Original Research Article

"If I Ever Leave, I Have a List of People That Are Going With Me:" Principals' Understandings of and Responses to Place Influences on Teacher Staffing in West Virginia

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Abstract

Purpose: Schools across the predominately rural state of West Virginia are experiencing widespread teacher shortages, though recruitment and retention difficulties are unevenly distributed across place. Using spatial in/justice as our framework, we explore how principals define place, how place influences principal perceptions of teacher recruitment and retention, and how principals respond to these staffing challenges given their leadership experiences, relationship to school community, and understandings of place

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affordances and disadvantages. **Research Methods/Approach** This research utilized interviews with eight principals across six school districts in West Virginia over a four-month time frame. We inductively coded interview transcripts in iterative cycles using our research framework as a guide for emic and etic codes. **Findings:** We find principals' understanding of place influences on staffing to be specific to the unique attributes of each community and the placement of their leadership experiences – as community returners, seasoned though not originally from the community, and new-to-place. Their understandings of spatial in/justice as it relates to teacher staffing shape ideas of place affordances and disadvantages and recruitment and retention practices. These findings complexify the teacher staffing picture across geographically diverse rural places and the responses available to leaders given their leadership experience and relationship to place. **Implications for Research and Practice** The place-specific influences on teacher staffing problematize statewide policy mechanisms for ameliorating teacher shortages. The findings also suggest the need for further in-depth qualitative research within districts and across states, with an emphasis on racially diverse rural places.

Introduction

In 2019, the growing West Virginia teacher shortage reached a point of crisis, with over 1,000 teacher vacancies statewide, especially in disciplines such as mathematics and special education (Farmer, 2020; Pellett, 2019). Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous West Virginia schools were forced to close temporarily in Fall 2020 because of understaffing (WCHS, 2020). These shortages persist, yet are unevenly distributed (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). School leaders responsible for filling vacant positions with qualified teachers and retaining existing teaching staff must navigate place-specific staffing challenges.

In contributing to this special issue on the role of leadership in the equitable recruitment and retention of rural educators, we attend to how West Virginia school principals perceive the role of place in teacher staffing issues and, given these perceptions, their recruitment and retention practices. Drawing on qualitative analyses of interviews with school principals from geographically diverse places across West Virginia, this study is oriented

toward the following research questions: (1) How do principals define place as it relates to their schools?; (2) How do principals' perception of place influence their approaches to teacher recruitment and retention?

By addressing these questions, our research highlights the localized, place-based nuances of the teacher shortage, and the effects of spatial in/justice on opportunities and limitations for responses afforded to school-level leaders. Crucially, we surface how principals' perceptions of and relationships with their school communities shape approaches to teacher staffing shortages. By complexifying how constructions of place critically influence teacher staffing and examining the relationship between place, spatial in/justice, and principals' approaches to addressing staffing inequities, this work provides a novel contribution to the teacher staffing literature.

Theoretical Framework and Relevant Literature

Research that centers rural schools and communities is inherently grounded in geographic and sociocultural definitions of place. In the United States, there is no single definition of rurality; instead, governmental agencies use a range of geographic and demographic measures to establish urban–rural definitions. Summing up the "definitional messiness" of rural and urban places, Tieken (2017) notes "depending on the system used, the rural proportion of the country's population swings from 7% to 49%," (p. 386). For rural education research, it is therefore essential to conceptualize the geopolitical dimensions of rural communities and the sociocultural, economic, ecological, and spatial perceptions that define places (Roberts & Green, 2013).

In this study, we use two forms of data to identify schools and districts as rural places: (a) rural locale identifications from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), and (b) participant-defined categorizations of place. By including emic, principal-centered definitions of place, we expand the conceptualization of rurality beyond geopolitical boundaries. We argue this conceptualization is particularly salient for research on educator attrition, as the political, economic, sociohistorical, and cultural dimensions of communities create the underlying contexts that influence teacher recruitment and retention in myriad ways. Those contexts are intertwined with uneven resource allocation across geographic and political boundaries, which in turn obscures how broader systems may influence teacher recruitment and retention.

