes for rural students, can only take place when the various stakeholders strive to understand and respect each other’s values. Educators cannot enter rural environments without a clear understanding of their own values and the values of the rural community. Rural community values often result in students never leaving the community or students leaving and never returning; ideally, students would leave the community and return with broader horizons (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Educators who understand the key values of their rural students will be able to negotiate their own professional values with the personal values of their students, leading to increased achievement and opportunity. A key criterion in effective rural schools is high-quality relationships with family and community members (Wilcox, Angels, Baker, & Lawson, 2014). This can be accomplished by creating inclusive environments, valuing education, and connecting to place (Wilcox, et al., 2014).

DeYoung (1995) reaffirmed that studies on rural schooling are limited; those that exist focus on specific groups within rural communities, such as minority or special education students, rather than on the role of the rural environment (DeYoung, 1987). Furthermore, the
research tends to focus on how financial and administrative decisions impact these specific groups (DeYoung, 1987). DeYoung (1987) stated, “. . . research on the particular problems and issues in rural education is relatively obscure, lacking in focus, and comparatively unsophisticated” (p. 136). Burton, et al. (2013) also cited the alarming lack of research in rural education. Effective reform in rural schools cannot occur without significant, specific empirical research within rural school environments.

**Resistance to Change**

Change is challenging for both teachers and rural communities. Commitment to change and resistance to change lie along a continuum (Coetsee, 1999). Judson (1991) posited four positions on the change continuum including active resistance, passive resistance, indifference or apathy (Coetsee, 1999), and acceptance. Active resistance may feature deliberate sabotage and withdrawal (Judson, 1991). Passive resistance includes doing as little as possible and protesting (Judson, 1991). Indifference appears as apathetic behavior and doing only what is ordered (Judson, 1991). Finally, cooperation and enthusiasm are evidenced by acceptance (Judson, 1991). Coetsee (1999) added aggressive resistance at the far end of the continuum; aggressive resistance includes physical and mental violence and destruction (Coetsee, 1999). It is important to remember that this is a spectrum of behaviors, rather than a systematic progression.

The acceptance phase has four subphases: support, involvement, shared vision, and commitment (Lawler, 1989). Support tends to be verbal rather than active in nature (Lawler, 1989). To move an organization to be involved, leaders must provide information, knowledge, empowerment, and rewards and recognition (Lawler, 1989; Coetsee, 1999). Shared vision requires an organization to have common goals and values (Coetsee, 1999). Commitment involves ownership, enthusiasm, and collaboration for an extended period (Coetsee, 1999).
Change in schools has been found to be slow, heavily resisted, and short lived (Starr, 2011). Schools are difficult to change due to factors such as conflicting philosophies among stakeholders, federal and state micromanaging, increased diversity, and the day-to-day challenges that arise when managing and organizing large groups of people (Starr, 2011). Principals in Starr’s (2011) study characterized those most resistant as “loud and self-righteous people who often claimed authority as spokespeople for others” (p. 649) and as “troublemakers or ‘difficult’ people” (p. 649). Principals reported resistant behaviors ranging from door-slamming to threats, including vandalism, rumor-spreading, and disruption during public meetings (Starr, 2011). As Moll (2004) aptly states,

Power never goes unchallenged; it always produces friction, resistance, and contestation.

And schools are not fixed or immutable entities; they are built environments, socially produced and re-created through the actions of human beings who participate in and mediate their realities, even when those realities include significant constraints (p. 126).

Change requires dissonance; dissonance, as Festinger (1959) postulated, makes people uncomfortable. Effectively putting an end to rural educator turnover is going to require an investigation of values and an effort to mediate those values, on the part of both educators and communities.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the theoretical framework and literature related to this inquiry. A study of the literature revealed a lack of research on educator turnover because of dissonance between the values of educators and rural communities. Bandura’s (1975, 2012) sociocultural theory, Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory, and Lewis’s (1975) culture of poverty theory provided a framework for understanding the perpetual cycle of educator turnover that
exists in rural school districts. The literature revealed inconsistent definitions in terminology and a disconnect between the values of educators, educated in and for urban environments, and the values of the rural communities wherein those educators frequently serve. Topics of investigation included the cost of educator turnover, educator values, rural characteristics and values, and rural hiring practices.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter three reviews the research design and research questions. The research design was a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology. Four research questions were developed to guide the study. The participants and setting are defined. Participants were former educators of the Woodstown School District and were selected via purposive sampling. Procedures are explained in detail; after receiving IRB approval (See Appendix A), data was collected from interviews, questionnaires, documents, and focus groups. Van Manen’s (1984) methodological outline for phenomenology was used to guide data analysis. The researcher’s role is defined. Data collection methods are discussed in depth and include interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and documents. The method of data analysis is explained. Trustworthiness, in the form of credibility, transferability, and dependability, is addressed using thick, descriptive data, an audit trail, triangulation, member checks, and external auditing. Finally, this chapter addresses ethical considerations; participation in this study was voluntary, participants signed a consent form, and all data collected was password protected.

Design

This study was a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study. Creswell (2007) states, “a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). The intersection between educator values and their perception of rural community values was effectively explored using the process of phenomenological research. Qualitative research provided much needed descriptive evidence and personal experience to the statistics produced by quantitative research. Lewis (1959) stated, “In studying a culture through the intensive analysis of specific families we learn what institutions
mean to individuals” (p. 3). Qualitative research allowed me to study a culture, rural community, through the analysis of specific former administrators and teachers, to learn what the institution of school meant to both the community and the educators.

When determining my research design, I reviewed both transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology, developed mainly by Husserl and Moustakas, is purely descriptive in nature. Furthermore, during Husserl’s (1931) Epoch, an individual must set aside all preconceived notions, personal biases, and judgements to fully experience the participants’ thought processes; Moustakas (1994) called this “bracketing” (p. 85). Van Manen (1990), as a follower of Heidegger, subsequently moved away from the idea of bracketing out one’s own experience and interpretation from the research. Because I worked in a rural setting (and continue to do so) during the period of the educator turnover I researched, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to entirely bracket my interpretation from the research. Rather than bracketing out my experience entirely, I was careful to pose my interview questions in a neutral way, so as not to bias the participants’ descriptions and perceptions.

Van Manen (1990) made eight assertions about hermeneutic phenomenology which I applied to my research:

- “Phenomenological research is the study of lived experiences” (p. 9).
- “Phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness” (p. 9).
- “Phenomenological research is the study of essences” (p. 10).
- “Phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them” (p. 11).
- “Phenomenological research is the human scientific study of phenomena” (p. 11).
• “Phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness” (p. 12).
• “Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human” (p. 12).
• “Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity” (p. 13).

Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to explore the essence of the lived experiences of my participants through their perceptions, experiences, and voices. Phenomenology requires a researcher to delineate exactly what the phenomenon is, what characteristics it must have, and what characteristics is does not have (Van Manen, 1990). The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology is to uncover the pathic experience underlying the physical experience of the world. Van Manen stated (1990) “. . . hermeneutics describes how one interprets the ‘texts’ of life” (p.4). Hermeneutics is the act of studying “persons” not “subjects” (Van Manen, 1990, p.6). Van Manen (1990) asserted, “Much of educational research tends to pulverize life into minute, abstracted fragments and particles that are of little use to practitioners” (p. 7); hermeneutic phenomenology rejects this quantitative approach in favor of a more holistic, humanistic view of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen (2007) posited, “Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experiences of human existence—sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial, and suppositional intoxications” (p. 12). Further, Van Manen (2007) suggested that the act of reading and writing “open[s] up possibilities for creating formative relations between being and acting, self and other, interiorities and exteriorities, between who we are and how we act” (p. 12). Van Manen considered hermeneutic phenomenology to be primarily an activity of reading, rereading, writing, rewriting, and “sober reflection” (Van Manen, 2007, p. 12); clearly, as Husserl (1937) also expressed, the work of the phenomenologist is to sift through experiences again and again,
magnifying, reflecting and re-reflecting until the “essence” (p. 156) of the experience is fully revealed.

Husserl initiated phenomenology as a method for studying philosophy; Heidegger later applied phenomenology to hermeneutics (Kafle, 2011). The key to Heidegger, and later, Van Manen’s, approach to hermeneutic phenomenology is a deep understanding of “lived experiences” (Kafle, 2011, p. 188). Although Heidegger was a student of Husserl, he took a distinct approach to phenomenology through hermeneutics. The transcendental phenomenology of Husserl relied on bracketing the researcher’s own experiences and opinions from the research; Heidegger rejected this school of thought and embraced personal anecdote and narrative, including the researcher’s, as the core means of interpreting the world (Kafle, 2011). Van Manen (1990) stated, “Anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (p. 117). As previously stated, the study of values has been somewhat shunned due to the elusive quality of these ideas (Pantic & Wubbels, 2011); therefore, as Van Manen (1990) suggested, hermeneutic phenomenology, using narrative, helped “make comprehensible” (p. 117) the notion of educator values.

There were eight participants, including both former teachers and former administrators of Woodstown School District. Data was triangulated via semi-structured interviews, documents, an educator questionnaire completed by each participant, and focus groups. Focus groups were developed with follow-up questions and discussions from the initial pool of eight participants. Specifically, the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups assisted the participants in making their perceptions explicit to determine the level of consonance or dissonance between their values and the perceived community values (Festinger, 1959). Van
Manen’s (1984) methodological outline for phenomenology was employed to identify themes and perceptions.

The lens was an axiological constructivist approach which examined how people construct and perceive values. Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory provided the framework for supporting the analysis of the data. Furthermore, to understand the culture of the rural school district, Lewis’ (1959) culture of poverty theory was considered. Lewis (1959) stated, “Poverty becomes a dynamic factor which affects participation in the larger national culture and creates a subculture of its own” (p. 2). WSD represents one of many rural school districts suffering from low socioeconomic status. Furthering Lewis’s work, Payne’s (1996) research revealed varying rules between the classes that aided in interpreting the experiences of the participants and the context of the rural setting.

**Research Questions**

1. How do former administrators and teachers (participants) of Woodstown School District describe their values?

2. How do participants describe their perception of the values of the Woodstown community?

3. How do participants’ values compare with the perceived community values?

4. What reasons do participants identify for leaving and how, if at all, do those reasons relate to their perception of values?

**Setting**

The Woodstown School District in Northeastern U.S was the site for this research. The Woodstown School District is a result of the consolidation of the Woods School District and the Town School District in 1955. The school district is currently comprised of four schools; the
The consolidations and redistributions of students caused significant upset among community members. Furthermore, just as students were redistributed, so were teachers and administrators; highly-qualified status and experience played the largest role in who would get to teach at the new and remodeled buildings. Woodstown Board Meeting Minutes from January of 2012 show the union president voicing concerns from the faculty that the construction would be disruptive to the educational environment. The meeting minutes indicated that the union president “would like to see the sixth grade stay where they currently are and does not understand the reason for moving his classroom to the back of the building” (Woodstown Meeting Minutes, January 2012, association topics). Special Voting Meeting Minutes for January 2012 record that a community member “has mixed feelings about the school’s finances and questions whether we can afford a new school” (para. 6). In December 2011, when a new school board member came on board, he stated his goal in running for school board was to “do all he could to stop [the building project]” (Woodstown Reorganization Minutes, December 2011, para.)
7). The consolidations cannot be overlooked as a possible factor in straining the relationship between community values and educator values.
Figure 1: Consolidation of Woodstown School District. Gray fill shows currently operating buildings.
Another important aspect of the district’s geography is that Woodstown Secondary School and Town Elementary School are in Glad County, while Woodstown Middle School and Woods Elementary School are in Grassburg County. Because Glad County is home to a prominent university, Glad Valley University, the county has many more resources; students living in Glad County can be eligible for superior services which students in Grassburg County cannot access.

Situating this school district or any school district within the definition of rural is quite challenging due to the varying definitions of rural. Koziol et al. (2015) recommend the use of Metro-Centric Locale by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes by the Rural Health Research Center, and the White House’s Office of Management and Budget to determine the degree of rurality. The U.S. Census Bureau also gives a definition of rural which can be applied to the research.

One problem that occurred when addressing Woodstown School District is that it spans two counties within the Appalachian Mountain Range and consolidates two distinct towns into one district. Rurality is generally determined at the level of the county or sector, not necessarily the school district. Thus, when applying any definition of rural, it does not suffice to consider the degree of rurality of only one of these two counties or towns. Rather, I looked at the data available for all locations within the district.

NCES data for 2013-2014 considers the location of the Woodstown Secondary School to be town:distant, the Town Elementary School to be rural:fringe, the Woods Elementary School to be rural:fringe, and no data was available for the recently opened Woodstown Middle School or the former Woodstown Junior High School. “The Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) accepts all non-metro counties as rural and uses an additional method of determining rurality
called the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015, para. 5).” The RUCA data labels both Woods and Town as micropolitan which still falls within the confines of rural, as it is non-metropolitan. The Office of Management and Budget considers Glad County to be metro and Grassburg County to be micro (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Each metro county must have at least one urban area of 50,000 or more residents; while micro counties are those that have urban clusters of 10,000 to less than 50,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Finally, the U.S. Census Bureau defines urban as 50,000 or more residents, urban clusters as 2,500 to less than 50,000 residents, and rural as anything outside of those two definitions (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015).

The Woodstown School District’s total population in 2010 was approximately 15,410, primarily Caucasian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 2013, Woods had a declining population of 1,115; Town had a declining population of 2,708 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Although the district’s total population puts it in the urban cluster range, Town is just above the urban cluster range and Woods is well below, in the rural range. As a whole and when viewing the idea of rurality as a continuum, the Woodstown School District can be considered closer to rural, but certainly not remote, and an even greater distance from urban. Finally, the geography of the school district within the Appalachian Mountain Range adds to the sense of rurality; although the Glad Valley School District, located adjacent to Glad Valley University, and the Woodstown School District exist within the same county, a literal and figurative mountain separates the two.

The community within the district has an income level below the state and local median household income level (Educational Facilities Feasibility Study, 2008). The per capita income is nearly $6000 lower than state and national averages. The median house value in the district was $86,500 which is less than half the national average (USA.com, 2015). The median home age is
55 years. The population density was lower than average at 68.59 people per square mile (USA.com, 2015).

In 2012, the Woodstown School District had a student population of 1831. Families in poverty equaled 18.3%. On par with the national average of 46% (NICHE, 2015), 45.1% of students received free or reduced lunches (NCES, 2015). The total population of special education students equaled 18.6%; only 2% of students were considered minorities (NCES, 2015).

The Woodstown Secondary School has a college readiness score of 14.4% of 100 (US News, 2015). The average SAT score for the district is 1450 which is significantly lower than the national average of 1720 (NICHE, 2015). The graduation rate was reported at 77% in 2012, lower than the 81% national average (NICHE, 2015). Only 19% of the population has a higher education degree, much lower than the state average, while 68% hold a high school diploma which is higher than the state average of approximately 55% (Statistical Atlas, 2015). Thirteen percent of residents age 25 and older do not hold a diploma (Statistical Atlas, 2015). Only 37 residents (0.3%) hold a doctorate degree, 86 hold a professional degree (0.7%), 283 (2.4%) hold a master’s degree, and 844 (7.3%) hold a bachelor’s degree; these percentages are significantly lower than state averages (Statistical Atlas, 2015). Slightly higher than the state average, 958 (8.3%) hold an associate’s degree (Statistical Atlas, 2015). Those holding a graduate degree in the district earn an average of $50,100 which is about $15,000 less than the state average.

Per the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) the district spent $15,900 per student in the 2013-2014 school year. The average level of education attained is lower than both the state and national levels, meaning fewer students than average graduate high school, go to college, and obtain advanced degrees.
The school district employs 155 teachers at a 12:1 student to teacher ratio (M. Straw, personal communications, April 20, 2015); the national average is 16:1 (NCES, 2015). The average teacher salary was $57,020 while the national average is $46,325 (NCES, 2015). Between the years 2011 to 2015, 47 teachers resigned or retired (M. Straw, April 9, 2015, personal communication); this is a 30% turnover; additionally, eight administrators resigned or retired (M. Straw, April 9, 2015, personal communication).

The most prevalent industries in the district are oil, gas, and mining, followed by construction, and retail (Statistical Atlas, 2015). Approximately 54% of residents between the ages 25 to 64 are employed (Statistical Atlas, 2015). The healthcare field employs 18.2% of residents, retail employs 15.7%, construction employs 9.7%, and education employs 9.6% (Statistical Atlas, 2015).

An analysis of the Woodstown School District website in 2015 and again in 2017 shows that changes have occurred with administrative turnover. The website reports the school district is in two counties. In 2015, the website indicated the district educated approximately 1,900 students and employed 300 personnel in two K-4 elementary schools, a 5-6 intermediate-level school, a 7-8 junior high school and a 9-12 high school. The current website indicates the school educates approximately 1,800 students and employs 250 personnel in two K-4 elementary schools, a 5-8 middle school, and a 9-12 high school.

Both versions of the website assert a commitment to high student achievement, inquiry-based instruction, collaboration, and a goal of producing “outstanding citizens” (Our District Page, 2015; Our District Page, 2017). The curricula used in math, science, reading, and writing has changed. For example, the *Everyday Mathematics* series was implemented in 2009-2010, but was replaced by *Go Math* in 2016-2017. In 2015, the district employed the *Olweus Bullying*
Prevention Program, but in 2017, the website indicates the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention Support Program is used. The 2015 website described an Integrated Arts program, while the 2017 website does not mention this program.

Participants

Participants were former administrators and teachers of Woodstown School District. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of this study. Purposive sampling is defined as,

A form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research (Oliver, 2006, para. 1).

In purposive sampling “units are chosen not for their representativeness, but for their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 272). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study; to investigate how values impacted educator turnover, I selected educators who left Woodstown School District for an alternative career or location. Purposive sampling ensured that the participants I selected had experiences relevant to the research questions. Snowball sampling was also employed. Snowball sampling is defined as using “a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study” (Morgan, 2008, p. 816).

The following criteria was used to identify potential participants:

(1) Former secondary (7-12) teachers of Woodstown Secondary School or the former Woodstown Junior High School or former administrators of Woodstown School District
(2) Left the district of their own volition, not by actions of administrators or school board members.

Both genders were included. Various content area and grade levels (7-12) were included to ensure that maximum variation was obtained. Maximum variation seeks to include participants who have had different experiences within the same setting “to more thoroughly describe the variation in the group and to understand variations in experiences while also investigating core elements and shared outcomes” (Patton, 1990, p. 172). The teacher to administrative staff ratio at Woodstown is roughly 6:1 (NICHE, 2015). For this study, I achieved a 5:3 ratio of teachers to administrators.

**Procedures**

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, meeting minutes from Woodstown School District from 2008 to the present were analyzed to gather names of educators who had resigned. Former educators (who met the sampling criteria) were contacted via email or phone and asked to participate. After asking participants to complete an informed consent (See Appendix B), in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted. Teacher questionnaires and administrator surveys (See Appendices D & E) were emailed before the interview and completed at the participants’ convenience. A focus group was set-up using an online asynchronous google doc; the purpose of the focus group was to collect further information regarding the themes that were extracted from the interviews. Participants were informed they would receive a gift card after completing the interviews, surveys, and focus groups to thank them for participating; several participants declined their gift cards. Newspaper articles from two local news sources were obtained; these were available for free from online archives. School board meeting minutes, available free online from the Woodstown School District website, were printed for analysis.
Participants were asked if they wished to provide any documents, such as personal communications, to support their assertions from the interviews.

Data saturation is reached when the study can be replicated, the ability to gain new data has been exhausted, and additional coding is futile (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I determined data saturation had been reached when new codes were not being revealed in the transcripts, the interviews began producing similar data, and additional participants were increasingly difficult to find. After reaching saturation, data analysis using Van Manen’s (1984) methodological outline for phenomenology took place.