To conceptualize the relationship between place and factors that shape teacher attrition, we apply Soja's (2010) theory of spatial in/justice—that parameters of spaces are shaped by human geography, which creates an uneven distribution of cultural, economic, political, and social capital and

resources. Soja, a postmodernist political geographer, critiques the conceptualization of justice-neutral geopolitical space, explaining: "justice and injustice are infused into the multiscalar geographies in which we live… the socialized geographies of (in)justice significantly affect our lives, creating lasting structures of unevenly distributed advantage and disadvantage" (2010, p. 20). Although spatial in/justice is an urbanist theory, the well-documented inequitable distribution of resources across educational systems (e.g., Baker, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Logan et al., 2012) illustrates the theoretical relevance to research on US public schooling.

An emerging body of scholarship adapts the theory of spatial in/justice to examine how educational inequities are shaped by geospatial place (Morrison et al., 2017; Roberts & Green, 2013; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). Tieken (2017) writes:

> The American educational system is based on property rights: those with high-value properties have the "right" to high-value schooling experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Rural and urban communities of color are typically places of little property wealth, a legacy of exploitation, underinvestment, and white inheritance … Quality education, therefore, is not just an advantage of race and class; it is also an advantage of geography. (p. 398)

The uneven geographic distribution of economic, social, and political capital creates place-based educational inequities (Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019) that critically shape the experiences of administrators, teachers, and other educational professionals, and, therefore, influence the affordances and challenges of teacher staffing experienced in a particular place. Although factors influencing teacher staffing can be personal, such as leaving the profession due to family obligations or retirement (Ingersoll, 2009), turnover trends can be shaped by organizational dynamics and external contexts of the school (Nguyen et al., 2020). These factors include student body characteristics and community demographics (Borman & Dowling, 2008); teacher salary, benefits, and school resources (Nguyen et al., 2020); and administrative and community support for educators (Ingersoll, 2001, 2009). As such, this problem is particularly acute in certain geospatial contexts (e.g., rural and urban communities) and content areas, such as mathematics and special education (Sutcher et al., 2019; Viadero, 2018).

Large-scale policy levers touted as promising shortage responses, such as teacher residency programs, grow-your-own initiatives, and alternative certification pathways, among others (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kaka et al., 2016) may alleviate staffing challenges in some contexts, but the diverse and inequitable nature of place suggests uneven effects of

blanket policies. Given the urbanist nature of most education policy frameworks, rural staffing problems are unlikely to be solved by these initiatives (Johnson & Howley, 2015).

Rural schools experience greater challenges in recruitment and retention than other geospatial contexts (Goldhaber et al., 2020; Miller, 2012; Nguyen, 2020). Many factors have been attributed to the rural retention issue, including social isolation (Hansen, 2018), geographic isolation (Fowles et al., 2014), distance from university teacher preparation programs (Goldhaber et al., 2020), and comparatively lower salaries (Monk, 2020). This is not to suggest that rural schools do not have desirable teaching attributes, as a robust body of scholarship illustrates the benefits of teaching in rural communities (e.g., Azano & Stewart, 2015; Tran et al., 2020). Rather, challenges may supersede benefits: "While community closeness, small rural class sizes, and other attributes of rural communities are often noted as advantages for working in a rural school, realities of rural life can serve as barriers for recruiting highly qualified teachers" (Azano & Stewart, 2015, p. 1).

Recruiting and retaining teachers to rural schools requires a "fit" between candidates and communities (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Novice and new-to-place principals (seasoned administrators working in new schools or communities) lack the essential relationships and knowledge needed to navigate their rural communities (Bailey, 2020; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018), placing them at a disadvantage when trying to recruit "best fit" community outsiders or credentialed locals to fill vacant teaching positions (Bland et al., 2016; Reininger, 2012). Rural administrators need to develop a critical understanding of the dynamics and dimensions of their communities (Budge, 2006; McHenry-Sorber & Sutherland, 2020) in order to recruit teachers who are more likely to stay. Rural administrators can develop critical, place-based leadership through ongoing engagement with community stakeholders and organizations (Bauch, 2001; Harmon & Schafft, 2009), thus building trust with community members and local teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

However, rural administrators have high rates of turnover (Pendola & Fuller, 2018; Williams et al., 2019), and rural schools and districts may be used as "'stepping stones' to more desirable positions" (Grissom & Andersen, 2012, p. 1173). Building- and district-level administrators are also stretched thin in rural districts, often taking on work of multiple positions (Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006). "Unlike the superintendents from large city districts, many rural superintendents may be asked to perform duties such as teaching, coaching, or driving a bus," (Jenkins, 2007, p. 28). The work of recruiting, training, and retaining educators falls on the shoulders of both

district- and building-level administrators in many rural communities (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018), though they must do that work with smaller central office staffs, diminished local tax bases, and the barriers presented to many rural schools around teacher recruitment and retention (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019).

Although the challenges of teacher recruitment and the effects of spatial inequity on schooling are investigated issues, there is little research that examines the intersection of these challenges for educational leaders. In order to effectively address teacher shortages, researchers need to surface the intersection of place and leadership relevant to teacher staffing phenomena. In this study, we use spatial in/justice to provide a foundational understanding of the relationship between the context of schooling and external factors that influence teacher recruitment and retention. By critically examining place as an essential context for teacher staffing, we encompass multiple dimensions of influences over teacher labor decisions.

Study Motivation and Methods

Using the framework of spatial in/justice, we focus on school principals' perspectives of place, and the impacts of place on principals' approaches to addressing teacher staffing and shortages. This principal-focused research is part of a larger study (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019) into the antecedents and potential solutions for the teacher shortage crisis in West Virginia. The broader work included interviews with leaders of rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts across the country; and 27 state-, region-, and local-level stakeholders across West Virginia, including state officials, as well as school, district, and union leaders. We analyzed state policies offered as potential solutions to the shortage crisis. Our qualitative, principal-centered study addresses a critical gap in scholarship (Goldhaber et al., 2020) by providing information-rich cases on the affordances, challenges, and opportunities for rural teacher staffing at the building level.

Research Context

West Virginia is an exemplary case for studying the localized nature of the teacher shortage. West Virginia is a largely rural state, wholly situated in Appalachia, with some of the highest poverty rates in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). It is marked by divergent community economic viability, demographic shifts, and spatial in/equity of resources; therefore, it is an ideal site to examine leadership responses to teacher shortages. Approximately 261,000 students attended West Virginia's 55 county

school districts, during school year (SY) 2019–2020. The White student population makes up 90% of total enrollment, with Black and Hispanic or Latinx students (the next two largest racial groups) comprising about 6% of enrollment (WVDE, 2020). Half of all schools are located in rural districts (NCES, 2020); however, schools vary by NCES rural/urban locale code within county-wide systems. One in six rural students in West Virginia qualify for special education services, and one in five rural children lives below the poverty line (Showalter et al., 2019).

In tandem with declining K-12 student enrollment,[1] the state's teacher workforce is decreasing due to slowed recruitment and increased turnover (Lochmiller et al., 2016), consistent with broader national trends (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). State-level policy efforts to address teacher recruitment and retention, including multiple alternative certification and additional credentialing pathways, have not been effective solutions. The state's hiring policies, which prevent districts from offering jobs onsite to candidates at career fairs, further inhibit recruitment efforts. These ineffective policy levers are compounded by the state-determined relatively low teacher salary scale. Although the state sets a minimum teacher salary, some districts are able to attract teachers with higher pay achieved through the raising of excess levies. Nonetheless, West Virginia ranked 50th for average teacher pay in SY 2018–2019 (Perino et al., 2020). In 2018, teachers in West Virginia staged a statewide teacher strike; while they won 5% pay increases, this union win has not appeared to improve the statewide teacher shortage.

Data Collection and Analysis

We center our analysis on interviews with eight school principals (see Table 1) across six county school districts in West Virginia (see Table 2). Interviewees were purposefully selected to capture geographic and demographic diversity, and divergent population shifts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in order to build rich descriptions of principal perspectives on teacher staffing across contexts (Patton, 2015). We included leaders of schools across the PK-12 spectrum[2], interviewing principals from four high schools, one middle school, one PK-8 school, one intermediate school, and one elementary school (see Table 1). Early interview data suggested teacher movement within county-wide systems. To further investigate this phenomenon, we identified one district with significant teacher movement —Heritage County[3]—and conducted interviews with principals at each school level within that county system, illuminating intradistrict as well as interdistrict spatial inequalities.

Table 1. Summary of School Principal Interviewees.

County school district	NCES locale code	Name	School level	Tenure in current position	Leadership tenure classification
Heritage County	Town: distant[a]	P. Clark	High School	<1 year	New-to-Place
	Rural: fringe	P. Jackson	Middle School	10 years	Seasoned
	Town: distant	P. Wallis	Intermediate School	3 years	Returner
River County	Town: remote	P. Wilde	High School	2 years	Returner
Coal County	Rural: fringe	P. Branch	High School	3 years	Seasoned
Folk County	Town: remote[a]	P. Lewis	Elementary School	<1 year	New-to-Place
Mountain County	Rural: remote	P. Green	High School	5 years	Returner
Bridge County	Suburb: small	P. George[b]	PK-8 School	2 years	Returner[b]

[a]New-to-place principal former school NCES locale codes: P. Clark-rural: distant; P. Lewis-rural: remote; P. George-rural: remote.
[b]Returner principal, leading a new-to-place consolidated school.