The Researcher's Role

I am currently employed by a rural school district as a secondary English teacher. Although I knew my participants prior to the study, I was not aware of their reasons for leaving Woodstown School District and had not spoken to any of them recently. I had connections and information that allowed me to contact them. As a teacher in a rural school district, my experiences may have created bias in the study. To prevent this, I avoided sharing or corroborating experiences with the participants and tried to maintain neutrality during the data collection phase.

Although I can think of many examples that would illustrate my personal interest in this study, one that specifically relates to the differing values of educators and community members is a disagreement that I had with a school board concerning Advanced Placement (AP) exams. Many new Advance Placement courses were introduced in my district in 2011. At the end of the 2011-2012 school year, 205 students wanted to take the exams, and the board agreed to pay for their tests (Local Press, 2012). The number of students enrolled in AP courses and the number of students taking the AP exams is a factor that the state uses to determine the individual school
performance score; thus, our increase in numbers improved our school performance score. The following school year, I again advocated for the board to pay for the exams and called on parents to advocate as well.

After criticizing my efforts and accusing me of spreading rumors, the board president stated that Advanced Placement courses are “wonderful” (Local Press, 2012, Bullet 1), with the board promptly voting to pay for only half the cost of each child’s 2013 exam(s), and none of the cost for the 2014 exams. In a low-income district, the consequence has been a drastic decrease in the number of students enrolling in AP courses, with only 81 students taking the exams in 2015. The words and actions of the school board directly contradicted each other. One newspaper reported, “In an interview with the Daily Report, Mr. Jones said he had been elected by residents with the goal of ending [the superintendent’s] administration, which he said was too skewed toward college education” (Daily Report, 2012). The paper further reported,

“This guy (the superintendent) wants to teach solely to the upper crust. We have more average and below students than average and above,” said Jones, who thinks too much time is being spent directing kids toward college and teaching to the higher levels with Advanced Placement courses instead of guiding them toward vocational and technical career training (Daily Report, 2012).

This same scenario played out over and over again, with a small group of administrators, teachers, and parents advocating for student opportunity and achievement and consistently being shut down by the school board and many community members. Topics of conflict included everything from curriculum to professional development to the hiring process.

As an outsider to the community (I reside in a different school district), I often felt alienated from my peers and confused about the mission and purpose of my school district. I was
making decisions that I thought coincided with the stated mission and purpose, but my efforts were met with resistance every step of the way. I watched countless educators seek employment elsewhere, and I could not help but wonder if others found it as difficult as I did to assimilate to the culture of a rural school district.

I believe I am a reflective and intuitive person by nature, but my experience alone cannot reveal the true essence of the phenomenon at hand. By applying a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I learned how educators experienced the culture of the Woodstown community and how they perceived consonance or dissonance between their personal values and those of the Woodstown community.

**Data Collection**

Data collection continued until data saturation was reached. Data triangulation involves gathering information about a topic from multiple sources at multiple times and in multiple ways to increase validity (Patton, 2001). To achieve triangulation, collection techniques included interviews, surveys, a focus group, and document analysis. An asynchronous google document was used as a follow-up tool for the focus group (See Appendix G). Semi-structured interviews were conducted first. Before the interview, participants completed, at their convenience, a questionnaire eliciting demographic information and questions specific to their values and perceptions of the school district. The questionnaire was used to corroborate the espoused values with the action (leaving the school district) taken by the educator. Document collection and analysis was conducted before, during, and after interviews and surveys and was used to compare the intersection between perception and reality.
Interviews

Semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix C) were developed and verified using peer and expert review. All participants were asked to complete an interview. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) defined the semi-structured interview as a formal interview that incorporates a purposefully organized interview guide; however, I added additional questions as needed during the interview to collect rich, thick data. The semi-structured interview was piloted with educators who had formerly left rural school districts; I conducted three pilot interviews prior to the actual interviews, and at a date, time, and location that was convenient for my participants. This occurred during the month of April 2016. The pilot interviews served the purpose of increasing the validity of the questions.

Through the pilot interview, I identified which interview questions elicited the kind of information my study required and which did not. For example, I quickly realized that asking a question such as “What specific instances and observations challenged your perceptions about your needs, wants, and expectations and those of the community of Woodstown?” gained specific positive and negative instances, while “Describe some of the most difficult situations you faced at Woodstown that challenged your values and beliefs” led to only negative responses. This question would have biased my study by leading the participants to recognize instances which negatively impacted them, while not acknowledging instances that positively challenged their values and actions.

Informed consent was completed prior to piloted and actual interviews; the consent explained that all information is anonymous and pseudonyms were used unless otherwise directed by the participant. Both the piloted and actual interviews were audiotaped using an iPhone 5 app; interviews were additionally recorded using an iPad app for backup. I took limited
notes to capture recurring themes, ideas that need revisited and further investigated, and other important information that could not be captured via audio such as facial expressions and body movements.

After the pilot interviews were completed, actual interviews took place at the participants’ convenience between August 2016 and January 2017. I travelled as needed to meet participants at a time and location of their choice; when in-person interviews were not possible, Skype was employed, as well as email for follow-up questions. The participants were eight former administrators and teachers of the Woodstown School District. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. I employed a private transcriber to create the interview transcripts (See Appendix J).

Interview questions included:

1. What influenced you to become an educator?

2. Why did you apply for and accept a position at Woodstown?

3. How did working at Woodstown meet your needs, wants, and expectations?

4. How did working at Woodstown not meet your needs, wants, and expectations?

5. How did you perceive your needs, wants, and expectations in comparison to the needs, wants, and expectations of the school community and school board?

6. What is your current position and how does it meet your needs, wants, and expectations?

7. What could have changed at Woodstown that would have resulted in you staying?

Follow-up interview questions included:

1. What educational experiences did you have prior to being employed at Woodstown?
2. What specific instances and observations challenged your perceptions about your needs, wants, and expectations and those of the community of Woodstown?

Interview questions one, two, and three and follow-up interview question one were intended to answer research question one, which asked, “How do former educators of Woodstown School District describe their values?” These questions allowed participants to explore their reasons for becoming an educator, and their reasons for accepting a position working in Woodstown School District. The responses were then used to understand what values the participants found important when selecting a career and workplace.

Interview questions four, five, and six were intended to collect data for research questions two and three which ask, “How do participants describe their perception of values of the Woodstown community?” and “How do participants’ values and actions compare with the perceived community values and actions?” These interview questions required participants to consider how specific aspects of the Woodstown School District met or did not meet their wants and needs.

Finally, interview question seven and follow-up question two were intended to answer research question four which asks, “What reasons do participants identify for leaving and how, if at all, do those reasons relate to their perception of values?” These interview questions asked participants to consider their current position and how it meets their wants and needs and identify specific instances at Woodstown that compelled them to consider leaving the district.

**Surveys/Questionnaires**

A questionnaire was administered to each of the eight participants to collect demographic data and generate data about the values of former educators of Woodstown School District and their perceptions of the values of the rural community members. Survey Monkey (1999) was
used to collect participant answers. I employed questions from the Teacher Questionnaire School and Staffing Survey (SASS-4A) and the Principal Questionnaire School and Staffing Survey (SASS-2A) for the 2011-2012 school year, as published by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistic. The Teacher Questionnaire is 48 pages with a total of 87 questions and the Principal Questionnaire is 30 pages with a total of 59 questions. I truncated the questionnaires to only include those questions related to my research; the teacher questionnaire had 25 questions and the administrator survey had 23 questions (See Appendices D & E).

Piloting and expert and peer review established reliability and validity. The questionnaire assisted in verifying the perceptions and actions of the participants. The questionnaire also assisted me in triangulating the data and verifying consonance and dissonance between espoused ideals and actual behaviors.

Although the interview questions sought to answer each of the four research questions, the questionnaires further validated the data captured from the interviews by gathering information concerning research questions one and two. Finally, the questionnaires provided background information regarding the participants which may have influenced their answers to the interview questions such as where they attended college and what experiences they had in addition to working at Woodstown. The survey was developed using Survey Monkey (1999), and a link was emailed to the participants upon receiving their consent to participate. Additionally, the questionnaires helped prepare the participants for the interview as they reflected on their past experiences in education.
Document Analysis

Document analysis is defined as systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents and is used to aid in triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was applied to documents including school board meeting minutes, local newspaper articles regarding the school district, and student achievement data. The primary and secondary documents assisted in verifying the perceptions of the participants and in fully answering the research questions.

Focus Groups

Per Cohen and Crabtree (2006) focus groups may be used to clarify research findings, explore a sensitive topic, or to collect concentrated data. An asynchronous online focus group, in the form of an invitation-only google document (see Appendix G), was used to collect follow-up information and give participants the opportunity to share their experiences with each other, particularly for specific themes that emerged and required deeper analysis. I used the asynchronous focus group as a final data collection method to ensure that triangulation and saturation had occurred. Although all participants were invited to participate in the focus group, only five responded to my invitation. Questions included:

1. What advice would you give to an educator who is considering working in a rural school district such as Woodstown School District?
2. If you could start your tenure at WSD over again, what, if anything, would you do differently?
3. How, if at all, has your experience at WSD impacted your life?
4. Three themes have been revealed in this study: A) The importance of lifelong growth and learning through being progressive, embracing change, and practicing leadership skills; B) the need for positive interpersonal relationships as evidenced by autonomy, support,
acceptance, and appreciation; C) the need for good health, financial security, and a stable family environment. Please describe any final comments or experiences as related to these values.

Data Analysis

Van Manen (1984) suggested four steps to the research process. First, he suggested “Turning to the nature of the lived experience” (p. 42) which includes “orienting the phenomenon, formulating the phenomenological question, and explicating assumptions and preunderstandings” (p. 42). The second step, per Van Manen (1984) requires the researcher to generate data through personal experience, interviews, artifacts, “idiomatic phrases” (p. 42), and literature. The third and fourth steps relate specifically to the data analysis stage of the phenomenology and include reflection and writing.

Per Van Manen (1984), phenomenological reflection requires the researcher to “conduct thematic analysis” through a series of stages including “uncovering thematic aspects in lifeworld descriptions, isolating thematic statements, composing linguistic transformations, and gleaning thematic descriptions from artistic sources” followed by “determining the essential themes” (p. 42) from these stages. Van Manen (1984) was careful to clarify that “lived experiences cannot be captured in conceptual abstractions” (p. 59). He likened themes to “stars that make up the universe”; thus stars, or themes, are the structures by which experiences can be understood. In order to isolate themes, Van Manen (1984) suggested two approaches: highlighting and line-by-line. Highlighting involves reading the text repeatedly to identify essential phrases, which are then highlighted (Van Manen, 1984). The line-by-line approach requires the researcher to review each statement or sentence individually and identify how the statement relates to the experience.
When working through these two approaches, certain themes are likely to recur, and thus become essential (Van Manen, 1984).

Once essential themes have been established, the researcher can begin to “compose linguistic transformations” by bringing together research from literature with the themes and considering the connections in written form (Van Manen, 1984, p. 42). Using artistic sources to further develop themes allows the phenomenologist to “transcend the experiential world in an act of reflective existence” (Van Manen, 1984, p. 62); the key to using artistic sources to develop themes lies in the act of reflection (Van Manen, 1984). Determining the essential themes requires the researcher to conduct follow-up interviews to collect further information where needed and ensure that the emerging themes actually represent what the participant experienced; this process requires numerous drafts as the themes are rewritten to better exemplify the experience (Van Manen, 1984).

Phenomenological writing includes “attending to the speaking of language, varying the examples, writing, and rewriting” (Van Manen, 1984, p. 42). Van Manen (1984) urged the researcher to be, first and foremost, a sensitive listener who is “able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way the things of the world speak to us” (p. 64). Van Manen (1984) also suggested “varying the examples,” (p. 64) requires the researcher to describe examples within examples, and even non-examples, in order to reveal the essence of the experience. Descriptions might be structured thematically, analytically, exemplificatively, existentially, or exegetically (Van Manen, 1984). Finally, Van Manen (1984) explained that the researcher must engage in rewriting, “a dialectical going back and forth” (p. 68) between the various stages of the method, in order to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon.
Memoing was employed during the data analysis phase; Groenewald (2008) defined memoing as “the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from the data” (para. 1). Memos improve credibility and trustworthiness (Groenewald, 2008). Researchers should date and cite memos as needed, and each memo should be focused on a single topic (Groenewald, 2008). I utilized memoing (see Appendix F) to keep track of ideas as they evolved during the analysis process; memos serve to elucidate the process that was taken to reach unique conclusions.

Saldana (2012) defined coding as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, or essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (p. 3). As I progressed through Van Manen’s (1984) methodological outline for phenomenology, I coded, or applied a descriptor to, the recurring themes using a Microsoft Excel (2016) document (see Appendix H), thus reducing and eliminating unnecessary information while highlighting and grouping information which pertained to my research questions.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness for this study was addressed using credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability including triangulation, member checks, external auditing, an audit trail, reflexivity, and thick, descriptive data.

**Credibility**

Credibility is defined as “confidence in the 'truth' of the findings” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, para. 1). Credibility was strengthened using triangulation and member checks. Member checks allow the participants to review and verify the completed analysis for accuracy (Cohen &
Crabtree, 2006). Participants were emailed excerpts of the draft and asked to check for accuracy. Triangulation was achieved using documents, interviews, a focus group, and surveys.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is “showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, para. 1). External auditing, or allowing a qualified researcher to review the drafts, confirms the link between the data and the conclusions. I employed external auditing to improve the dependability and ensure that I did not inadvertently draw incorrect conclusions. External auditors included my three committee members and two fellow educators. These auditors provided guidance both on the research as a whole and on individual sections. The audits lead to changes including increased clarity of diction and syntax, modifications to research questions, reorganization of themes, formatting adjustments, additional tables and figures, and the change from transcendental phenomenology to hermeneutic phenomenology.

Confirmability is described as “a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, para. 1). Increasing confirmability required an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail (See Appendix I) is a complete record of the steps taken to perform the research and arrive at conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation for this research involved multiple methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews, participant surveys, document analysis, and asynchronous focus groups.

Reflexivity is defined as “attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para. 1). Reflexivity requires the researcher to constantly be aware of how he/she arrives at inferences, assumptions, and conclusions because of the data analysis. Using Van Manen’s (1984) approach to data analysis increased reflexivity in this research.
Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define transferability as “showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts” (para. 1). Thick, descriptive data that reveals themes in the values of educators and rural communities will improve transferability by allowing other researchers to determine if any aspects of the current research are applicable to other times, places, and people.

Ethical Considerations

All electronic files were password protected. Anonymity was protected at all times; the setting and participants received appropriate pseudonyms. IRB approval proceeded data collection. Participants completed consent forms before any data was collected. Although I knew the participants prior to the study, I had not been in contact with them after they had left the rural district where they formerly worked, so no conflict of interest was present. Furthermore, I was not compensated in any way for this research. Finally, participation in this research was entirely voluntary, and participants reserved the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the study design, research methods, setting, and participants. Data collection and analysis was explained; this hermeneutic phenomenology employed data collection in the form of interviews, documents, surveys, and focus groups. Former administrators and teachers of Woodstown School District served as participants and were selected via purposive sampling. Once data was gathered, it was coded and analyzed for themes; Van Manen’s (1984) methodological outline for phenomenology was utilized. Finally, this chapter addressed trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Trustworthiness was increased using various methods including triangulation and member checks. Participation was voluntary and required a signed consent form; data was password protected.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter reviews the purpose statement and research questions. The participant sample is briefly described, followed by a rich, thick description of each participant. Three major themes were developed and discussed as they related to educators’ values. The first theme is the value of positive interpersonal relationships. Subthemes include autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation. The second theme is the value of lifelong growth and learning. Subthemes include being progressive, embracing change, and practicing leadership skills. The final theme is the value of stability and security. Subthemes include health, finances, and family. This chapter closes with potential answers to each research question.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how former administrators and teachers of a rural school district in the Northeastern Appalachian Mountain Range in the U.S. described their values and their perceptions of the values of the rural school district where they formerly worked. I utilized interviews, documents, surveys, and focus groups to collect data. For this research, “value” was defined as an “enduring belief” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 16) that leads to actions and behaviors which are “personally and socially preferable” (p. 16). The theories that guided this study were Bandura’s sociocultural theory (2012), Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory, and Lewis’ (1975) culture of poverty theory. These theories supported the connection between educator values and the perceived values of rural communities.

The following research questions were answered:

1. How do former educators (participants) of Woodstown School District describe their values?
2. How do participants describe their perception of the values of the Woodstown community?

3. How do participants’ values compare with the perceived community values?

4. What reasons do participants identify for leaving and how, if at all, do those reasons relate to their perception of values?

Participants

The participant group was diverse in some ways. Of the 16 contacts made, two males and six females agreed to participate. A seventh female initially agreed to participate but declined to follow-through with the consent form, questionnaire, and interview. All the participants, except one, still live and work in the state. Using the current ratio of administrators to teachers at Woodstown, I determined that a 2:10 ratio would be appropriate for my study. Those who responded to my invitation equaled a 3:5 ratio. Every administrator I asked agreed to participate, while teachers were less likely to respond and/or follow through. Most of the participants had middle, junior high, and/or high school experience, while only one had experience at the elementary level. One administrator worked in human resources, one as director of public relations and compliance, while the other served as director of student services, with experience in elementary guidance counseling. The teacher participants had experience in subject areas including Spanish, technology, special education, music, math, and guidance. Although one participant had experience as a math teacher, he was teaching technology when he left the district; therefore, no core content area teachers (math, science, social studies, English) responded to my inquiries. The length of the participants’ work in the district ranged from less than a year to more than fifteen years. Two of the participants graduated from Woodstown School District, while two continue to live in the district. Two participants have children
currently attending the Woodstown School District. All the participants had bachelor’s degrees and five had master’s degrees; none of the participants have completed a doctoral degree.

Table 1. Educator Biographical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Departure Date</th>
<th>First Position in a School District</th>
<th>Years in Woodstown</th>
<th>Graduated from Woodstown</th>
<th>Primary Reason(s) for Leaving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lack of autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Director of Human Resources</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lack of autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Music Teacher</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lack of appreciation for employees, lack of support for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Tech/Math Teacher</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lack of appreciation for educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lack of leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lack of support, lack of progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Spanish Teacher</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lack of supportive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Director of Public Relations</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Lack of public support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shelly Weston indicated a focus on self-growth and leadership. She is a busy, working mother of three children; she never resided in the Woodstown School District, but raises her children in a larger, nearby school district. Shelly has a master’s degree and has completed the coursework for a doctorate, but has not completed her dissertation. In Woodstown School District, she served two years as a guidance counselor in Woods Elementary School before taking on the role of director of student services at the district level for five years. Prior to working at Woodstown, she held positions in two other districts.

Shelly was brought up “in this very traditional mindset” concerning “what education should look like.” When she began her first full-time position in the state capital where there was significant poverty, she realized “those methods do not work for those kids . . . It’s not just the city kids and the urban kids and the high poverty kids.” She found students were more engaged when “there were more progressive methods and strategies for instruction.”