We conducted principal interviews during summer and fall 2020. All interviews were conducted via Zoom by the first and second authors, lasted approximately 60 min in length, and transcribed via Zoom and cleaned by the first author. We used semistructured interview protocols that addressed principal experiences with teacher recruitment and retention; teacher and community demographic descriptors; local factors and policies that influence recruitment and retention; and how these factors influenced their work as building-level leaders. For new-to-place administrators, we also elicited a comparison between current and former school placements.

We inductively coded interview transcripts in iterative cycles, using our research framework as a guide for emic and etic codes (Miles et al., 2018). Multiple authors coded transcripts; thus, we coded separately first, crafted individual analytical memos to analyze themes between major constructs, and then engaged in dialogue to reach a consensus regarding codes and themes (Corbin et al., 2014). We then coded principals' emic identification of place characteristics, including social and geographic isolation, student population descriptions, community attributes, and local economic

opportunities. Next, we coded principals' perceptions of the impact of place on teacher recruitment and retention, using similar emic codes. Finally, we employed etic codes to capture principals' practices in recruiting and retaining teachers. These codes included intentional hiring practices, building a familial culture, reliance on personal relationships, reliance on retired teachers, and providing social opportunities outside of school. To aid in trustworthiness, we constructed analytic and reflexive memos (Miles et al., 2018) to further assess and structure our use of rich data and direct quotes.

Some themes initially appeared discordant; for example, some principals who had moved to new schools relied on local connections or personal relationships to recruit new teachers, while others relied more heavily on "poaching" teachers from their previous school. We therefore organized our leadership findings by tenure definitions, including "returners," "seasoned," and "new-to-place" leaders (see Table 1). Returners are principals who returned to the community where they grew up and are currently leading a school in their home community. Seasoned principals have led the same school for 3 or more years; they do not have an established history with the community beyond administrative tenure. New-to-place leaders are experienced administrators who are in the first 2 years of leading a new school. We discuss each definition in detail in the findings. These role constructs enabled us to connect principal experience with staffing strategies, as well as categorizations of place. We then used peer-review to check for representativeness of findings, as well as data triangulation (Miles et al., 2018).

Findings

We found principals' definitions of place, and the resulting place-specific affordances and challenges influencing teacher recruitment and retention, were complex and nuanced. This included definitions of place that went beyond municipal designation and simplistic rural/urban dichotomies and were more complex than those identified by district superintendents (i.e., county-wide rural geographic isolation or burgeoning urban populations) in previous work (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Principals' conceptions of the place were informed by the length of their relationship in the region: returners and seasoned principals were more likely to use social, economic, and geospatial definitions. In comparison, new-to-place principals, as well as principals of consolidated schools, constructed definitions tied to student populations. These principals are also more likely to apply deficit perspectives when describing sociospatial dimensions of their school communities.

Principal perceptions of the relationship between place and teacher staffing were similarly nuanced. Returning and seasoned principals leveraged unique

Table 2. Relevant District Profiles.

District/County[a]	Heritage	River	Coal	Folk	Mountain	Bridge
Primary Industry/ Employer[b]	Technology; Government	Manufacturing; Government	Manufacturing; Government	Prison; Higher Education	Recreation & Tourism	Recreation & Tourism
Population change since 2010	−2.7%	−3.0%	−4.8%	−10.0%	−5.4%	−7.9%
Median household income (approx.)	$39,100	$35,600	$36,600	$29,700	$32,200	$31,900
% of population with BA or higher	22.5%	14.4%	14.7%	14.4%	16.3%	15.2%
District size (approx. sq. miles)	410	480	330	340	940	670
Proximity to an IHE	<30 min	~1.5 h	~2 h	<30 min	~1.5 h	~1 h
Number of PK-12 schools	26	4	13	2	5	12
Student enrollment in district (approx.)	10,500	1,600	4,000	800	980	6,000
Student racial	White (92.7%) Multiracial	White (97.0%)	White (92.8%) Black (3.9%)	White (97.1%)	White (98.8%)	White (91.8%) Black (4.2%)

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

District/County[a]	Heritage	River	Coal	Folk	Mountain	Bridge
demographics (>1%)	Latino (3.3%) Black (1.7%) Black (1.5%)	Black (1.1%) Latino (1.3%)	Multiracial (2.3%)	Multiracial (1.2%)		Multiracial (2.9%)
% Low SES	40%	47%	39%	43%	53%	53%

[a]Data are from 2019, drawn from two sources: (1) U.S. Census Bureau (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WV) and the West Virginia Department of Education "ZoomWV" data dashboard (https://zoomwv.k12.wv.us/).