Shelly came to Woodstown when her husband earned a job promotion in a nearby town. As a guidance counselor, Shelly indicated she did not feel the sense of challenge and growth that she craved, and thus, she moved to the newly created position of director of student services. Initially, she felt fulfilled in this position, under the direction of superintendent, Dr. Gary Morgan. Shelly stated, “My desire to create something from the ground up was met . . . [he] provided so much for me as a leader. I knew under him I was going to be a great leader . . .” When Dr. Morgan’s contract was not renewed, Shelly experienced stagnation under the new superintendent. She expressed, “It was a very controlled environment, we weren’t allowed to think for ourselves, we weren’t allowed to do anything without asking first”; Shelly spoke with emotion as she recalled these challenges. Shelly included concerns about job security, lack of
autonomy, dissatisfaction with administrators, and a lack of leadership opportunities as impacting her decision to leave Woodstown. Shelly recalled, “A factor that played a huge impact in my decision to leave Woodstown was the hostile work environment created by the superintendent. Additionally, philosophically, the current superintendent and I were not in agreement.” Earlier this year, Shelly accepted a similar position at another school district.

Shelly explained that her ability, and the ability of her co-workers, to influence school policy and perform as a leader depended on the philosophy of the acting superintendent. For example, Shelly reported that professional development during Dr. Kennedy’s tenure was sometimes designed to support the schools’ and district’s improvement goals and the state standards, but professional development was rarely evaluated for evidence of improvement in student achievement, considered as part of educators’ daily work, planned or presented by educators, or accompanied by necessary resources to implement change. She reported during Dr. Morgan’s tenure “professional development was much more targeted, goal-oriented and focused, and was seen as part of the daily work of teachers” but “after that, professional development was less of that and more aimed at ‘just getting stuff done.’”

Shelly was somewhat satisfied with her salary and her job as an administrator at Woodstown, yet the stress and disappointment were not worth it in the end and the longer she worked at Woodstown, the less enthusiasm she had. She was adamant that a higher paying job would not lead her to leave the educational field. Shelly expressed concerns with the school district including student apathy, lack of parental involvement, and poverty.

As an administrator, she felt she was effective. Shelly indicated that she communicated respect for and support of the teachers, encouraged teachers to change their teaching methods if students were not doing well, encouraged professional collaboration among staff, worked with
staff to solve problems, encouraged teachers to use student assessments to plan curriculum and instruction, and facilitated professional development. She felt there was some cooperation among staff members, and staff members were sometimes recognized for a job well done. Shelly felt most of her colleagues held somewhat similar beliefs and values about the mission of the school.

She reported that she is very satisfied working in the educational field and hopes to continue being an administrator as long as she is able. Shelly indicated that her main goals as an administrator are encouraging academic excellence, preparing students for post-secondary education, and building basic literacy skills. Shelly was an enthusiastic participant who willingly shared many details of her experience in and out of Woodstown School District.

**Amber**

Amber Franklin self-describes as a “people-person.” As a graduate and current resident of the Woodstown School District, she expressed passion for the education of Woodstown students, including her two children. Amber began her career in the district as a personal care aide, then a secretary, and finally, director of human resources. She worked in the district for 15 years in three different buildings. Amber earned her bachelor’s degree during her tenure at Woodstown.

Amber grew up in a small, rural school district and did not envision herself working in education. Rather she went into accounting and earned her associate’s degree at a small, local business college. Once she had children, Amber began to focus on raising her children and finding a job that would allow her to be with them as much as possible. Working as a paraprofessional and secretary at Woodstown met those needs, and once in the classroom, Amber realized how much she enjoyed working in the educational system. Under superintendent Dr. Gary Morgan, Amber related, “I was able to experience helping make a change in a school
distric . . .” Amber indicated that her main goals as an administrator are encouraging academic excellence, building basic literacy skills, and preparing students for post-secondary education. Amber reported promoting occupational or vocational skills as low priority.

When Dr. Morgan’s contract was not renewed and Dr. Matthew Kennedy was hired, Amber expressed dissatisfaction with her position as human resources director. She stated, “. . . I’m really just a robot now. I’m told what to do. I can’t make any decisions. I’m not really benefitting anybody.” Amber reported that in the past four years, as director of human resources, she had moderate to little influence over school policy and practices. Amber commented that prior to Dr. Kennedy’s tenure, teachers and staff were allowed more input. She indicated poverty as a serious problem, while absenteeism, drop out, lack of parental involvement, poor student health, and student apathy were considered moderate problems in the district.

Amber indicated that she was somewhat satisfied with her salary, the level of support she received from parents and the community, and the level of cooperation among staff. She felt that most of her colleagues shared her beliefs and values about the central mission of the school. Amber was somewhat satisfied being an administrator at Woodstown and felt she was effective at her job, but eventually the stress and disappointments involved in working at Woodstown were not worth it. She thought other employees were somewhat dissatisfied as well. Amber reported that the longer she worked for Woodstown the less enthusiasm she had.

Although it has been several months since Amber resigned from Woodstown School District, her emotions are still somewhat raw, and she mentioned that the interview allowed her some catharsis. She cited dissatisfaction with her working conditions as a very important reason for leaving the district. Amber, despite a significant commute, is satisfied with her current
position as human resources director for another school district, and she indicated that she plans to remain in administration as long as she is able.

**Danielle**

Danielle Carson expressed enthusiasm for music and working with students. When Danielle moved to the district to teach high school music, specifically band, she inherited a disjointed and underappreciated position in the arts department; Danielle recalled, “I remember board members bashing the progress of my students in public at meetings.”

As a musician throughout her life, Danielle said, “I just always knew that it was the only path for me. I always felt drawn to teaching and helping kids.” After graduating college, Woodstown was the first school district to offer her a position. Danielle taught both senior and junior high in the district. She recalled that her mentor did not teach the same subject, leaving her to feel “completely on her own in terms of learning how the district operated.” She also felt a lack of support from the parents and community for her work, specifically stating, “The biggest reason for leaving Woodstown was the community. I could not see myself settling down and making a life there.” She further explained, “I learned that if you were not born and raised in the town then you were an outsider.” Danielle stayed in the district for three years before accepting a job with a school district in a different part of the state; Danielle feels a great deal of support in her current district and plans to remain in teaching as long as she is able.

Upon graduating from college, Danielle felt somewhat prepared to handle classroom management, differentiate instruction, use data to inform instruction, and meet state standards. She felt well prepared to teach her subject, use technology, and assess students, but not at all prepared to use a variety of instructional methods. Danielle reported little to no influence over school policy such as determining the content of in-service, setting discipline policy, or deciding
how the school budget would be spent. She indicated a great deal of control over classroom
decisions such as selecting textbooks and materials, determining teaching techniques, and
evaluating and grading students.

Danielle did not feel the principal was strongly supportive and encouraging. She felt a significant lack of support from parents and the community. Necessary materials were not always available for her use, and routine duties and paperwork sometimes interfered with her teaching. She indicated that the principal enforced school rules, but teachers sometimes did not. She felt strongly that her colleagues did not share her beliefs and values about the central mission of the school or cooperate effectively.

Danielle was strongly dissatisfied with being a teacher at Woodstown, but indicated that she was mostly satisfied with her salary. She did not feel the stress and disappointments were worth it, and she did not think other teachers were satisfied either. She did not like the way the school was run and often thought about transferring or simply staying home. Her enthusiasm greatly decreased the longer she worked at Woodstown. She indicated personal reasons, job security, working conditions, administration, and lack of leadership opportunities as strong factors in her decision to leave. She also indicated salary, lack of autonomy, number of students, intrusions on teaching time, student discipline, lack of influence over school policies, student assessment, and school accountability as moderate factors in her decision.

Jordan

Jordan Yorks indicated that he enjoys working in a collaborative environment. Jordan began his career as a math teacher because he “wanted to make students love math.” Jordan graduated from Woodstown High School and began substituting there a week before officially graduating from college with his bachelor’s degree in math and computer sciences. He applied
for and received a permanent position teaching math in the school district the following school
year. Jordan stated that working in the district initially met his wants and needs because he
wanted to be close to home, and he needed a job quickly.

Jordan indicated an ambivalence toward his teaching career, at times experiencing a great
deal of support and satisfaction, while at other times experiencing a strong lack of support and
dissatisfaction. Although Jordan initially taught math at Woodstown, he eventually bid into a
computer teacher position which he found highly engaging. The district made the decision to
close the technology position and forced Jordan back into a junior high math position to save
money. Jordan recalls, “I thought it was all about the kids and I came to realize it wasn’t all
about the kids; it was about the money. So that, that uh, did it for me.” He stayed in the math
position for one month before accepting a math position in a neighboring school district.

Upon graduating from college, Jordan felt somewhat prepared to handle discipline
problems, use a variety of teaching methods, teach his subject matter, assess students, and use
data to inform instruction. He did not feel prepared to use technology, differentiate instruction, or
meet state standards. He indicated that differentiation did not become an educational trend until
well into his tenure, and no state standards existed at the time he was hired. He also stated,
“Using computers for classroom instruction was not an option when I started teaching.”

Jordan expressed minor influence over school polices such as setting performance
standards, determining the content of in-service, and deciding how the school budget would be
spent. He felt more control over decisions related specifically to his classroom, such as selecting
textbooks, content, and teaching techniques, evaluating students, and determining the amount of
homework.
He perceived his principals were not effective at developing broad agreement among the staff about the school’s mission, but felt his co-teachers shared his beliefs and values about the central mission of the school. Because Jordan worked under various principals, he felt their effectiveness varied. He indicated principals were somewhat effective at communicating respect for and support of teachers, working with staff to meet standards, encouraging professional collaboration, and working with teachers to solve problems. Poverty was considered a moderate problem in the district, while student apathy, lack of parent involvement, and student health were considered minor problems. Jordan felt some encouragement and support from administration, but less from the parents and community. As a teacher, Jordan believed he made a strong effort to coordinate his content with other teachers’ content.

Jordan expressed numerous important factors leading to his decision to leave the district including personal life reasons, job security, dissatisfaction with his job assignment, and dissatisfaction with administrators. He indicated some factors as being slightly or somewhat important including lack of autonomy, student discipline, and lack of influence over school policies. Jordan indicated that at some points in his career, the stress and disappointment involved in teaching at Woodstown were not worth it. Additionally, at times in his tenure at Woodstown, the teachers seemed satisfied, and he liked the way the school was being run. His enthusiasm declined at times, and he sometimes thought about transferring to another school. He reported being somewhat satisfied with his salary and his position.

Jordan has seen many changes in education during his tenure. When asked if he would still become a teacher if he could go back to his college days, he indicated that chances are about even for or against. Although he is nearing retirement, he is undecided about how long he will
stay in the education field. Jordan owns a small beef farm, and his enjoyment of the farm life was evident as he discussed his future options.

Tanya

Tanya Wood is a reflective educator, as evident from her interview responses. Tanya worked as a special education teacher in Woodstown for over 10 years and still lives in the school district. Tanya was inspired to become an educator because she loved school; she specifically became a special educator because she had an uncle with autism and a cousin with Prader-Willi Syndrome. Tanya attended Catholic school as a child and was strongly influenced by some of her more progressive teachers. She earned her bachelor’s degree in elementary and special education and her master’s degree in curriculum and instruction.

Tanya accepted a position teaching learning support at Woodstown High School because it was closer to her home and paid more money. While working at Woodstown, Tanya earned her master’s degree and administrative certification. Although there were challenges to being a special educator, she indicated that when she accepted her current position, it was not a result of significant dissatisfaction with her teaching position. “I just think I was ready to move on as an administrator. I just think I had a skillset that I was looking to utilize.” She indicated that she would not change her decision to work in education. Tanya currently works as a supervisor for the local intermediate unit, a group which provides educational resources to school districts.

When Tanya began teaching, she felt prepared to handle classroom management, use a variety of instructional methods, teach her subject matter, use technology, assess students, differentiate instruction, use data to inform instruction, and meet state standards. She thought her influence over school policy was very limited in the areas of setting performance standards, establishing curriculum, determining the content of professional development, evaluating or
hiring teachers, setting discipline policy, and deciding how the budget would be spent. She indicated a great deal of control over classroom including select textbooks and materials, selecting content, topics, and skills, selecting teaching techniques, evaluating and grading students, disciplining students, and determining appropriate homework. Tanya did not feel she received a significant amount of support from the parents or the community, but she felt the administration was usually supportive and encouraging.

Regarding student behavior, Tanya felt the principal sometimes enforced rules and backed her up, and rules were somewhat consistently enforced by teachers. Tanya did not feel that most of her colleagues shared her beliefs and values about the mission of the school. She also did not feel that the staff members were always recognized for a job well done. She thought there was sometimes cooperation among the staff members. She indicated that lack of parental involvement, unpreparedness to learn, and poverty were moderate problems for students in the school district.

Tanya made it clear she left the district only to better use her supervisory certification; she indicated she was generally satisfied with being a teacher, she usually liked the way things were run in the school district, and she perceived other teachers were also generally satisfied. She was also mostly satisfied with her salary. The only factors Tanya indicated as impacting her decision to leave were a slight dissatisfaction with administrators and a slight dissatisfaction with her level of influence over school policies and practices.

Charlotte

Charlotte Emerson stated, “As a school counselor, I get to help meet students’ needs emotionally, academically, socially, and help them create a career plan.” Although Charlotte’s tenure in Woodstown High School was short-lived, the district still made a distinct impression on
her. She indicated that her first impression of the school district was negative, as the town and school were “super run-down.” She stated that the previous district she worked in was “an amazing experience” and she left that district “strictly to get closer to home.”

Charlotte earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s in counselor education prior to beginning her career in education. She plans to remain in education until a more desirable job opportunity comes up. Nonetheless, she clearly expressed her desire to work with children saying, “I became an educator because I wanted to be a champion for kids.”

After leaving college, Charlotte felt well prepared for her role as a guidance counselor in areas such as meeting state standards, handling discipline situations, and using technology. While at Woodstown, she indicated little to no influence over school policies such as setting performance standards, evaluating and hiring teachers, and determining the content of in-service. She felt more control over selecting content and teaching techniques.

Charlotte did not feel the administration was always supportive and encouraging, but felt the parents and community offered somewhat more support. She was generally satisfied with her salary and the materials available to do her job. She perceived the staff was mostly cooperative and mostly shared her beliefs and values about the central mission of the school. She did not think teachers were often recognized for a job well done. Charlotte did not feel the administration encouraged professional development or collaboration, worked to develop agreement about the school mission, or encouraged the use of data for planning.

Charlotte indicated student behavior as somewhat of a problem. She did not feel the principal always enforced school rules or backed her up when needed. She also did not feel teachers were always consistent in their enforcement of the rules. As a guidance counselor, she felt student tardiness and absenteeism, dropping out, student apathy, lack of parental
involvement, poverty, and unpreparedness to learn were serious problems in the school district. She also indicated poor student health as a concern.

Charlotte was extremely dissatisfied with her job at Woodstown. She felt the stress and disappointments were not worth it and disliked the way things were run. She experienced a loss of enthusiasm and sometimes thought about staying home or transferring to another school. She indicated factors in her decision to leave including a desire to relocate, personal life reasons, dissatisfaction with her job description, dissatisfaction with working conditions, student discipline problems, dissatisfaction with administrators, and lack of influence over school policies.

**Jackson**

Jackson White, a foreign language teacher, entered the educational field because he “wanted to be able to impact students who struggled.” Jackson considers himself proficient in Spanish and French with a basic understanding of Greek and Hebrew. He initially accepted a long-term sub position teaching Spanish at Woodstown. The Spanish teacher was on a medical leave of absence, with serious doubts about her ability to return to school. By the time the school district took steps to secure Jackson for a permanent position, just days before the new school year started, Jackson had already accepted an ESL (English as a Second Language) position with his current school, a charter school in Glad Valley.

Jackson had worked in two school districts and a prison prior to working at Woodstown. When he became unemployed from the prison, the long-term position at Woodstown met his financial needs and allowed him to re-enter the educational field. He recalled, “It placed me back in education and with students and I really needed that purpose in my life.” Jackson plans to
remain in teaching until a more desirable opportunity comes up; he earned his master’s degree in ministry and intends to serve as a pastor when possible.

Upon college graduation, Jackson felt well prepared in areas such as handling classroom management, using a variety of instructional methods, teaching his subject matter, and using technology. Jackson expressed a great deal of control over selecting teaching techniques, evaluating and grading students, and disciplining students. He did not feel he was given the necessary materials to effectively teach his classes and expressed that support from the parents and community was lacking.

Jackson felt most of his colleagues shared his beliefs and values about the mission of the school, but there was a significant lack of cooperation among the staff. He did not find that staff members were often recognized for a job well done and did not feel the teachers were entirely satisfied with the school. He did not think the administration was at all effective at developing the school’s mission. Nonetheless, Jackson was generally satisfied being a teacher at Woodstown. His enthusiasm waned after a time, but he somewhat liked the way the school was run.

Jackson indicated student apathy as a serious problem in the district. He also felt lack of parental involvement, poverty, and unpreparedness to learn were moderate problems. Tardiness, absenteeism, and poor student health were considered minor problems. Overall, Jackson felt a more open-minded and supportive environment were strongly needed in the district.

Chris

Chris Miller served as the director of public relations and compliance for the Woodstown School District for five years. She indicated that encouraging academic excellence, building basic literacy skills, and promoting personal growth were her top goals while working in the
district. She plans to continue working in education as long as she is able. She is currently working in the college of law at a university in another state.

Chris indicated moderate to minor influence over school policy and practice. Chris perceived lack of parental involvement, poverty, and student health were moderate problems facing the school district. Chris was somewhat dissatisfied with her salary and the support she received from parents and the community. Chris strongly felt that her colleagues shared her beliefs and values about the central mission of the district. She felt that there was appropriate cooperation among staff and that staff members were sometimes recognized for a job well done. Overall, Chris reports she was somewhat satisfied with being an administrator at Woodstown and felt she was effective in her job.

Chris indicated several factors leading to her decision to leave the district. She was very concerned about her job security and was somewhat dissatisfied with her salary, benefits, working conditions, and ability to influence school policies and practices. Chris reported, “When new board members were elected and the superintendent left, it became clear that the educational mission of the district would change dramatically . . . I felt it was best for me . . . to be part of an institution where I could continue to make a difference in the educational system.”
Results/Theme Development

The results of this study on educator values and rural schools included three themes with subthemes. Additionally, each research question was answered using thick, rich data. After analyzing the data using Van Manen’s (1984) method for data analysis, three themes, stated as values, with subthemes, were developed. The themes are organized by the most significant, based on total number of codes, to the least significant. The first theme was the development of positive interpersonal relationships, which included the four subthemes of autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation. The second theme was the lifelong pursuit of growth and learning which included the two subthemes of progress and change, and leadership. The final theme was stability and security which included the three subthemes of health, finances, and family.

Theme 1: Development of Positive Interpersonal Relationship

Participants argued that the status of their relationship with administrators, colleagues, and community members impacted their job satisfaction. The value of positive interpersonal relationships was not met as evidenced by a lack of autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation. The enduring belief that positive interpersonal relationships are critical for well-being led to the action of leaving the district when the participants experienced negative interpersonal relationships.

Subtheme 1A: Autonomy. Amber and Shelly felt a strong sense of autonomy during part of their tenure at Woodstown and felt a strong sense of loss when that autonomy was taken away. Jackson, Danielle, Jordan, and Charlotte indicated dissonance between their expectations and decision-making ability and the expectations and decision-making of the administrators and school board members. Tanya and Chris did not indicate concerns regarding autonomy.
Teachers, in general, felt more control over classroom decisions, such as selecting textbooks and instructional strategies, than over school policy decisions, such as establishing curriculum, evaluating and hiring teachers, and setting discipline policy, while administrators felt slightly more control over school policy than classroom decisions. When the six participants who were concerned about autonomy felt micromanaged and distrusted in making decisions, as a result of their relationships (or lack of relationships) with administrators, school board members, colleagues, and community members, their enthusiasm declined.

Both Shelly and Amber indicated that being trusted to make decisions led to increased satisfaction in their work. Amber recalled, “When I got moved out into an administrative position and was able to kind of, under Dr. Morgan, mold and make it our own position. That was great because it met my needs.” Shelly stated, “He [Dr. Morgan] really allowed me to take that program and create it…my desire to create something from the ground up was met. After Dr. Morgan’s tenure, Shelly and Amber indicated a more controlled environment which restricted their ability to be autonomous. Shelly related, “It was a very controlled environment, we weren't allowed to think for ourselves, we weren't allowed to do anything without asking first.” She indicated a loss of self-efficacy when her ideas were not taken seriously. “But more than anything, just the fact that there was no autonomy, there was no ability to try new things without asking first and when you did ask, it was usually shot down because it wasn't the traditional way of doing things.” Amber’s distress led her to dread going to work; she recalled, “When you start hitting the snooze button every morning because you hate going to work or you don't feel like you are making progress or there's not anything to get up for because you know that…I am really just a robot now. I'm told what to do, I can't make any decisions, I'm not really benefitting anybody.”
In their new positions, Amber and Shelly feel some autonomy has been restored. “He [superintendent at new district] comes to me and asks me what needs to happen with HR. It's not if I make a decision do I need to sit and worry if he's going to get mad or do I have to ask him.” Amber indicated a return of self-motivation since leaving Woodstown. Jackson had a similar experience, commenting, “The community seemed to want to control incoming administration and teachers to ‘fit the mold.’” Participants used words including “trust,” “control,” and “decision” to describe their autonomy and lack of autonomy.

**Subtheme 1B: Support.** A need for additional support, from administrators, school board members, and the community, was strongly specified by participants. Six participants reported lacking support from parents and the community. Four participants reported dissatisfaction with administration as a factor for leaving. All eight participants reported lack of parental involvement as a problem.

For Charlotte, administrative support was lacking. Charlotte mentioned, “I felt extremely unsupported at Woodstown which ultimately just made me sad and not have much value in my position.” On her first day in the district, Charlotte recalled, “I knew from my first day at Woodstown that it was not a fit for me personally. I remember walking in my first day at school, and one of the principals shoving a crying kid into my office to help, without introducing her.” In addition to sadness at the lack of support, Charlotte also indicated fear.

I have a few situations that really rocked my core during my time at Woodstown. I was surprised to learn on my first day at Woodstown that counselors had mandatory times during the week where they were required to meet with Alternative Ed, never was previously mentioned in my interview, my tour of the high school, or during any of my summer days. I accepted that, since it was apparently part of my job description, and
initially had a decent relationship with all of the kids. However, it didn't take long for that to change, and once I started enforcing rules such as 'no screaming in the hallways' and 'keep your shirt on during workouts.' One student, in particular, really started to give me a lot of push back. Once day was particularly rough for him, and he stormed out of the room. I followed him as he made his way down to the main office, kicking in lockers with his boots. I asked him what was wrong and he told me to 'get the fuck away' from him several times. When we finally got in the office, he told me to 'go walk my fucking ass back to my office' and to 'get out of his face.' I told him I would just sit with him until he was ready to talk. To this day, he never said what set him off. The principals proceeded to come out, and he told them 'this fucking bitch needs to go walk her ass to her office' The principals said nothing, but calmly brought him back to their office. I found out later that they allowed him to go home early, without punishment, since he was having a bad day. He came back the next day like nothing happened. Since he was so aggressive with me, I was genuinely worried about going back to Alt Ed, but I was still required. The principals never spoke to me about it, nor did they ask him to apologize to me. I felt completely unsupported. I know from the bottom of my heart that at either of my other schools, my principals would have let a kid have it for talking to any adult that way.

In her role as guidance counselor, Charlotte did not feel that discipline was always the best answer; however, “I felt like any disciplinary action, when needed, was nonexistent.”

Other participants recalled a lack of administrative support as well. While Charlotte needed support in student relations, Shelly and Amber felt administrators should offer support
for personal growth and education. Shelly lamented that she has all the credits for her doctorate but has not started her dissertation.

I think that's why I'm still sitting in this 'all but dissertation world' because there was not the support there from my superintendent (Dr. Kennedy) at that time to keep going and say 'how are you doing with that' whereas Dr. Morgan did that. He always encouraged us to read, and do better, and do more and that stopped after him.”

Amber related, “I'm a people person and HR was exactly where I needed to be but Dr. Morgan pushed me to that and encouraged me to go back and get my bachelor's.”

Jordan, a technology teacher, felt a lack of support for his position. Near the end of his tenure at Woodstown, Jordan recounted being asked to create new technology courses. He elaborated,

When the principal comes up to you and says to you during the previous year, at the end of the school year, and says to you “We need you to come up with some cool computer classes. Call them cool things, call them things that the kids will need to know because we need some electives for next year”. Fine. So I made these computer classes up the following year. I had a classroom of 25 computers. I had 35 students in my classroom. I didn't complain about it. I went to the janitor and we found tables, we found laptop carts. I made it work. I didn't complain. And it was like that all year long. These were 9 week classes but every marking period that's how it was. And the next year they said, “We don't need a computer teacher anymore.”

Jordan also held a math certification; when a math teacher left the district, to eliminate a teaching position, the district decided to close Jordan’s technology position and force transfer him to a math position. He also recalled, “Everybody else had been schooled in whatever the math
programs that they were using at the time, and they just threw me in with no schooling at all.”

Jordan perceived a lack of support from the administration in obtaining the resources for his technology position and the education necessary for his math position.

Danielle indicated a lack of board and community support and felt that the administration did not come to her aid in this problem. Danielle simply stated, “I definitely would have needed more support from the administration in order to stay [at Woodstown].” She also felt the lack of support from the board, community, and administration targeted not only her, but also her students. She expressed a sense of sadness and an inability to protect her students from negativity.

I remember sitting at school board meetings and hearing members call our students “podunk country folk” and stating that our kids would never have white collar jobs. It was heart breaking. I remember board members bashing the progress of my students in public at meetings. It was really difficult to find the words for my students when they asked “Do you think we're not capable of having white collar jobs too?” or “Do you think we aren't good enough?” I felt like I was fighting a losing battle.

Chris, as an administrator, recalled, “Honestly, I think just some public support for what the administration was trying to achieve would have been enough for me to stay.” She further explained,

I don’t think the community perceived the administrators very well, and I was part of the administrative team. But I think that, overall, I was perceived well as an individual. There was a news report written about my departure that included a lot of positive information, including a thoughtful quote from a board member who considered my leaving as a loss for the district.
Like Jordan, Danielle also cited a lack of support for gaining necessary resources to teach her class. “I was given a new class to teach in my content area, but when I requested $200 for materials from my principal, I was told no. The gym teachers, however, were permitted to purchase yoga balls in lieu of chairs for their classes.” Danielle also felt a lack of support from her co-workers. “I had students come to my class crying because their teacher the period before was bashing my program. I confronted that teacher as soon as school ended that day.”

Participants indicated a renewed sense of support in their current districts. Charlotte stated, “In my current position, I feel valued. My principals collaborate with me, and we speak constantly and work together throughout the day.” Danielle asserted,

I left [Woodstown] to find a position where I would be appreciated and a place that actually advocated for kids. When you are constantly beat down time and time again, you just get tired of fighting and move on to bigger and much better things.

Each participant in the study indicated a need for support from administrators, coworkers, parents, community members, and board members which they perceived as lacking. This lack of support resulted in sadness, fear, anger, and overall dissonance in satisfaction and served as a factor in turnover.

**Subtheme 1C: Acceptance.** Shelly, Amber, Charlotte, Danielle, and Jackson indicated difficulty penetrating the social bonds that existed in the community. While Shelly and Amber discussed their view of the community’s lack of acceptance for Dr. Morgan, other participants voiced their own difficulty finding acceptance. Conversely, each participant mentioned feeling more welcome in their new school district. Jordan graduated from Woodstown, but no longer lives in the community. Amber graduated from and continues to live in the community. Shelly, Charlotte, and Jackson have never lived in Woodstown. Danielle briefly lived in the district,
while Amy lives in Woodstown but did not graduate from Woodstown. Chris expressed hope of being an asset to the community due to her own background, stating, “I am from a poor rural area myself, and I always believed that if it weren’t for some of my teachers and my love of learning, my life journey could have taken a more dismal path.”

Amber asserted, “It’s truly that small town mentality that we are what we are, and I think one board member said it best when he said 'we are Podunk country folk.' We can't be any better.” Amber further related that to be accepted as a valuable employee of the school district, a person must attend sporting events, plays, musical performances, and other extracurricular programs. She elaborated,

Sports means everything to Woodstown. So, if you go to sports events, all those things, you show up, you party, Woodstown people want to be together. They're swingers…they truly are. If you are a drinkin' buddy, if you go to a bar with them, you hang out at their house, you go to a sporting event, you go to their kids' things, birthday parties, they are um, social, it's like a social environment. Dr. Morgan did not fit into that [the social environment] because he was not social. He was there for one purpose and that's getting the school district better. Getting kids ready for education, ready for the world, whatever it was. He wanted a better education for our kids. They [community] wanted him to go to football games, they wanted him to go to music events, they wanted him to go to plays…he would have went to some of those things if it was better. He [Dr. Morgan] did go to a couple football games, whatever, but he was not that, he didn't live in the community, he lived in an apartment and they hated that. They claimed he didn't buy his food and everything else which is probably true because his wife cooked for him for the week and he brought it up with him. None of that matters if your kid does better...but that
is what Woodstown is. …they don't even welcome businesses in the area. They don't want anybody, anything different coming in. Woodstown goes to Fishburg or Glad Valley to shop, eat, go to things that are happening, all the bigger things happen there. They would rather go out and keep their small community…the one thing I will say about Woodstown is that they are close knit for themselves, but if you are the outsider you will probably never fit in. They'll be nice to you but it's a fake nice.

Amber further related that the current superintendent, Dr. Kennedy, has been better able to penetrate the social structure of the district because he moved to the district upon being hired, and “he goes to baseball games, he goes to events, he shows up at plays, he caters to the right teachers.”

Charlotte and Danielle perceived themselves as “outsiders” and thought members of the school district intentionally made them feel that way. Charlotte mentioned,

My perception was that the school board was strictly there to get a friend or family member a job at the school. Harsh, but it seemed like a pattern. In fact, one teacher joked with me at one point that she couldn't believe I got the job and that I “actually must be really good” if I got a position at Woodstown without knowing anyone.

Danielle recalled,

I had expected to be welcomed with open arms by the school and the community. This was not the case. Within the first few months, I learned that if you were not born and raised in town, then you were an outsider. I never felt that I was wanted or appreciated in the school or the community. On the whole, I felt alienated at Woodstown. Expectations definitely not met.
Jackson stated, “Once again the political demon reared its head so I did not feel embraced by the established personnel at the school.”

Participants Amber, Shelly, Jackson, Danielle, and Charlotte indicated a greater sense of acceptance in their new districts. Amber related, “Overall, I've been welcomed to the community and the district [not Woodstown] and I feel like my needs have been met.” Danielle commented, “I noticed right away how kind and welcoming my new school district was compared to Woodstown. It is sad to say this, but it took a long time for me to get used to my colleagues being so nice to me…My new school district puts the children first.” Amber and Shelly reported feeling part of a family or team in their new districts.

Overall, the participants perceived that those who were not born and raised in the district were unwelcome. When educators were hired from outside the district, they were not welcomed unless certain unspoken terms, such as full participation in extra-curricular events and moving to the district, were met. Charlotte, Jackson, and Danielle had the shortest tenures at Woodstown and spoke most strongly concerning the lack of acceptance in the district. Amber and Jordan, both of whom graduated from the district, had the longest tenures. Nonetheless, all participants express greater satisfaction in their current positions.

Subtheme 1D: Appreciation. Four participants felt that receiving some level of appreciation and recognition would have led to greater satisfaction. Although Jordan felt this most strongly, other participants also indicated a need to feel valued and appreciated. Four participants felt that staff members were sometimes recognized for a job well done. They also indicated that students should be valued, recognized, and appreciated more.

Charlotte recounted, “I felt like the administration at Woodstown showed very little as far as care and respect for the employees and students.” Jordan spoke of the technology club he
created and the vast amount of personal time he gave up for the betterment of the students and district without any recognition.

I started a club up where I went around with my pickup truck and got donations of used computers and computer hardware. And then on my own time after school, I taught kids how to tear the computers apart, fix them, put them back together, and we gave them to community members...that was taken away from me. There was no time during the school day. They ended up giving me one period a day and then they took that away so I did it over my lunch and then so after doing that for four or five years, the district decided that they didn't want to put any, they didn't value that program at all, so I thought if they didn't value it I don't, I tried to make it work. So that's it. I worked for a long time. I got some of the very first IBM compatible computers in that school and wrote a grant to get in the library and junior high. I help the technology specialists at the time set networks up. All that stuff I did for free on my own time. I did not feel appreciated there at all. I didn't feel like anything I did there over the 23 years that I had been there anybody gave a hoot about. So there's a pile of things that I did for the kids and nobody took any of that into consideration.

Amber expressed, “I just want to be valued, trusted, supported.”

According to Amber, Shelly, Jordan, Danielle, and Charlotte, leaving Woodstown School District alleviated the sense of worthlessness participants were experiencing. Jordan, for example, stated, “And so I feel appreciated here [new district]. I even have people tell me that now to my face. And like I said, I have right now, I didn't do anything to deserve it but I have the most awesome job I've ever had.” Danielle reported,
There is a great sense of pride [in new district] from the students, parents, district employees, and community. The accomplishments of our students are celebrated no matter how big or small. Our test scores are always great, but our focus is on the children that we serve. Our kids are not just numbers here. The kids love going to school and the parents are so appreciative of everything that the teachers offer. I have never felt so respected, valued, and loved. It makes a wonderful work environment. I am proud of where I work.

Charlotte observed, “In my current position, I feel valued.”

The participants sensed that during at least some of their time at Woodstown, their work was not valued, their students were not valued, and as humans, they were not valued. The feeling of being undervalued was mediated at their new schools; participants felt a renewed sense of respect and appreciation.

**Theme 2: Lifelong Pursuit of Growth and Learning**

All eight participants perceived that continual growth and learning is a desirable value for themselves and their students. They identified being progressive, embracing change, and practicing leadership skills as ways of pursuing growth and learning. The enduring belief that lifelong growth and learning is important led to the action of leaving the district when the participants’ abilities, and often their students’ abilities, to grow and learn were stunted.

**Subtheme 2A: Progress and change.** Per the Woodstown home page (January 20, 2017) the school’s belief statements include:

- All people have value and should be treated with respect.
- The school district and community are responsible for generating measurable improvement in student achievement.
• Student learning is maximized when effective and varied instructional resources are applied.

• All students should be taught using differentiated instruction.

The mission of the district is “to provide a supportive educational environment to promote student learning through academic rigor, district partnerships and career-readiness programs for the development of responsible citizens in today’s world” (Woodstown Home Page, January 20, 2017). The school’s motto reads “Educating today ... responsible citizens tomorrow” (Woodstown Home Page, January 20, 2017).

Questions about the mission of the district revealed some dissonance between the participants who were administrators and the participants who were teachers. The administrators were clear about their top goals as administrators, and those goals match the school district’s mission (see Table 2 below). All three administrators and three of the teachers felt their colleagues at least somewhat shared their beliefs and values about the school’s mission.

Nonetheless, teachers thought administrators were somewhat effective to not at all effective at developing agreement with the teachers about the mission. The administrators felt they were slightly to somewhat effective at developing agreement with teachers about the mission. If administrators thought that their colleagues agree on the mission, at least somewhat, and teachers thought that their colleagues agree on the mission, at least somewhat, but participants agree that administrators may not be entirely effective at sharing the mission with the teachers, the participants may have thought they were working toward a similar mission, but without explicit dialogue about the mission, they could have been working toward different missions.

Furthermore, teachers may have been aware of the school and administrators’ mission, while not
agreeing with it. Finally, teachers may have agreed with other teachers about a mission, which was not the same mission as the school and administrators, leading them to agree that their colleagues mostly shared the same mission.
Table 2. District and Administrator Missions

**School District Mission** (as reported on district website): “The mission of the district is to provide a supportive educational environment to promote student learning through academic rigor, district partnerships and career-readiness programs for the development of responsible citizens in today’s world.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Administrator Mission (as reported in administrator survey)</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with “Most of my colleagues shared my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.”</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with “As an administrator I worked to develop broad agreement among the teacher staff about the school’s mission.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>2008-2015</td>
<td>Encouraging academic excellence, preparing students for post-secondary education, building basic literacy skills</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Slightly effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>2001-2016</td>
<td>Encouraging academic excellence, building basic literacy skills, preparing students for post-secondary education</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Somewhat effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>2008-2013</td>
<td>Encouraging academic excellence, building basic literacy skills, promoting personal growth</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Somewhat effectively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Teacher Level of Agreement About Missions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with “Most of my colleagues shared my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.”</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with “Administrators worked to develop broad agreement among the teaching staff about the school’s mission.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Not at all effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>2000 or earlier-2013</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Not at all effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>2010-2013</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>2000 or earlier-2009</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Slightly effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Slightly effectively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants felt that a lack of challenge, goal-setting and progress toward goals, and an inability to embrace change impacted their satisfaction while working at Woodstown. Six participants cited both personal growth and the growth of their students as not only stagnate, but moving backwards when they decided to leave. Three participants cited a lack of progress in areas of technology, new teaching methods, and student achievement; four participants perceived that tradition was more valuable than progress and change. A sense of discomfort at the lack of challenge was evident.

Shelly indicated that, initially, she was challenged and making personal growth. When she begin to stagnate in her role as a guidance counselor, she took up the challenge of director of student services. “My expectations for myself were met-- growing as an educator. He [Dr. Morgan] supported the going back to school and getting the superintendent's letter. Dr. Morgan really challenged me as a school counselor to think and to, he challenged my beliefs and viewpoints.” Once Dr. Morgan was no longer with the district, Shelly expressed, “That whole idea of being on the cutting edge of things sort of stopped. You know we were going backwards. I didn't want to be a part of that either.” In her new position, Shelly expressed, “I'm being challenged everyday by things that I've never been challenged by at Woodstown.”

Amber felt her growth was hindered after Dr. Morgan left. “I did not feel like I was making a difference. I didn't feel like I was going anywhere. I didn't feel like I was being challenged at all.” Amber indicated that her sense of growth and challenge has been renewed in her new position. “I feel like I'm getting what I need because number one I'm challenged more. I'm trusted. I don't have any of the issues like at Woodstown as far as if I make a decision my superintendent supports me.” She expressed that she has learned from her experiences; “He [Dr. Morgan] already taught us we can't take away what we learned. That's one thing I've learned
about education, once you learned it you have it. Can people stifle it for a while? Yeah, but it can come back.” Concerning her new position, Amber stated, “I feel good about my job. I go in there every day and every day is a challenge…I learn something new.”

In his new position as an instructional coach, Jordan feels that he and the teachers he works with are being challenged and making positive change. His work as an instructional coach engages him in goal-setting and making progress in collaboration with teachers.

The idea, the ideal way is for me to meet with the teachers and discuss what kind of teacher strategy, what do you want to do in your classroom? Ok, here's some teaching strategies that you might want to consider to teach whatever it is you want to teach. Or here's some technology tools that would really complement what you want to teach. Kick that up to a higher depth of knowledge level. Before, during, after. Before is the planning part of it. The during part is when you actually go into the classroom and co-teach with them or just kind of stand off to the side and just observe what's happening. Whatever. Afterwards you have another meeting with them. That's that after part...before, during, after. After to discuss how they think it went. What they think they would change, what they didn't like, and then maybe doing another before, during, after round with them again.

Jordan expressed greater satisfaction with his ability to help other people grow and change in his current school district.