[b]In many counties across West Virginia, the public school system is the largest employer. This highlights other notable industries/employers in the county.

community attributes to recruit and retain teachers, whereas new-to-place leaders perceived place relative to their prior positions and had fewer place-specific strategies for staffing. The variance in the established tenure of principals, and their perceptions of place, highlight spatial inequities that emerge in novel ways. As such, we organized this section by principal tenure: returning principals, seasoned principals, and new-to-place principals. Each of these sections is further nuanced through descriptions of leaders' constructions of place, including perceived affordances and challenges, which influenced leaders' responses to teacher staffing challenges.

Returner Principals

In rural communities, "returners" refer to local graduates who leave after secondary school but return to the community as adults. Returners typically have social and familial ties to their communities, as well as the depth of understanding of the spatial context. In the following sections, we highlight the perceptions and practices of two returner principals.

"We're getting our own people back". Principal Green leads Mountain County High School (NCES rural: remote), his alma mater, nestled amid national forests that run along the eastern border of the state. The school itself is located in a very remote area known for a lack of internet and cellular phone service, though 15 miles from the more idyllic county seat. It is challenging for Green to attract "outside people" to Mountain's community due to its remote location. Even when he thinks he has an "outside" person interested in the position, he says it "doesn't pan out." One of the complicating factors to this successful recruitment is the lack of jobs for a teacher's partner. "You gotta have some job opportunities for whoever's coming with them."

However, as a returner himself, Green has placed his staffing approach on "trying to grow our own." Green's strategy has been highly successful: the last four positions successfully filled have been "people who grew up here and then came back," including traditionally prepared teachers who are Mountain County graduates. Although "grow your own" programs are not always viable in rural communities, it has become Green's main focus in recruitment. This serves as a point of pride for Green, who asserts, "we're getting our own people back." The same geographic isolation that makes it difficult to attract outsiders to Mountain County, Green says, attracts returners, particularly for outdoor recreation opportunities such as camping and kayaking. "These kids want to come back home because they're used to the open spaces."

Teacher salaries are also an advantage for Green's recruitment process. Teacher pay is higher than the majority of job opportunities in the region. Financially, Green explains teaching is the way to "make a good living," adding, "You can't go down to the factory and get a job that pays an equal amount of money." This phenomenon, Green believes, is "unique" to his situation. Although Green does not discuss how his personal experiences in Mountain County influence his strategies, his nuanced understanding of the assets and challenges of the community appear to drive the success of his recruitment and retention process.

The complications of border counties. Returner Principal Wilde serves as the building administrator for River County High School (NCES town: remote). River Fork is home to about 2,500 people, and River County High serves the town and surrounding rural areas. Like Principal Green, Wilde is an alumna of the school she now leads. She describes River Fork as a "very small community. If you grew up here, you got used to it." She says it is an "easy" place to live "for people that are familiar with it." But, "if you want to go shopping, you drive an hour and 15 min away." Because of the school's geographic isolation, Wilde finds it difficult to recruit and retain community outsiders. But, like Principal Green, Wilde is able to depend on a pool of educated locals to fill most vacancies. In fact, she says about 90% of the teachers in her school are from the school district, originally. As Wilde notes, "a lot of our kids who went into education have come home."

Like Green, Principal Wilde also discussed the significance of salaries for teacher recruitment; however, she introduced the relationship between competitive teacher pay and spatial inequities. One of the schools in the district, a PK-12 educational complex, is located near the state border. The educational complex experiences high turnover as teachers cross the state border for higher salaries. Wilde's school and others in River Fork, while in the same county, are located 40 min from the border, and this geographic distance appears to mitigate salary-driven teacher turnover across state lines.