Danielle also expressed concern with a lack of forward-thinking in Woodstown. She recalled,

At the time I worked in this district, the best way that I can describe this is, the mentality that what was good enough 20 years ago for the members of the school board or the
parents of the children in the district was still good enough for our current students and nothing needed to be changed. I always felt that the school board and the community were stuck back in time. This was a huge reason for why I decided to leave.

Danielle confirmed that her tenure at Woodstown would probably have been longer if the district had embraced change. “If there were less drama and bad publicity from the school board at the time and the district were more progressive in their views on education, I probably would have stayed longer. She further elaborated on her struggle to move forward in her work with students,

I wanted to make a lot of changes and run my classroom in a way that I knew was best for the students. However, I quickly learned that change was not something that was welcome at Woodstown. I dealt with a lot of resistance from students, parents, community, and administration with almost every ‘want’ or ‘vision’ I had for my program. This was really frustrating. I didn't feel like a real teacher, but rather still a student teacher. My belief in process over product did not seem to fit well at Woodstown. My desire to care for my students as human beings instead of just a test score did not seem to fit well at Woodstown. My desire to reflect on the progress and my students and plan for ways to stretch and push them in my classroom did not seem to fit well at Woodstown. I was not willing to maintain the status quo. I am not a quitter but I had to get out of there before I completely lost my passion for teaching. By the time I reached my third year at Woodstown, that passion was fading fast.

Charlotte voiced concerns about how the lack of progress impacted students’ futures. “I felt like Woodstown was not a progressive school district and that students absolutely suffered from that.” For example, Charlotte elaborated,
At my current and former districts, students began career development very early on. At Woodstown, I was teaching seniors, halfway through their senior year, about the college application process. The majority of them had no idea what to do, which made me sad. I felt like my job was putting out fires, and I rarely had the opportunity to do progressive work with kids. I feel like the community of Woodstown, as a whole, was a little backwards and not progressive in their thinking.

She voiced frustration with another counselor’s unwillingness to find ways to help students make progress toward their future goals.

Another situation that really upset me was teaching the other counselor, who had been there for a number of years, about giving out SAT fee waivers. A huge portion of the students at Woodstown receive free or reduced lunch. Any student who receives free or reduced lunch qualifies for an SAT fee waiver. I was truly devastated to learn he had never given one out. Over the years, that was probably hundreds of kids who qualified to take the test for free who did not have or know about the opportunity. I pictured the amount of kids who either struggled to come up with the money or simply didn't take the test at all, because they didn't have that fee waiver.

Charlotte indicated that she is satisfied with the progressive thinking in her new position, indicating that her work is “preventative rather than reactive,” she does career development with students, all students have ipads, and student work is completed via technology.

Jackson indicated, “The apathy demonstrated by the students, parents, and some staff was also tough to digest and process.” He also asserted, “I believe diversity and varied opinions are important for growth.” In the survey, all eight participants reported student apathy as a problem in the school district and that students came to school unprepared to learn.
When applying to the district, Chris initially felt encouraged by the progress and mission of Woodstown. She recalled,

The mission of public education excited me, and the school district seemed to be progressing in a way that others were not. It interested me, and I wanted to be part of helping students succeed. I also knew the other administrators and board members, and I was very impressed with their educational mission and new direction that it appeared to be taking.

As her tenure continued, Chris felt the district stopped progressing.

I worked at [Woodstown] through a pretty dramatic transition. The majority of the school board had changed hands several years after I arrived, and it was clear that the new members had a much different direction in mind. The board that hired me appeared to be much more educationally progressive and student-centered, and nearly all of them had children in the school system at that time. The new board members who were elected several years later no longer had children in the school system and appeared to be more concerned about cutting the budget and athletics and preparing kids for vocational training. Those philosophies were different from my own. They also clashed with the superintendent and did not renew his contract.

Participants’ transcripts revealed a need for growth, challenge, and change for themselves and their students; when these needs were unmet at Woodstown, they left the district. All participants hold a bachelor’s degree, five hold a master’s degree, and one has completed the credits for doctoral degree, indicating a strong value for personal growth and achievement.

**Subtheme 2B: Leadership.** Participants, including Amber, Shelly, Tanya, Chris, and Jordan, indicated a desire to be leaders and to have strong leadership in their work environment.
Stevenson (2013) defines the value of leadership as the need “to feel responsible for identifying and accomplishing needed group tasks.” Shelly recounted, “Dr. Morgan [at Woodstown] provided so much for me as a leader. I knew under him I was going to be a great leader someday because of the challenging conversations we had and the different, the way he made us think and everything.” Shelly felt under the leadership of Superintendent Kennedy, her ability to lead and be led diminished causing dissonance in her satisfaction with her job. In her new position, she feels that she has regained some of the leadership ability that she lost. Amber experienced empowerment in her role under Dr. Morgan, stating “I mean building leaders is what he does.” She felt her ability to lead was diminished under Dr. Kennedy, prompting dissatisfaction.

Chris stated,

When the position of public relations and compliance opened up at [Woodstown], I had been working as an education writer for the local newspaper for several years. I wanted to take on more of a leadership role, and I decided to apply for the opening. I also had a strong interest in education. I applied because the position seemed to be the perfect fit for what I was looking for in taking on more of a leadership role, and I thought that my writing and educational skill set could greatly benefit the district.

Chris initially felt fulfilled in her leadership role. She recalled,

I learned a great deal about working with an administrative team and being in a leadership role. Probably the biggest highlight was helping to lead a community-based committee that ultimately decided to close an aging junior high building and build a new middle school. It was a controversial project, and we put together a multi-year plan to make it happen. I was in charge of leading the committee through its various decision-making stages and continuously communicating with parents, students, educators,
community members, media contacts and more about the project as it progressed. What made this project stand out even more was the fact that all previous attempts to accomplish the same objective had failed, so we knew what we were up against.

Amber, Chris, and Shelly, all working in the district between 2008 and 2012, felt their leadership abilities diminished because of new board members and a new superintendent.

**Theme 3: Stability and Security**

Participants believed that a certain level of stability and security should be achieved and maintained in their personal lives. Participants identified good health, financial stability, and family security as important factors in decision-making when confronting whether to leave or stay in the district.

**Subtheme 3A: Health.** Several participants mentioned their health or the health of others as declining during their tenure at Woodstown, both via physical symptoms such as weight gain and high blood pressure, psychological symptoms such as increased stress and anxiety, and mental symptoms such as fear. Five of eight participants agreed that the stress and disappointments involved in working at Woodstown were not worth it. Six of the participants reported their enthusiasm decreased the longer they worked at Woodstown, while two participants often thought about staying home rather than going to work.

Amber recalled,

The day Dr. Morgan left, I was a perfectly healthy person, low blood pressure, no cholesterol problems, I, um, didn't stress a lot. Loved my job, enjoyed the people I worked with, everything. About, so Kennedy started in June, in January I was on blood pressure medicine, cholesterol medicine, I probably gained about 40 pounds...I had anxiety so bad that I felt like I had heart palpitations.
Shelly also indicated that she gained weight during her time working with Dr. Kennedy. Shelly further reported a sense of post-traumatic stress disorder from her tenure in the district. Charlotte reported that the teachers at her new school “don't seem completely exhausted and drained. They are tired, but it is manageable. I felt like Woodstown's teachers worked so hard, like they were compensating for the administration, too.” She recalls a sense of dread as she drove to work every day. Danielle reported feeling “beat down” and “tired.”

Amber reported “being treated like shit one moment” and getting flowers [metaphorically speaking] the next and feeling abused. Shelly and Amber also felt threatened by comments such as “You might win the battle but I'll win the war. Don't double cross me; you'll regret it. I'll cut you off at your knees.” Amber reported, “Everyone was afraid.” Charlotte recalled a time when she felt unsafe with a student because administrators did not support her by using appropriate discipline.

**Subtheme 3B: Finances.** Money was discussed as it applied to the district and as it applied to the participants personally. In the district, some participants felt that money was not allocated for the supplies they needed to have a successful classroom, perhaps was misallocated, and was considered more important than what was best for students. Most participants were adamant that money, their paycheck specifically, was *not* a factor in why they left the district; six participants reported being mostly satisfied with their salary.

First, Danielle and Jordan suggested that the district’s use of money impacted their students negatively. Danielle recalled not being able to spend $200 to purchase materials for a new class that she was required to teach, although other teachers were given money to purchase the materials necessary for their classrooms. Jordan felt that his forced transfer from a technology teacher to a math teacher was motivated by the district’s desire to save money and
was not in his best interest or in the best interest of the students’ futures. Chris was hopeful that she could improve the financial status of the school district, stating, “I also liked the idea of writing grants and doing my part to bring in additional revenue to a poverty-stricken area very similar to my own personal upbringing.” All eight participants reported poverty as a problem in the school district.

Secondly, Jordan, Amber, and Shelly specifically stated they did not leave the district for financial reasons. Jordan indicated that he took a $10,000 pay cut when he left the district. Amber said,

They did offer more money, it was never about the money. It has never been about the money…I'm making almost double which is great. Money is always nice. I'm not a money person. I'm not a, um, like assets, things, items don't mean anything to me. And I guess that's what irritates me it's because [people say] ‘Amber left because she wanted more money’ and that is so not true. So not true.

Shelly reiterated, “I think all of us who left [in 2016], left and made more money, but that's not the reason we left.” Charlotte suggested that she may have stayed in the district longer if she received both more support and more money.

**Subtheme 3C: Family.** Family was a theme that came up for three participants. In addition to the family and social connections present in Woodstown that the participants felt difficulty bridging, as discussed in a previous section, participants indicated their own families as serving a role in their decision to leave the district.

Amber explained she initially started working in the district so she could be with her children and take an active role in their education. Amber recalled a board member telling her that he hated her son. She further explained her child (who is currently in 10th grade) had once hit
a homerun off the board member’s son when the two boys were in Little League. The board member perceived that Amber’s son celebrated more than was appropriate. Amber recalled, “So he told me ‘I hate your son’. I was first of all taken back because we were talking about a board member. They are on the board for the best interest of our children and he’s telling me he hates my child.” She expressed it was difficult being a human resources director in the district where her children attended school. Amber asserted,

So that's the other piece to my leaving was because I felt like this is a good time, my kids are older, they don't need me as much, and it's a good time for me to get away from where they are and let them have their own…because they started to get questions about some things…and so that became kind of challenging for me.

Shelly explained that she came to work at Woodstown because her husband earned a job promotion that required their family to move close to Woodstown. Danielle stated, “I could not see myself settling down there [in Woodstown] and starting a family.”

Research Questions

1. How do former administrators and teachers of Woodstown School District describe their values?

Participants identified leadership, autonomy, support, acceptance, challenge and growth, appreciation, and healthiness as core values. Participants did not express financial gains as an important value.

Conducting oneself as a leader meant having “challenging conversations,” (Shelly) being able “to mold and make,” (Amber) and “creat[ing] something from the ground up” (Shelly). Leadership also meant using a specific skillset that included writing, communication, and collaboration. Additionally, being a leader meant having autonomy. The participants described
autonomy as thinking for oneself and being able to make decisions and try new things without asking for permission, leading to self-motivation. Lack of autonomy meant having to “fit the mold” created by the community (Jackson).

The participants believed that support, in the educational environment, meant having “someone to back us” (Amber) in difficult situations, receiving respect from administrators, students, co-workers, and community members, and being provided with the resources needed for success. For example, Charlotte expressed disappointment when administrators did not intervene when a student was swearing at her and when she was properly introduced to students before being asked to help them. Charlotte expected respect from students and expected her administrators to want that for her as well. Danielle expected respect for her students from her co-workers, the school board, and the community. Shelly and Amber felt unsupported when their personal growth as administrators was not encouraged. Jordan and Danielle would have felt more supported if the district had provided them with the resources needed to accomplish their goals for the students. Jackson wanted to feel his skills were being effectively put to use; he commented, “My [new] employer places me in positions where all of my gifts and talents may be utilized and my opinion is valued.”

Participants thought that acceptance meant being welcomed and supported by the community and feeling like a family or team with everyone working toward similar goals. The participants anticipated being “embraced” by the community with respect and kindness. Danielle felt verbal respect and kindness meant not being put-down publicly, such as in board meetings. Educators expected the community to be positive participants in the educational process as a way of showing acceptance of and respect for the educators. Positive communication with the community, rather than the negative communication some participants mentioned, is valued.
Some participants believed that acceptance also meant being shown appreciation for their work. None of the participants were core content teachers or primary administrators (principals or superintendents); this may lead to the perception of a lack of acceptance and value.

Challenge and growth meant setting goals and continually making progress toward those goals, embracing change rather than resisting it, and continuing one’s education. Shelly expressed being positively challenged in her initial work with Woodstown and being challenged in her new position. Amber said her needs are being met in her new position because she is being challenged; Jordan reported he is challenged to make positive change in his new position. Charlotte enjoys the progressive thinking in her new district.

Most participants continued their education while working at Woodstown, indicating a belief that education is a life-long process. The teacher questionnaire and administrator survey showed that all participants hold bachelor’s degrees, five hold master’s degrees, and one has completed the credits for a doctoral degree. Furthermore, all participants reported that if they could go back to their college days and start over, they would still consider becoming an educator. These statistics suggest that educators hold life-long learning as an important value, inherent to their role as educators.

Several participants voiced concern for their own mental and physical health and for the health of their co-workers. Some participants reported high blood pressure, severe anxiety, weight gain, and PTSD symptoms as problems that occurred toward the end of their tenure at Woodstown. Danielle reported that every day at Woodstown was a struggle for her. Charlotte reported that her new co-workers seem less stressed than those at Woodstown. Four participants perceived that their co-workers were unhappy working at Woodstown. Participants indicated that
maintaining good mental and physical health and working in a safe, low-stress environment is a priority for them.

Participants did not strongly express a need for greater salary as a core value. Although some participants earned more in their new positions, they were adamant that this was not the key reason for leaving the district. Further, some participants took a pay cut when leaving the district. Jordan reported a $10,000 pay cut, while Amber asserted, “I'm not a money person. I'm not a, um, like assets, things, items don't mean anything to me.”

2. How do participants describe their perception of the values of the Woodstown community?

Participants describe their perceptions of the values of the Woodstown community using terms such as “traditional,” “small-town,” “backwards,” and “not progressive.” Jackson indicated that conversely to Woodstown, his new district is “open and tolerant.” Participants did not believe the community held the same values of leadership, autonomy, support, challenge and growth, and acceptance. Although participants began their careers feeling relatively prepared and enthusiastic, some left the district feeling dissatisfaction.

Because the participants believed that part of leadership was having autonomy, when they did not have autonomy, they began to perceive that the community believed in controlling leaders rather than supporting leaders. Shelly mentioned not being allowed to think for herself, do anything without asking first, and having her ideas “shot down” because they were not “traditional.” Jackson reported the community exerted control over the administrators and teachers. Although participants perceived the community desired to control school district decision-making, this was not the type of involvement and support the educators needed.
Due to a perceived lack of support from administrators, community members, and parents, participants felt unwelcome and unvalued. In the teacher questionnaire and administrator survey, all eight participants reported lack of parental involvement as a problem. The perceived lack of parental involvement may have led to the feeling of being unsupported. Some participants felt supported by their colleagues and valued collaboration.

Feelings about the district’s mission and vision were mixed. Six participants reported that their colleagues shared their beliefs about the central mission of the school. Zero of the five teachers reported that administrators worked to develop broad agreement among teaching staff about the school’s mission, while administrators reported feeling slightly to somewhat effective at developing agreement about the school’s mission. This confusion may be because the district’s stated mission and vision and the participants’ perception of what actually happens in the district are different.

Due to a lack of support and communication and sometimes, outright negativity, participants felt the community did not accept them. They perceived that to be accepted, educators had to attend sporting or other extracurricular events, be born and raised in Woodstown, currently live in Woodstown, and purchase goods and services in Woodstown. Participants felt strongly that the community does not welcome “outsiders.” Jackson recalled, “As a result I do not believe I was valued or taken seriously. Instead I was criticized and ridiculed.” Danielle recounted a school board member criticizing the band at a public meeting. Amber reported a school board member saying, “I hate your son.” These negative interactions led participants to feel unwelcome in the community.

Participants strongly perceived that the community has traditional educational values which are not “progressive.” Progressive educational values included attending college, lifelong
learning, academic careers, and traveling outside of the community. Traditional educational values were described as using materials and resources that worked in the past, becoming educated in technical and vocational fields, obtaining local careers in technical and vocational jobs, and continuing to live in the community. Some participants felt “what’s best for students” was not a priority for the community. Jackson recalled, “Um, the wrong direction to me was that they didn't value…you have to value your students. First and foremost. Absolutely.”

Chris recalled that when she was hired, the district was heading in a progressive direction which abruptly changed with new leadership. “The board that hired me appeared to be much more educationally progressive and student-centered, and nearly all of them had children in the school system at that time. The new board members who were elected several years later no longer had children in the school system and appeared to be more concerned about cutting the budget and athletics and preparing kids for vocational training.”

Participants focused on some perceptions regarding students as well. Survey results revealed all eight participants suggested that poor student health is somewhat a problem in the district; this could indicate that quality health care is not a priority, is unavailable, or is unaffordable in the district. Nonetheless, participants indicated that physical and mental health is a priority for them.

Participants agreed that student apathy was a problem in the district. The survey also found that students come to school unprepared to learn. These perceptions furthered the participants’ belief that education is a low priority to the community. Jackson perceived that “the community [did not] view acquiring a world language as a need or want but more of a requirement on a college application.”
In the survey results, three participants indicated somewhat unsatisfactory working conditions. Charlotte found this especially challenging. Participants may interpret the perceived poor conditions of the buildings and grounds as a lack of care for education, students, and school staff.

3. How do participants’ values and actions compare and contrast with the perceived community values and actions?

Participants believed that educators should be leaders who are autonomous; they perceived the school board and community wanted to control and micromanage educators. Participants believe in life-long academic learning, while perceiving the community, school board, and parents see high school graduation is an endpoint in education and prefer vocational fields of study. Jackson commented, “Catering to the culture and community is not necessarily a negative approach but providing other opportunities for other pursuits is important also.” Participants further viewed academics as more important than extra-curricular or social activities, but perceived the community places extra-curricular and social activities above academic excellence. Participants believed significant support from administrators, parents, community, and school board is required for students to meet educational goals, while perceiving that the community and parents believe education is primarily the job of a teacher.

Some participants perceived that the school board and administrators did not make decisions based on what was best for children, but rather made decisions primarily based on saving as much money as possible. Tanya stated, “And I still feel for the most part the community values education. I’d say the community values the bottom line dollar still more.”

The district’s purported mission and values do not match the perceptions of former educators. The first belief statement says, “All people have value and should be treated with
Some participants felt that they were not valued and were disrespected by the community. Some participants also suggested that students were valued less than monetary savings. The second belief statement says, “The school district and community are responsible for generating measurable improvement in student achievement.” Participants indicated a perceived lack of growth and change necessary for progress in the school district. Participants felt parents, the community, and the school board were not supportive of initiatives to improve student achievement. Survey results indicated that professional development was not often cross-referenced with data to ensure its impact on student achievement. The third belief statement reads, “Student learning is maximized when effective and varied instructional resources are applied.” Some participants felt they were not given the resources necessary to be effective. The final belief statement reads, “All students should be taught using differentiated instruction.” Participants did not directly mention differentiation, but did believe that professional development, a venue for learning how to use differentiation, was somewhat unfocused and ineffective at some points in their tenure.

The mission of the district is “to provide a supportive educational environment to promote student learning through academic rigor, district partnerships and career-readiness programs for the development of responsible citizens in today’s world” (Woodstown Home Page, January 20, 2017). The school’s motto reads “Educating today ... responsible citizens tomorrow” (Woodstown Home Page, January 20, 2017). Although the mission statement indicates a “supportive educational environment,” participants strongly suggested that support for education was lacking. Participants also felt “academic rigor” was not as valued by the community with social, sports, and extra-curricular activities overshadowing academics. The participants perceive that “career-readiness” means vocational and technical careers to the
community, not academic careers. Participants did not mention strong “district partnerships” but did indicate a lack of parental involvement and a distrust of outsiders as problems. Participants perceived that parents prefer their children to live locally and have local jobs which somewhat juxtaposes the idea of being “responsible citizens in today’s world.” Chris recalled, “The majority of the school board had changed hands several years after I arrived, and it was clear that the new members had a much different direction in mind. Those philosophies were different from my own.” While participants lamented the lack of support and involvement from the community, school board, and administration, some participants felt they lacked autonomy and were micromanaged.

4. What reasons do participants identify for leaving and how, if at all, do those reasons relate to their perception of values?

In understanding why participants left Woodstown School District, it is important to first identify why they came to the school district. Danielle came to Woodstown because it was the first school that offered her a position, and she felt it was the ideal job as she wanted to work with high school students. Jordan came to Woodstown because he graduated from Woodstown and lived in the area; he began substitute teaching there even before graduating from college. Woodstown was one of the few districts he applied to (he could only remember one other) and, like Danielle, Woodstown was the first to offer him a teaching position. Amber resided in Woodstown and desired to work at the school to be more involved in her children’s education. Jackson came to Woodstown because he was unemployed and the job was available. Although the position was initially only long-term, rather than permanent, Jackson looked forward to taking the full-time position and “immers[ing] myself in the school district and other extracurricular activities that would fit my gifts and talents.” Tanya came to the district because
it was closer to home, paid more money, and it was a high school position. Although Charlotte was very satisfied with the district she was working in, she, like Tanya, took a position at Woodstown because it was closer to her home. Chris came to the school district because she was looking for a leadership role and thought she could benefit the school district. She also agreed with the educational mission and how it was being carried out. Shelly accepted a job at Woodstown because her husband had a job relocation in the area. Chris was the only participant who alluded to taking a job in the school district because the position matched her philosophy.

Participants left the district for a variety of reasons, but most participants recognized dissonance between their beliefs and actions and the beliefs and actions of the school board, administrators, and community members. Danielle reported, “I left to find a position where I would be appreciated and a place that actually advocated for kids.” This connects to the perception that being supported and accepted means feeling appreciated. Although she wanted to continue to work on the initiatives she had started in the district, Chris left because she did not agree with the philosophy of newly elected school board members or their decision to release Dr. Morgan. She commented, “Honestly, I think just some public support for what the administration was trying to achieve would have been enough for me to stay.” This supports the perception that an alignment between the district’s beliefs and the educator’s beliefs is an important factor in educator turnover. Charlotte stated, “I knew from my first day at Woodstown that was not a fit for me personally.” Her reasons for leaving included dissatisfaction with the community and her position. She cited a lack of progress, a reactive rather than proactive approach to problems, and a significant lack of support from the administration as specific catalysts. Charlotte perceived her beliefs and values as nearly opposite to those held by various stakeholders in the district.
Amber and Shelly worked at the school district during the same period of time and left the school district within months of each other. They expressed similar reasons for leaving. Amber indicated that it was a good time to leave the district because her children are older now. Amber recalled that having a school board member say he hated her child was one catalyst for her departure. Another catalyst was the lack of autonomy she experienced under new leadership. Amber also felt that as a human resource director, she was being asked to take actions that countered her values and beliefs. She recalled, “You’re put into a spot where you know possibly people are being set up.” She further elaborated, “I had to support his ideas or his beliefs when I knew they weren’t right.” Amber also cited her health as declining because of the tensions in her workplace. She further mentioned, “not being challenged.” Amber’s decision to leave related directly to her perception that her beliefs and values were not shared by school board members and the superintendent.

Likewise, Shelly indicated that when she left, the district was moving backwards and “I didn’t want to be a part of that.” She recalled a lack of autonomy, health concerns, and a lack of support. Additionally, Shelly explained,

He pulled me into his office . . . and said he wasn’t so sure that with my husband traveling and you know with my three kids that I could really commit to being a director the way that I needed to. I looked at him and I say, “You know I have to leave at 4:00 and I do have a family, but as you know there is never an email that doesn’t get answered, all my reports are always done on time, um, everything that you ask me to do it’s done” . . . But basically, he was insinuating that I couldn’t do my job because I’m a female. And I had other things to do because I’m a wife.
She stated, “[In my new district], I am trusted and I’m believed in and that’s what I did not have when I left Woodstown.” Amber and Shelly’s experiences connect to the value of leadership and the belief that leaders should be trusted and supported by the administrators and community members.

Jordan left Woodstown when he no longer felt appreciated as an employee. He reported, “But somebody along the way forgot, oh you also have to value your employees. And I didn't see that there at all. And so that not valuing your employee part, um, that probably drove me out. And like I said before, I know the talk was 'it's all about students' but in my opinion it was not all about the students.” This connects to the belief that people should be valued and appreciated for the effort they put forth, especially when that effort is beyond what is required.

Jackson left the district because he was offered a full-time position in a charter school before Woodstown officially offered him a full-time position. He also said a more supportive environment would have been necessary for him to accept the position. This relates to the perception that teaching should not be done in isolation, but requires support and collaboration.

Tanya is the only participant who left the school district on primarily positive terms. Tanya left the district largely because she wanted to put her leadership skills and her advanced certification to better use. Tanya and other participants perceived that leadership opportunities are important to those who practice life-long learning and prefer challenge and growth in the workplace rather than stagnation or tradition.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the purpose statement and research questions. Participants included eight former educators of the Woodstown School District from various grade levels, content areas, and administrative positions. Each participant was described using his or her own
words from the interviews and surveys. Data analysis revealed three major themes which were discussed. Themes included the value of positive interpersonal relationships, the value of lifelong growth and learning, and the value of stability and security. Each theme revealed several subthemes. The value of lifelong positive interpersonal relationships included the subthemes of autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation. The value of growth and learning included progress and change and leadership. Finally, the value of stability and security included health, finances, and family. Answers to research questions were explained. Participants expressed specific values that were different from the perceived community values; this discrepancy led to dissonance and the eventual decision to leave the school district.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to compare the values of educators to the perceived values of a rural community. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings as related to the literature review and guiding theories, the methodological and practical implications of the study, a review of the limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The results of this research were achieved using a phenomenological research methodology and were presented in Chapter Four of this manuscript. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to gather the lived experiences of the participants and then analyze those narratives for values and perceptions. Van Manen (1990) suggested that phenomenology requires a researcher to define what the phenomenon is, what characteristics it has, and what characteristics it does not have. The phenomenon in this study was educator turnover and its relationship to values. To identify the characteristics of the values that relate to educator turnover, research questions were developed and data was collected and analyzed. Results from the analysis were presented in the form of themes and answers to the research questions. These results are briefly restated below.

Themes

Three themes related to the study’s purpose of describing educators’ values were uncovered from the data collection including (a) the development of positive interpersonal relationships, (b) the pursuit of lifelong growth and learning, and (c) the desire for a certain level of security and stability. The first theme, the development of positive interpersonal relationships,
had four sub themes: autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation. The second theme, the pursuit of lifelong growth and learning, encompassed two sub themes: progress/change and leadership. The final theme, the desire for a certain level of security and stability, incorporated three sub themes: health, finances, and family. These themes were viewed through the lens of personal values and compared against Rokeach’s (1968) definition of a value as an “enduring belief” (p. 16) that leads to actions and behaviors which are “personally and socially preferable” (p. 16).

The most significant theme was the development of positive interpersonal relationships. This theme was deemed to be most significant because it elicited the most codes during data analysis. Much of the participants’ interview and focus group answers revolved around their relationships and interactions with other educational stakeholders; this led me to understand that participants, when considering whether to leave or stay in the district, were more concerned about people, than about “things” such as money, resources, or the physical environment. This revelation further cemented the need for qualitative research in the field of rural school turnover; quantitative research focuses on measuring and counting, while qualitative research is better able to reveal the nuances of participants’ thought processes concerning more abstract concepts such as values, relationships, and decision-making.

Participants hold positive interpersonal relationships as a value necessary to be successful and satisfied in their lives and careers. When positive interpersonal relationships did not exist, participants felt a decrease in autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation. Some participants voiced frustration when they were not trusted to make informed decisions on their own. All participants felt a lack of support from one or more key groups including administrators, colleagues, school board members, parents, and/or community members. Some
participants felt unable to penetrate the already existing relationship bonds within the community. Additionally, participants felt their hard work went unnoticed or was misunderstood by the key groups. Negative interactions with administrators, colleagues, school board members, and community members greatly decreased job satisfaction and impacted the participants’ decision to leave the district.

The data analysis revealed that participants believe learning and growth are lifelong activities; they felt more satisfied in their lives and jobs when they were serving in roles which allowed new experiences and opportunities to practice leadership. Participants enjoyed setting goals and making progress toward those goals, being positively challenged, and embracing change. Participants expressed dissatisfaction when goals were unclear, no progress was evident, or they were not able to put their learning to use through leadership. These factors impacted participants’ decisions to leave the school district.

A final minor theme included the need for good health, financial security, and family stability; participants believed a certain level of security and stability are necessary for a quality life. When participants began having physical symptoms related to the negative interpersonal relationships in their workplace, they were more inclined to leave. Symptoms varied from physical, such as heart palpitations, to mental, such as not wanting to go to work. Participants were mostly satisfied with their salaries, and they adamantly denied salary as a reason for leaving the district. Participants did voice concerns about the financial status of the school district, indicating that the district valued saving money more than doing what was best for students or faculty. Finally, participants were influenced by the needs of their families as they made the decision to leave or stay in the district.
Research Questions

In addition to the themes revealed and discussed above, this research sought to answer four research questions:

1. How do former educators (participants) of Woodstown School District describe their values?

Participants described their values using terms such as “progress,” “goals,” “change,” “open-minded” and “cutting-edge.” Participants identified leadership, autonomy, support, acceptance, challenge and growth, appreciation, and healthiness as core values. Participants did not express financial gains as an important value. Jordan asserted a focus on student growth and achievement; “Everything that I do is geared towards student outcomes.” Charlotte indicated,

I would say some of the best experiences I had at Woodstown were always with the students. I recall helping a homeless student get a job, obtain his CTC license, and get clothes. I remember building relationships with kids who told me that felt like they had no one else in the building they could talk to and how grateful they were for me. I remember feeling very fulfilled when I went into senior English classes and reviewing their options after high school and the college application process. It made me feel happy knowing that I left there and they at least had that information. The hardest about leaving Woodstown for me was feeling a little guilty about leaving the relationships I had built with some of the students.

Participants in this study expressed a desire for doing what was best, according to their personal values, for students.

2. How do participants describe their perception of the values of the Woodstown community?
Participants describe their perceptions of the values of the Woodstown community using terms such as “traditional,” “small-town,” “backwards,” and “not progressive.” Some participants expressed the idea that decisions were made by the school board and administrators that were in the interest of saving money, rather than in the best interest of students or educators. Jordan recalled, “I was on the negotiating committee for one contract. Just to see what it was like and I know what I thought people were like, when I got in that negotiating room and at the table they were completely different and their opinion of teachers was completely not what I thought they were. This was even teachers.” Jordan’s initially thought that the community supported education and educators, but was alarmed when he found his positive perceptions did not accurately reflect the community’s beliefs, at least when money was involved.

3. How do participants’ values and actions compare with the perceived community values and actions?

Participants perceived that the community’s values are different from their values and different from the values espoused by the school’s vision and mission. Charlotte recalled, “Unfortunately, I had come from a very progressive district before Woodstown, so I had it set in my head how a school district should be, and was devastated when my experience was completely different than my expectations.” For example, participants believe in lifelong learning and growth while they perceived, and research on rural school districts supports the belief, that rural communities do not strongly support ongoing education beyond high school. Additionally, participants indicated a significant need for collaboration and relationships, but perceived that the community’s social structure was impenetrable. A plausible explanation is that the kind of support and involvement being offered and the kind of support and involvement participants wanted was not the same.
4. What reasons do participants identify for leaving and how, if at all, do those reasons relate to their perception of values and actions?

Participants cited reasons for leaving including lack of support, lack of appreciation, lack of respect, dissatisfaction with the community, a need for more challenge and growth, and a discrepancy in educational philosophy. When participants were unsuccessful in establishing positive relationships, and were not supported in their efforts for growth and learning, they lost enthusiasm for their work and subsequently left the school district. They did not believe the community held the same beliefs and standards, causing dissonance both their personal and professional lives. Danielle asserted, “There simply are not very many opportunities for the kind of career I desired to have in that area of [the state].”

Discussion

This section relates the findings of this study to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The findings support and further extend the literature concerning educators’ values and rural school districts and adds to the body of research relating to the guiding theories.

Empirical Literature

As the literature suggested, educators felt unprepared to handle the unique qualities of the rural school. Although the literature identifies factors impacting educator turnover and the participants of this study cited some of those factors, these studies do not view turnover or the reasons for turnover through the lens of values. The results of this study are not only supported by research on rural education and values, these results expand the research on rural education and the impact of values on educator turnover.

Rural education. Many of the characteristics of rural communities revealed in the
literature match the participants’ perceptions of Woodstown. For example, Carlson (as cited in Yarrow et al., 1998) found that social relationships in the rural community are tight-knit; participants in this study struggled to penetrate the social bonds present in Woodstown. Carlson (as cited in Yarrow et al., 1998) also found that rural communities have traditional values while the educators in this study espoused more progressive values.

Participants confirmed Gjelten’s (1982) description of education in the depressed rural community, particularly the strong identity of the Woodstown community and the belief that school should be a place of pride and tradition over academic excellence. Participants further confirmed Broomhall and Johnson’s (1992) factors impacting education and achievement in rural schools, such as limited job opportunities, controversial or uninformed community educational decisions, and low socioeconomic characteristics. Participants also confirmed the struggle between vocational and academic education that exists in Woodstown and is revealed in the literature as a common conflict in rural education (DeYoung, 1995).

Little and Miller (2007) found that rural communities tend to hire teachers whose values match the school values, rather than those educators who are most qualified; this study reveals that when school districts hire educators who are qualified but perhaps do not share the rural community’s values, educator turnover increases. Burton, et al. (2013) indicated several themes concerning rural educator turnover, two of which were confirmed by the participants. The participants expressed a lack of support and resources, and the participants did not embrace the rural culture, in this case, the same values of the community.

Values. Participants espoused, and through their teacher education programs further reinforced, specific values that are appropriate for educators. The literature on teacher education programs confirms the values expressed by the participants. For example, the educators in this
study exhibited values similar to the NCATE’s dispositions for teachers, such as “We believe all students can learn” and “We value collaboration and cooperative work” (NCATE, 2002, bullets a & f).

Educators’ perceptions of rural community values mirrored the rural values described by Payne (1995) and other researchers. Terminal values are ideals, while instrumental values are perceptions about behaviors and beliefs that society deems acceptable. For example, the educators in this study could be considered “life-long learners” because they have continued to gain education throughout their careers. Conversely, for many people in rural communities, high school is the highest educational attainment earned; data confirms that this is the case in Woodstown School District. This discrepancy in instrumental values, a difference in each culture’s understanding of learning, could lead to dissonance. Participants reported greater consonance between their values and actions after relocating to new jobs outside of Woodstown School District.

Resistance to change, or a commitment to tradition rather than progress, was perceived by the educators in this study. As Coetsee (1999) and Judson (1991) revealed commitment to change and resistance to change are opposite ends of a continuum. Participants in this study longed for progress and change. Per Judson (1991) and Lawler (1989), cooperation, enthusiasm, support, involvement, shared vision, rewards, recognition and commitment are evidence for acceptance of change. The participants perceived these key values as missing from the Woodstown culture.
Theoretical Literature

Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory supported this study. The results of this study provided additional evidence for the guiding theories.

Correlating with Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory, educators experienced social interactions which led them to develop a specific representation of the environment of Woodstown School District. These social interactions and the consequential representation led the educator to specific actions and behaviors based on self-efficacy and self-evaluation. Bandura (2012) described self-efficacy as a person’s ability to produce certain outcomes based on certain actions and behaviors. Participants self-efficacy declined when they were unable to produce desirable outcomes based on their values because of the perceived conflicting values of the community and the actions and behaviors of those around them.

Bandura (2012) suggested that self-efficacy is “strengthened by reducing anxiety and depression, building physical strength and stamina, and correcting the misreading of physical and emotional states” (p. 13). In order to increase self-efficacy and decrease the dissonance created by conflicting values, educators left the school district. Bandura (as cited in Pajares, 1996) also found that self-efficacy is lowered when barriers outside of the individual’s control impeded performance; when the participants of this study were impeded from practicing their values, they felt significantly less satisfaction in their jobs and subsequently left.

Bandura (1991; 2012) determined that environment, behavior, and cognition bidirectionally impact one another. For example, former educators developed perceptions about their environment, while their environment also impacted their self-efficacy. When self-efficacy declined, they selected a behavior, leaving the school district, to decrease the dissonance between
the environmental pressures and their cognitive beliefs. Educators reported that when their self-efficacy decreased, their desire to actively participate in the environment declined. Essentially, the educators found themselves unable to practice their beliefs and values, set and reach goals, and have autonomy in the environment at Woodstown. This inability to achieve efficacy led to stress, anxiety, and lack of satisfaction. Participants identified factors that would have led to increased efficacy as autonomy, support, and recognition.
Figure 2: Triadic Reciprocal Determinism in Educator Turnover

The behavior of educators, leaving the school district, can impact cognition by relieving dissonance, while cognition (values and decision making) can impact the behavior of educators and community members.

Cognition, including values and decision making, can impact the environment of Woodstown. The environment of the school and community can, conversely, impact the cognition (values and decision making) of the educators and community members.

The environment of Woodstown community and school impacted the behavior of the educator which was leaving the school district. Research shows that educator turnover, in turn, impacts the school environment.
Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory suggested that people prefer to maintain cognitive balance in their beliefs, attitudes, and values. The participants perceived distinct discrepancies between their values and the community values, leading to dissonance. Festinger (1959) highlighted four types of dissonance, including post-decision dissonance, forced compliance dissonance, maximized dissonance/consequent attitude change, and social support dissonance. The most prominent types of dissonance in this research were forced compliance, when participants were forced to follow beliefs they did not agree with, and social support dissonance, when participants felt a significant lack of support for their values.

An example of forced compliance dissonance occurred when Amber, as human resources director, reported, “He told me, this is no lie--he told me he'd give me a raise, well first of all he told me I had to do it, then he told me if you can convince [specific female principal] to go back into the classroom, I'll get you a raise.” Amber, to her great discomfort and against her personal beliefs, did persuade the principal to go back to the classroom; the decision was later reversed, and the individual continued as a principal. Nonetheless, Amber experienced significant dissonance when similar situations continued to occur.

Participants experienced dissonance in social support when their values did not match with the values of the community. This lack of support and acceptance was felt most strongly when participants perceived they and their progressive ideas were unappreciated or unacknowledged. Charlotte felt dissonance in social support reporting,

A few days after my first day, the principal asked me about a friend who had previously applied for a position there. He asked if she was currently available because they would like to offer her a long-term sub which would likely become full-time. My friend came to the school and worked for about a month and a half developing strong rapport with the
students. They observed and checked on her several times a week, and told her how impressed they were with her. On several occasions, the principals told both of us, together and separately on a number of occasions, that it was her job for the taking and there was no reason she would not get the job when it became full-time. When the time came for her to interview, she felt confident. However, for several weeks after the interview, they avoided her. They stopped coming to her room, avoided her follow-up emails, and dodged questions . . . Finally, over three weeks after her interview, they had the nerve to tell her she did not get the job.

These types of situations led some participants to lack respect for and experience frustration with relationships and communication practices in the school district.

**Implications**

The results of this study produced findings that have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for stakeholders including educators, rural school boards and community members, and colleges of education. The purpose of this section is to address the implications of this study and provide recommendations for these stakeholders.

**Theoretical Implications**

Results of this study have theoretical implications for researchers studying rural education, educator values, and educator turnover. Using Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory as lenses through which to view educator values and educator turnover in rural school districts, this study provided a description of the values of educators and their perceptions of the values of rural school district where they formerly worked. Specifically, this study described how the values of educators compared with
their perception of the rural community values, the dissonance produced when those values conflicted, and the subsequent decision-making process regarding their careers.

The implications of this study as related to the guiding theories suggest that educators experience a triadic relationship between cognition, environment, and behavior. Further, educators experienced increases and decreases in self-efficacy because of the consonance and dissonance between their values and their perception of the community’s values. The words and actions of specific actors in the school and community environment led participants to develop perceptions of the values of these actors; these perceptions were then transferred to the community when the actors had significant roles, such as administrators or school board members, in the district or community.

**Empirical Implications**

The literature review revealed a gap in qualitative research regarding both rural education and educator values. The results of this study expand the literature and assist educational stakeholders including educational researchers, colleges of education, rural school boards and administrators, and educators considering a career in a rural community. When educational research is conducted primarily in urban school districts, and the results are then transferred to all school districts, negative consequences may arise. Rural and urban schools and communities have differing values and characteristics. The findings of this study confirm previous research on the values and characteristics of rural schools and communities and support the implication that more research on rural education is needed. This study also confirms that the values of educators, who have been educated in primarily urban settings, are different from the values of rural communities. This study implied a connection between the research on values, the research on education, and the research on rural communities that needs further explored.
Practical Implications

The results of this study have practical implications for colleges of education, rural school boards and administrators, and educators considering a career in a rural community. Implications for each group of stakeholders are described below.

Colleges of education. This study has three implications for colleges of education. Firstly, the results of this study suggest that colleges of education should expose future educators to rural school settings through preservice teaching. Secondly, colleges of education should assist future educators in identifying and making explicit their own values. Finally, colleges of education should explore the similarities and differences between rural schools and urban schools and develop programs that assist future educators in identifying and meeting the unique needs of various types of school districts.

Rural school boards, administrators, and communities. The study implies that rural school boards and communities should make their values explicit to future employees. The school district’s vision and mission should be accurate and well-publicized. Rural school boards and communities should ask potential employees to explicitly define their values during the interview process to better consider consonance and dissonance. Research suggests that educator turnover costs school districts a significant amount of money (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007); therefore, it is in the district’s best interest to consider educator and community values when making hiring decisions. Rural school boards and communities should consider ways to mitigate potential differences in community and educator values.

Rural educators. The results of this study have several implications for educators considering working in a rural school district. First, educators must consider and make explicit their values. Educators must research and be aware of the values of the community in which they
intend to work, whether that community is rural, suburban, or urban. Finally, in instances where an educator intends to work in a district that holds conflicting values, the educator must consider how he or she might mitigate those differences.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Participants for this study included former secondary (7-12) teachers of Woodstown Secondary School or the former Woodstown Junior High School and former administrators of Woodstown School District. Participants left the district of their own volition, not by actions of administrators or school board members as related to budget, ineffectiveness, or discipline. Both genders were included. Various content area and grade levels (7-12) were included. Participants left the school district from 2008 to the present.

Specific delimitations were set to limit the boundaries of this study. First, this study was set in a rural school district; research shows that rural schools are underrepresented in the literature. Research additionally shows that educator turnover is a problem of significance in rural school districts. Second, this study was set in one specific rural school district, Woodstown School District. This location was selected because it exhibits the phenomenon, educator turnover, and met the criteria for a “rural” school district. Only one location was selected to provide a deep, thick description of the setting and the perceived values of that setting. Third, only educators who had left Woodstown School District of their own volition, not by actions of the school board, were considered for this study; this delimitation eliminated participants who had been dismissed from the school district.

Certain limitations existed in this study. First, rural schools exhibit many diverse qualities; therefore, the characteristics of Woodstown and its associated values cannot necessarily be transferred to other rural schools and communities. Second, as an educator in a
rural school district, my personal values and perception of the rural community could have impacted my interpretation of the data, regardless of my attempts to bracket my experiences from those of the participants. Finally, it is important to recognize that this is a study of perceptions which are not necessarily reality. Participants were asked to identify their perceptions of the “other,” in this case the community; nonetheless, communities are made up of diverse individuals. Participants developed certain perceptions about the “community” based on their interactions with a limited number of prominent individuals within the community who served to represent the whole community. For example, the community elects school board members and expects them to make decisions based on the wishes of their constituents. Therefore, when a school board member makes a decision, one might assume that he or she is speaking for a larger portion of the community.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on the values of educators, their perceptions of the values of rural communities, and the intersection between those values as related to educator turnover. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. The dearth of research, both qualitative and quantitative, in rural educational settings indicates a need for future research in various topics within rural settings. Historically, research has focused on urban school districts and then findings have been applied to all school districts; yet research also shows that urban schools and rural schools have different characteristics and serve diverse communities. To improve education in rural schools, further research in rural settings, both those which are considered academically and financially successful and those which are not considered successful, should occur.
2. Research in educator turnover needs to be furthered as educator turnover continues to be a problem in some school districts. Quantitative data exists, but more anecdotal data, expressing the lived experiences of educators who have left school districts is needed to understand and mitigate the phenomenon more clearly and effectively. Research in rural school districts which have effectively retained quality educators is important in identifying factors that lead educators to stay in a school district.

3. The topic of values needs considerable research, both on its own and specifically as values relate to educators and school settings. First, researchers do not agree on one definition of values or specific examples of values; yet, researchers agree that values impact decisions. Valid and reliable tools for explicating values need developed. Once educators and other stakeholders clearly define their values, additional research can investigate how differing values interact with one another, particularly in educational settings. For example, participants in this study identified life-long growth and progress as a value. It is entirely likely that community members would also cite life-long growth and progress as a value as well. Nonetheless, the participants and the community members may have different ideas about what life-long growth and learning means; participants in this study clearly meant academic, collegiate learning. Rural community members might mean on-the-job and hands-on training when they consider life-long growth and progress. Each value elicited by the educator participants requires further investigation, and research with rural community member participants is needed to determine if the educators’ perceptions are reality.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the findings of this research including the themes that were developed through data analysis and the answers to the research questions. Themes included
positive interpersonal relationships, lifelong growth and learning, and stability and security. Connections and extensions to the empirical and theoretical literature were explained. The supporting theories included Bandura’s (1991, 2012) sociocultural theory and Festinger’s (1959) cognitive dissonance theory. Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications were addressed. The most important take-away from this research is that a discrepancy between educator values and community values can lead to educator turnover, particularly in rural communities. This finding can assist educational stakeholders, including college teachers and administrators, local school boards and administrators, and educators considering working in rural school districts, in mediating the dissonance that occurs because of differing values between educators and rural communities. Limitations and delimitations were addressed. Possible topics for future research were recommended including continued research in and about rural school districts and educator values.
Epilogue

In conducting this study, I have learned a great deal about the research process. Most significantly, I have learned that the topic of values is, as my literature review suggested, difficult to define. My research created more questions than it answered, yet shed light on the need for deeper and broader research in values and education.

As an educator in a rural school district, the results of this study can impact my day-to-day practice. I occasionally participate in interviewing new educators for the school district, and I see the need to question candidates about their experiences in rural education and their values as compared to the rural community. I recently worked with my administrators to conduct a mock interview with a student teacher. After the interview, I encouraged the student teacher to research the schools she applies to and consider their mission and vision as it compares to her own. Realistically, beginning educators are quick to accept the first position that is offered, but a philosophical mismatch between educator and school district could increase dissonance and turnover. As I continue to work with student teachers, I will encourage them to put their teaching philosophies into words, understand and verbalize their worldviews, and define their values as related to education. In my experience and as supported in my literature review, educators may not be aware of their values. If every stakeholder in an educational system is only vaguely aware, or not at all aware, of his/her values, then setting goals, making progress, and embracing change will be difficult.

I intend to continue to investigate and articulate my own values as an educator and researcher. As my expertise as a researcher evolves, I plan to conduct further research in educator values and rural school districts. I hope to answer some of the questions this research generated.
REFERENCES


April 20, 2016

Angela D. Howe
IRB Approval 2499.042016: Educators’ Values and Rural Communities: A
Phenomenological Study

Dear Angela,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 4/20/16 to 4/19/17
Protocol # 2499.042016

CONSENT FORM
Educators’ Values and Rural Communities: A Phenomenological Study
Angela D. Howe
Liberty University
School of Education
You are invited to be in a research study concerning educator turnover in rural school districts. You were selected as a possible participant because you formerly worked as a teacher or administrator in the chosen setting for this study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
Angela Howe, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to reveal how former administrators and secondary teachers of a rural school district in Northeastern U.S. describe their values and their perceptions of the values of the rural school district and community where they formerly worked in an effort to reveal dissonance that may lead to increased educator turnover.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1) Participated in a one-on-one audio-recorded open-ended interview with the researcher for approximately one and a half to two hours
2) Complete a questionnaire of approximately 25 questions which will take approximately 20 minutes
3) Potentially answer follow-up questions via online focus group blog space which will require approximately 20 to 30 minutes

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The risks involved in this study are no more than you would encounter in everyday life. You may decline to answer any question at any time, and you may terminate your involvement in this study at any time.
The benefits to participation are indirect; the study of educator turnover in rural schools districts may improve educational outcomes for students and occupational outcomes for teachers and administrators in the future.

Compensation:
Upon completion of the interview and questionnaire, you will receive a $50 Visa gift card for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 4/20/16 to 4/19/17
Protocol # 2499.042016
only the researcher will have access to the records. The names of the participants and the setting will be changed to protect confidentiality and privacy. Computerized data will be password-protected, while printed data will be secured in a private, locked office. Following the completion of this dissertation, all data will be retained for three years, then deleted and/or destroyed. After audio-recorded data has been transcribed, audio recordings will be deleted. During focus group sessions, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, as it is the participant’s responsibility to withhold his/her identity from the other participants.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:**
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:**
The researcher conducting this study is Angela Howe. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at (814) 762-4833 or adhowe@liberty.edu. You may also contact the research’s faculty advisor, Dr. Frederick Milacci, at fmilacci@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

(Note: Do not agree to participate unless IRB approval information with current dates has been added to this document.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: __________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: __________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: __________________________ Date: ________________
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Semi-structured Interview Questions:

1. What influenced you to become an educator?
2. Why did you apply for and accept a position at Woodstown?
3. How did teaching at Woodstown meet your needs, wants, and expectations?
4. How did teaching at Woodstown not meet your needs, wants, and expectations?
5. How did you perceive your needs, wants, and expectations in comparison to the needs, wants, and expectations of the school community and school board?
6. What is your current position and how does it meet your needs, wants, and expectations?
7. What could have changed at Woodstown that would have resulted in you staying?

Follow-up interview questions:

8. What educational experiences did you have prior to being employed at Woodstown?
9. What specific instances and observations challenged your perceptions about your needs, wants, and expectations and those of the community of Woodstown?

Focus Group Questions:

1. What advice would you give to an educator who is considering working in a rural school district such as PO?
2. If you could start your tenure at PO over again, what, if anything, would you do differently?
3. How, if at all, has your experience at PO impacted your life?
4. Three themes have been revealed in this study: 1) The importance of lifelong growth and learning through being progressive, embracing change, and practicing leadership skills;
2) the need for positive interpersonal relationships as evidenced by autonomy, support, acceptance, and appreciation; 3) the need for good health, financial security, and a stable family environment. Please describe any final comments or experiences as related to these values.
APPENDIX D: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Name:

This Questionnaire was developed from the Schools and Staff Survey 2011-12 published by the U.S. Department of Education for the National Center for Education Statistics and originally administered by the U.S. Census Bureau.

GENERAL INFORMATION
1. What year(s) did you teach in the Woodstown School District (SASS-4A #9)
   
   ___________ TO ___________

2. Was this your first teaching job? (SASS-4A #9)

   YES  NO

3. How many schools did you teach in, full-time, previous to Woodstown School District (SASS-4A #10)

   ___________

4. How many schools have you taught in, full-time, since leaving Woodstown School District? (Sass-4A #11)

   ___________

5. What grade level(s) did you teach while employed at Woodstown School District (SASS-4A #13)

   ______________________________

6. What courses did you teach while employed at Woodstown School District? (SASS-4A #16, 24)

   ______________________________
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

7. What degrees have you earned? Where did you earn these degrees?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Earned</th>
<th>Major(s)/Minor(s)</th>
<th>University, City, State</th>
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</table>

8. Where did you complete your student teaching practicum? (SASS-4A #31a,b)

9. How long was your student teaching practicum? (SASS-4A #31a,b)

10. In your first year of teaching, did you participate in a teacher induction program? (SASS-4A #34)

   YES   NO

11. Check the appropriate box for each statement below. (SASS-4A #33) In your first year of teaching, how well prepared were you to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at all prepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Well prepared</th>
<th>Very well prepared</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Handle a range of classroom management or discipline situations?</td>
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<td>b. Use a variety of instructional methods?</td>
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<td>c. Teach your subject matter?</td>
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<td>d. Use computers in classroom instruction?</td>
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<td>e. Assess students?</td>
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<td>f. Differentiate instruction in the classroom?</td>
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<td>g. Use data from student assessments to inform instruction?</td>
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<td>h. Meet state content standards?</td>
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</table>
13. Did you receive the following kinds of support during your FIRST year of teaching?  
(SASS-4A #35)  
   a. Reduced teaching schedule or number of preparations
      
      | YES | NO |
      |-----|----|

   b. Common planning time with teacher in your subject
      
      | YES | NO |
      |-----|----|

   c. Seminars or classes for beginning teachers
      
      | YES | NO |
      |-----|----|

   d. Extra assistance (e.g., teacher aides)
      
      | YES | NO |
      |-----|----|

   e. Regular supportive communication with your principal, other administrators, or department chair
      
      | YES | NO |
      |-----|----|
SCHOOL CLIMATE AND TEACHER ATTITUDES

14. How much actual influence do you think teachers had over school policy at Woodstown School District in each of the following areas? (SASS-4A #61)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>Minor influence</th>
<th>Moderate influence</th>
<th>A great deal of influence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Setting performance standards for students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Establishing curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Determining the content of in-service professional development programs</td>
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<td>d. Evaluating teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Hiring new full-time teachers</td>
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<td>f. Setting discipline policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Deciding how the school budget will be spent</td>
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</table>

15. How much actual control did you have in your classroom at Woodstown School District over the following areas of your planning and teaching? (SASS-4A #62)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>No control</th>
<th>Minor control</th>
<th>Moderate control</th>
<th>A great deal of control</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught</td>
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<td>c. Selecting teaching techniques</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Evaluating and grading students</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Disciplining students</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Determining the amount of homework to be assigned</td>
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</table>

16. Additional Comments:
### 17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements during your time at Woodstown School District? (SASS-4A #63)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>The school administration’s behavior toward the staff was supportive and encouraging.</td>
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<td>b.</td>
<td>I was satisfied with my teaching salary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>The level of student misbehavior in this school (such as noise, horseplay, or fighting in the halls, cafeteria, or student lounge) interfered with my teaching.</td>
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<td>d.</td>
<td>I received a great deal of support from the parents and community for my work.</td>
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<td>e.</td>
<td>Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machine were readily available as needed by staff.</td>
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<td>f.</td>
<td>Routine duties and paperwork interfered with my job of teaching.</td>
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<td>g.</td>
<td>My principal enforced school rules for student conduct and backed me up when I needed it.</td>
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<td>h.</td>
<td>Rules for student behavior were consistently enforced by teachers in the school, even for students who weren’t in their classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Most of my colleagues shared my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.</td>
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<td>j.</td>
<td>The principal knew what kind of school he/she wanted and communicated that to the staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>There was a great deal of cooperative effort among staff.</td>
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<td>l.</td>
<td>In WSD, staff members were recognized for a job well done.</td>
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<td>m.</td>
<td>I worried about the security of my job because of the performance of my students or school on state and/or local tests.</td>
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<td>n.</td>
<td>State or district content had a positive effect on my satisfaction with teaching.</td>
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<td>o.</td>
<td>I was given the support I needed to teach students with special needs.</td>
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<td>p.</td>
<td>The amount of student tardiness or class cutting interfered with my teaching.</td>
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<td>q.</td>
<td>I was generally satisfied with being a teacher at WSD.</td>
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<td>r.</td>
<td>I made a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers.</td>
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</table>
18. To what extent was each of the following a problem in POASD? (SASS-4A #64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Serious problem</th>
<th>Moderate problem</th>
<th>Minor problem</th>
<th>Not a problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Student tardiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Student absenteeism</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Student class cutting</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Teacher absenteeism</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Students dropping out</td>
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<td>f. Student apathy</td>
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<td>g. Lack of parental involvement</td>
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<td>h. Poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Students came to school unprepared to learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>j. Poor student health</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (SASS-4A #65)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school weren’t worth it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. The teachers at the school like being there; I would have described us as a satisfied group.</td>
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<td>c. I liked the way things were run at this school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. If I could get a higher paying job, I would leave teaching as soon as possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. I often thought about transferring to another school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. I didn’t seem to have as much enthusiasm the longer I worked at WSD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. I often thought about staying home from school because I was just too tired to go.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
20. If you could go back to your college days and start over again, would you become a teacher or not? (SASS-4A #66a)
   - Certainly would become a teacher
   - Probably would become a teacher
   - Chances are about even for and against
   - Probably would not become a teacher
   - Certainly would not become a teacher

21. How long do you plan to remain in teaching? (SASS-4A #66b)
   - As long as I am able
   - Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job
   - Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from another job
   - Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits
   - Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage)
   - Until a more desirable job opportunity comes up
   - Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can
   - Undecided at this time

22. Additional Comments:
23. Indicate how effectively your principal(s) at Woodstown School District, performed each of the following. (TFS-3-1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all effectively</th>
<th>Slightly effectively</th>
<th>Somewhat effectively</th>
<th>Very effectively</th>
<th>Extremely effectively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Communicated respect for and support of teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Encouraged teachers to change teaching methods if students were not doing well</td>
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<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Worked with staff to meet curriculum standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Encouraged professional collaboration among staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Worked with teaching staff to solve school or department problems</td>
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<td>f.</td>
<td>Encouraged the teaching staff to use student assessment results in planning curriculum and instruction</td>
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<td>g.</td>
<td>Worked to develop broad agreement among the teaching staff about the school’s mission</td>
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<td>h.</td>
<td>Facilitated and encouraged professional development activities of teachers</td>
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</table>
24. Indicate the level of importance EACH of the following played in your decision to leave Woodstown School District. (TFS-3-1 #23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Because I wanted to take a job more conveniently located OR because I moved</td>
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<td>b. Because of other personal life reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family)</td>
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<td>c. Because I wanted to receive retirement benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Because I wanted or needed a higher salary</td>
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<td>e. Because I needed better benefits</td>
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<td>f. Because I was concerned about my job security</td>
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<td>g. Because I was dissatisfied with my job description or assignment (e.g., responsibilities, grade level, or subject area)</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Because I did not have enough autonomy over my classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Because I was dissatisfied with the number of students I taught</td>
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<td>j. Because I felt there were too many intrusions on my teaching time</td>
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<td>k. Because I wanted the opportunity to teach at my current school</td>
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<td>l. Because I was dissatisfied with my working conditions (e.g., facilities, classroom resources, school safety)</td>
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<td>m. Because student discipline problems were an issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>n. Because I was dissatisfied with the administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>o. Because I was dissatisfied with the lack of influence I had over school policies and practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>Slightly important</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.</td>
<td>Because there were not enough opportunities for leadership roles or professional advancement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q.</td>
<td>Because I was dissatisfied with how student assessment/school accountability measures impacted my teaching or curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r.</td>
<td>Because I was dissatisfied with how some of my compensation, benefits, or rewards were tied to the performance of my students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.</td>
<td>Because I was dissatisfied with the support I received for preparing my students for assessments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t.</td>
<td>Because of other factors not included above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25.

Additional Comments:
APPENDIX E: ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Name:

This Questionnaire was developed from the Schools and Staff Survey 2011-12 published by the U.S. Department of Education for the National Center for Education Statistics and originally administered by the U.S. Census Bureau.

ADMINISTRATOR EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING

1. What years did you serve as an administrator for the Woodstown School District? (SASS-2A, #2)

   ____ TO ____

2. Before you became an administrator, how many years of elementary or secondary teaching experience did you have? (SASS-2A, #3)

3. In addition to serving as an administrator in the Woodstown School District, did you serve as a teacher in the district? (SASS-2A, #5)

   YES  NO

   If yes, for how many years did you serve as a teacher in the Woodstown School District?

   ____

   If yes, what grade level and/or content area(s) did you teach in?

   ____
ADMINISTRATOR EDUCATION

4. What degrees and/or certificates have you earned? Where did you earn these degrees and/or certificates?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree/Certificate Earned</th>
<th>Major(s)/Minor(s)/Content Area</th>
<th>University, City, State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GOALS AND DECISION MAKING

5. From the following ten goals, which do you consider the most important, second most important, and third most important? (SASS-2A, #15)

a. Building basic literacy skills (math, reading, writing, speaking)
b. Encouraging academic excellence
c. Preparing students for post-secondary education
d. Promoting occupational or vocational skills
e. Promoting good work habits and self-discipline
f. Promoting personal growth (self-esteem, self-knowledge, etc.)
g. Promoting human relations skills
h. Promoting specific moral values
i. Promoting multicultural awareness or understanding
j. Fostering religious or spiritual development

FIRST
SECOND
THIRD
6. How much ACTUAL influence did you had as an administrator at Woodstown School District on the following activities? (SASS-2A, #16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>Minor influence</th>
<th>Moderate influence</th>
<th>Major influence</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Setting performance standards for students in this school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Establishing curriculum at this school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Evaluating teachers of this school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Hiring full-time teachers of this school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Setting discipline policy at this school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Deciding how your school budget will be spent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

7. During your tenure as an administrator at Woodstown School District, were teachers provided with any of the following during regular contract hours for the purpose of professional development activities? (SASS-2A, #18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Substitute teachers to cover classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Early dismissal or late start for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Professional days built in before the beginning of the students’ school year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Professional days built in during the students’ school year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Professional days built in after the students’ school year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Common planning time for teachers for professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Reduced teacher workloads (less time in classroom with students or less time on assigned non-instructional duties) for professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. During your time as an administrator at this school, how often was professional development for teachers: (SASS-2A, #19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Designed or chosen to support the school’s improvement goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Designed or chosen to support the district’s improvement goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Designed or chosen to support the implementation of state or local standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Evaluated for evidence of improvement in student achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Considered part of teachers’ regular work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Planned by teachers in this school or district</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Presented by teachers in this school or district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Accompanied by the resources teachers need (e.g., time and materials) to make changes in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Additional Comments
### SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY

10. During your tenure as an administrator, did the district conduct any of the following in your building? (SASS-2A, #23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Control access to school building during school hours (e.g., locked or monitored doors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Control access to school grounds during school hours (e.g., locked or monitored gates)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Require students to pass through metal detectors each day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Perform random metal detector checks on students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Close the campus for most or all students during lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>Use random dog sniffs to check for drugs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>Perform random sweeps for contraband (e.g., weapons or drugs) but not dog sniffs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>Require students to wear uniforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Enforce strict dress code</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>Require clear book bags or ban bags on school grounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>Require students to wear badges or picture IDs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l.</td>
<td>Use one or more security cameras to monitor students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.</td>
<td>Maintain a daily presence of police or security personnel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. During your tenure, did the school offer any of the following? (SASS-2A, #24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Programs or activities where students participate in the community during or after normal school hours (e.g., service learning or community service projects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Programs to acknowledge student achievement (e.g., assemblies, principal list/honor roll, or student of the week/month)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>An incentive/reward program that encourages students’ academic success (e.g., pizza parties, cash for grades)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>A program designed to help students prepare for the next grade or college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Additional Comments

---
13. To your knowledge, how often, if ever, did the following events occur in the school? (SASS-2A, #25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Happens daily</th>
<th>Happens at least once a week</th>
<th>Happens at least once a month</th>
<th>Happens on occasion</th>
<th>Never happens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Physical conflicts between students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Robbery or theft</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Vandalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Student use of alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Student use of illegal drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Student weapon possession</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Physical abuse of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Student racial tensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Student bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Student verbal abuse of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Widespread disorder in classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>l. Student acts of disrespect toward teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>m. Gang activities</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. During your tenure, did the school have any of the following (SASS-2A, #27):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. A staff member assigned to work on parent involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Workshops or courses for parents or guardians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Services to support parent participation, such as providing childcare or transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. A parent drop-in center or lounge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. Additional Comments

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements during your time at Woodstown School District? (SASS-4A #63)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s.</td>
<td>I was satisfied with my salary.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t.</td>
<td>I received a great deal of support from the parents and community for my work as an administrator.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u.</td>
<td>Rules for student behavior were consistently enforced by teachers in the school, even for students who weren’t in their classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Most of my colleagues (other administrators and teachers) shared my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w.</td>
<td>There was a great deal of cooperative effort among staff, including administrators, teachers, and support staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.</td>
<td>In WSD, staff members were recognized for a job well done.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y.</td>
<td>I was generally satisfied with being an administrator at WSD.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. To what extent was each of the following a problem in WSD? (SASS-4A #64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Serious problem</th>
<th>Moderate problem</th>
<th>Minor problem</th>
<th>Not a problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>Student tardiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l.</td>
<td>Student absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.</td>
<td>Student class cutting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.</td>
<td>Teacher absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o.</td>
<td>Students dropping out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.</td>
<td>Student apathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q.</td>
<td>Lack of parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r.</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.</td>
<td>Students came to school unprepared to learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t.</td>
<td>Poor student health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (SASS-4A #65)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>The stress and disappointments involved in working at this school weren’t worth it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>The employees at the school liked being there; I would have described us as a satisfied group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>If I could get a higher paying job, I would leave the education field as soon as possible.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>I often thought about transferring to another school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l.</td>
<td>I didn’t seem to have as much enthusiasm the longer I worked at WSD.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.</td>
<td>I often thought about staying home from school because I was just too tired to go.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. If you could go back to your college days and start over again, would you become a teacher and/or administrator or not? (SASS-4A #66a)
   □ Certainly would become a teacher and/or administrator
   □ Probably would become a teacher and/or administrator
   □ Chances are about even for and against
   □ Probably would not become a teacher and/or administrator
   □ Certainly would not become a teacher and/or administrator

20. How long do you plan to remain in education? (SASS-4A #66b)
   □ As long as I am able
   □ Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job
   □ Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from another job
   □ Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits
   □ Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage)
   □ Until a more desirable job opportunity comes up
   □ Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can
   □ Undecided at this time
21. Indicate how effectively you believe that you performed each of the following as an administrator at WSD. (TFS-3-1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all effectively</th>
<th>Slightly effectively</th>
<th>Somewhat effectively</th>
<th>Very effectively</th>
<th>Extremely effectively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Communicated respect for and support of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>Encouraged teachers to change teaching methods if students were not doing well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>Worked with staff to meet curriculum standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l.</td>
<td>Encouraged professional collaboration among staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.</td>
<td>Worked with teaching staff to solve school or department problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.</td>
<td>Encouraged the teaching staff to use student assessment results in planning curriculum and instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>o.</td>
<td>Worked to develop broad agreement among the teaching staff about the school’s mission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.</td>
<td>Facilitated and encouraged professional development activities of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22. Indicate the level of importance EACH of the following played in your decision to leave WSD. (TFS-3-1 #23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>u. Because I wanted to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take a job more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conveniently located</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR because I moved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Because of other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal life reasons</td>
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<td>pregnancy/childcare,</td>
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<td>caring for family)</td>
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<td>w. Because I wanted to</td>
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<td>receive retirement</td>
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<td>benefits</td>
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<td>x. Because I wanted or</td>
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<td>needed a higher salary</td>
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<td>y. Because I needed better</td>
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<td>benefits</td>
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<td>z. Because I was</td>
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<td>concerned about my job</td>
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<td>security</td>
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<td>aa. Because I was</td>
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<td>dissatisfied with my job</td>
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<td>assignments</td>
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<td>bb. Because I did not have</td>
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<td>enough autonomy</td>
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<td>cc. Because I wanted the</td>
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<td>opportunity to work at</td>
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<td>my current school</td>
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<td>dd. Because I was</td>
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<td>dissatisfied with my</td>
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<td>working conditions</td>
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<td>(e.g., facilities,</td>
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<td>classroom resources,</td>
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<td>school safety)</td>
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<td>ee. Because student</td>
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<td>discipline problems</td>
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<td>were an issue</td>
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<td>ff. Because I was</td>
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<td>dissatisfied with the</td>
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<td>teachers</td>
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23.

Additional Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gg. Because I was dissatisfied with the lack of influence I had over school policies and practices</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hh. Because there were not enough opportunities for leadership roles or professional advancement</td>
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<td>ii. Because I was dissatisfied with district performance on assessments</td>
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<td>jj. Because I was dissatisfied with how some of my compensation, benefits, or rewards were tied to the performance of teachers and students</td>
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<td>kk. Because of other factors not included above</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX F: MEMO EXCERPT

1/30/17

The term values is a challenge. A person can value something, but that’s not necessarily a value, but it could be. No two authors seem to use the same definition of values or give the same examples of values. In order to maintain a consistent framework for my study, I selected one author’s definition of values. I have to constantly refer back to that definition to clear my mind as I develop my themes- my themes are, hopefully, the values that participants hold.

1/31/17

Email dialogue with chair. Re: sent draft of Ch 4 for review. Given permission to start updating Chapters 1-3 and start drafting Chapter 5

2/2/17

After reviewing chapter 4 on the phone with committee chair, I need to make some changes. Reintroduce problem statement, RQs, themes (summary). Regroup themes (2-3 themes with subthemes). Make themes (values) relate to title (like a sermon with 2-3 points). Explain data saturation. Add reason for leaving to chart. Focus group needs completed. Move to new dissertation template and rewrite previous chapters to past tense.

2/5/17

After conferring with chair via email about focus group questions, sent focus group invite to all participants. Also sent chair an outline of Chapter 4 per his request.
Email dialogue with committee member. Current use of citations in chapter 4 is distracting and cluttered. Need to check on APA guidelines for this and review with chair.
Other things that need completed: Thank you cards and gift cards, apply for graduation. Think of gift for committee members.

2/8/17

Focus group via google docs was difficult. Even though I followed the steps I was given, some participants still couldn’t access the doc. This was my first time setting up a google doc, although I’ve participated in group docs before. Still, I think I would do it this way again- seems to be the best format for managing an asynchronous, private group discussion. Participants haven’t really “responded” to each other so much as simply added to what was said.
Aiming for April 18th to defend. Committee chair has okayed the date even though it’s after the deadline, since he is also the research consultant. Things to do before then: get a suit, check on hotels.
Reviewed dissertation handbook for items needed in defense powerpoint. Also need to update appendices- missing a few things that are indicated in dissertation handbook.
APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP EXCERPT VIA GOOGLE DOC

Directions: Please add your pseudonym and answer the question.
Example:
1. What advice would you give to an educator who is considering working in a rural school district such as Woodstown?
   Angie: I would recommend…..
   Shelly: I suggest…..

Focus Questions:

1. What advice would you give to an educator who is considering working in a rural school district such as Woodstown?
   Tanya: I would tell them to know standards and learn the curriculum.
   Chris: Progressive education is not always valued by parents and community members, so educators need to go the extra mile to explain the importance of education to not only their students, but parents and community leaders as well. They have to constantly validate what they do.
   Charlotte: My advice for an educator who would work at Woodstown or a school district similar would be to go into it with an open mind. Be aware that your formal training and experiences will likely be completely different than what you’re about to jump into, but try to embrace it, and use the opportunity as a growing/learning experience.
   Jackson: Be sure to befriend somebody who has a tradition with the school or what I would call is part of the Crowd.
   Amber: I would encourage anyone to take part in education. It is a rewarding career. I would suggest that the person seeking employment research the school of interest to determine if the school’s goals and mission match up with their core beliefs on education. I would also recommend that the person seek employment in a school district outside of their own school district. Having personal connections makes things more difficult. Being outside your own school district allows you to see education for kids and not for the adults.
APPENDIX H: THEME DEVELOPMENT VIA EXCEL SAMPLE

And that was another issue. Everybody else had been schooled in whatever the math programs that they were using at the time, and they just threw me in with new data collection at all (L. Yorks, personal communication, October 30, 2016).

I think that’s why I’m still sitting in this “all but dissertation world” because there was not the support there from my superintendent (Dr. Kennedy) at that time to keep going and say how are you doing with that? Why?

I was a people person and he was exactly where I needed to be but Dr. Morgan pushed me to that and encouraged me to go back and get my bachelors’ (A. Franklin, personal communication, August 8, 2016)

If I have a superintendent who allows me to make decisions and supports me and tells me that every day (S. Weston, personal communication, August 8, 2016).

If I have the support [in new district], he [Dr. Morgan] already taught us we can’t take away what we learned. That’s one thing I’ve learned about education, once you learn it you have it. Can people stuff it for a while, but you have it (A. Franklin, personal communication, August 8, 2016)

I felt like the administration at Woodstown showed very little as far as care and respect for the employees and students. As a counselor, I am not quick to push discipline, but I felt like any disciplinary action, when it was given, was done in a very unprofessional way (C. Emerson, November 12, 2016)

I remember walking in my first day at school, and one of the principals’ I was crying kid in my office to help, without introducing her (C. Emerson, November 12, 2016)

In my current position, I feel valued. My principals collaborate with me, and we speak constantly and work together throughout the day (C. Emerson, November 12, 2016)

I have a few situations that really rocked my core during my time at Woodstown. I was surprised to learn on my first day at Woodstown that counselors had mandatory times during the week where they were required

... when I worked at Woodstown, I gave up myself above and beyond, um, I did so many things for kids there, after school, during school (L. Yorks, personal communication, October 29, 2016)

... I started a club up where I went around with my pickup truck and got donations of used computers and computer hardware. And then on my own time after school, I taught kids how to tear the computers apart, fix it

There was no time during the school day. They ended up giving me one period a day and then they took that away so I did it over my lunch and then so after doing that for four or five years, the district decided that

Until, when the principal comes up to you and says to you during the previous year, at the end of the school year, and says to you “We need you to come up with some cool computer classes. Call them cool things, do

And that was another issue. Everybody else had been schooled in whatever the math programs that they were using at the time, and they just threw me in with new data collection at all (L. Yorks, personal communication, October 30, 2016).
# APPENDIX I: AUDIT TRAIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/15-3/16</td>
<td>Drafted proposal</td>
<td>-Multiple drafts, received and incorporated committee feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Prepared powerpoint for proposal defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/16</td>
<td>Successful proposal defense</td>
<td>Begin IRB application, make recommended changes to manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/2016</td>
<td>Received IRB approval</td>
<td>Created list of potential participants via school board meeting minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Pilot interviews (3)</td>
<td>Reworked interview questions to elicit more thorough responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>Contacted participants with invitation</td>
<td>16 participants contacted; 8 agreed to participate</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/11/16</td>
<td>Received consent forms and questionnaires</td>
<td>Used Survey Monkey to collect and analyze responses to questionnaires</td>
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<td>6/28/16</td>
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<td>6/30/16</td>
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<td>10/21/16</td>
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<td>1/12/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/8/16</td>
<td>Conducted interviews</td>
<td>Transcribed by private transcriber</td>
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<td>8/8/16</td>
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<td>9/5/16</td>
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<td>10/20/16</td>
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<td>10/27/16</td>
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<td>11/2/16</td>
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<td>1/13/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/17-3/17</td>
<td>Themes draft</td>
<td>Used Microsoft Excel to dissect transcripts and organize into themes</td>
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<td>Participant description draft</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ch 4 Outline</td>
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<td>Ch 5 Complete draft</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/15/17</td>
<td>Sent complete manuscript draft to committee for review, per chair</td>
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<td>Began making edits as each completed their review, permission to proceed to defense manuscript without additional review</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/15/17</td>
<td>Sent each participant an excerpt for member check purposes</td>
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<td>Two participants had minor changes needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/5/17</td>
<td>Focus Group Invite and Responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/8/17-</td>
<td>Chris, Charlotte</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/18/17-</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/7/17</td>
<td>Confirmed defense date/time with university and committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/18/17 11:00 AM</td>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Scheduled</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Um, I’m not sure I would have stayed. As a matter of fact, I had, I could have stayed and I choose not to.

A: Tell me about that, like, why did you leave?

I did not feel appreciated there at all. I didn’t feel like anything I did there over the 23 years that I had been there anybody gave a hoot about. So there’s a pile of things that I did for the kids and nobody took any of that into consideration.

A: Right. Ok. And do you find that’s different now or are you still experiencing the same kind of thing?

Here?

A: Yeah.

It took me about, I’m going on my 5th year here now, it was the middle of last year, the first two or three years here was just a shock to my system. I was the old guy at the junior high where everybody asked “where’s this at?” “What’s that?” “How do you do that?” I get here and I didn’t even know where the copy machine was. So it was a real shock to my system. So it took me three and a half years to decide whether I made the right move or not. But, it was probably the middle of last year I realized this is an awesome place to come to. And so I feel appreciated here. I even have people tell me that now to my face. And like I said, I have right now, I didn’t really do anything to deserve it but I have the most awesome job I’ve ever had.

A: So, tell me how it works. How do you know what teachers you are going to go help and what do you show them when you are there? What do you do?

So, how it works is...

A: We don’t have any instructional coaches so I don’t know.

Ok, so how it works here is, there are all kinds of ways it could work. The idea, the ideal way is for me to meet with the teachers and discuss what kind of teaching strategy, what do you want to do in your classroom? Ok, here’s some teaching strategies that you might want to consider to teach whatever it is you want to teach. Or, here’s some technology tools that would really complement what you want to teach. Kick that up to a higher depth of knowledge level. Before, during, after. Before is the planning part of it. The during part is when you actually go into the classroom and co-teach with them or just kind of standoff to the side and just observe what’s happening. Whatever. Afterwards you have another meeting with them. That’s that after part...before, during, after. After to discuss how they think it went. What they think they would change, what they didn’t like, and then maybe do another before, during, after round with them again.

A: Do they come to you or do you go to them or is there some kind of method where everybody meets with you or?

It’s not a forced thing. It’s all voluntary. It’s, so I can affect whether it’s voluntary or not by, you know, building relationships and stuff up with people and saying “hey, how about I come observe your or just see how things are happening just to get a feel for what’s going on.” I can do it that way, they can come