The relevance of place on salary adds nuance to previous district-level understandings of teacher staffing in border county schools (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). West Virginia's geography is such that 29 of its 55 counties border another state—Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, or Ohio. The proximity of higher paying opportunities enables teachers to work in a neighboring state with a higher salary, potentially while commuting from West Virginia. Some district leaders, particularly in the state's Northern and Eastern Panhandles, point to this as a primary reason for teacher turnover, though that particular problem is not as pressing for rural counties bordering rural regions of neighboring states

(McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Principal Wilde's characterization of River County presents an additional consideration—that in some communities, like River Fork, the remoteness of an attractive rural place can serve as a relative advantage in a border county, anchoring local teacher candidates to the community school.

The ability to depend on local graduates interested in returning to a remote rural community, as evidenced by the stories of Principals Green and Wilde, is not common across all rural places, according to our data. Some rural communities are able to attract college graduates wanting to return home, while others have no such local pool of teacher candidates, a product of place characteristics. The success these two principals have recruiting and retaining returners appears to be a product of the administrators' established understanding of their communities, as well as the unique affordances of place.

The challenge of teacher preparation for rural returner schools. Although returner Principals Green and Wilde understand and leverage the benefits of their remote, rural districts, they also face place-based staffing challenges. They are able to recruit local residents and returners to teaching positions, yet these potential employees are less likely to have teaching certification or formal teacher preparation. Principal Green noted that many of these noncertified individuals are wholly unprepared for the classroom. He has had to "let go" three such recent hires, partly because of their lack of classroom management skills and the specific content knowledge taught in the classroom. Wilde has also relied on this approach, most recently relying on a local graduate waiting to get into medical school. Despite her lack of educational expertise and long-term commitment to the role, Wilde said she was "the best we could do for consistency and knowledge." These examples illustrate potential challenges rural leaders encounter through in-house and grow-your-own recruitment programs. The recruitment strategies can address short-term needs but may not reduce turnover. These principles willingly pursue these options, though, with continued hope that some of the new hires will stay long term.

"City" districts: balancing staffing issues with student needs. Much of the literature on teacher recruitment and retention challenges centers on urban places. In West Virginia, places with as few as 2,000 people can be designated as cities (W.Va. Code §8-1-3), creating a complex localized understanding of urban and rural. The following cases of a returner principal highlight how the geographic context of a "city" influences staffing.

Principal Wallis works in Heritage County's intermediate school (grades 3–5, NCES town: distant) located in Heritage City, which has a population of about 16,000 people and is the state's tenth largest city. The city's

population is about 90% White, 4% multiracial (non-Hispanic), 3% Black or African American, and 2% Hispanic, and almost one-quarter of the city's population lives below the poverty line (Data USA, 2020). Heritage Intermediate is a large school, with five classrooms per grade. Wallis is local to Heritage County schools; her father serves on the Heritage City Council. Like other returner principals, Wallis is blunt about the challenges of recruiting outsiders to her school. Three weeks prior to our interview, a city council member was shot outside his residence in Heritage City. Referencing the incident, she explained: "We're a big drug community, you know? So when a family moves here from out of state, are they going to choose to live in Heritage City? Probably not." In fact, Wallis and her family chose to live in a neighboring city, though she is quick to point out that she "believes in this community."

Principal Wallis, like Green and Wilde, is reliant on recruiting teachers with "roots" in the area. "We don't have anybody really that just moved here because they want to live in Heritage City." Wallis uses her established relationships with the community, as well as the city's proximity to universities as tools to help recruit local full-time teachers and substitutes. Although she can typically fill a position that becomes open early in the summer, Wallis has the added challenge of finding specialized teachers and staff for her student population. Heritage Intermediate is a high-poverty school, with 100% of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL). Wallis explains the school has "a lot of families" in which grandparents are raising children, as well as children who live in homeless shelters and two areas "group homes." The school experiences high student transiency in addition to behavior issues, including those who require daily physical restraint, and low state test proficiency. Teacher turnover is higher at high-needs schools such as Heritage Intermediate (Ingersoll & May, 2012). The student and school needs, along with added specialized, noninstructional positions that are also harder to staff (Ingersoll & May, 2012), create significant hiring challenges.

In one illustrative example, Wallis had to prioritize staffing a specialized position over a general education classroom teacher. At the time of our interview, the district has just funded a Social & Emotional Learning Specialist for Heritage Intermediate, a specialized position that is an affordance of a larger school system. A fifth grade teacher applied for the position, which put Wallis in a "tricky" situation.

> I thought, which way do I want to go with that? She could have stayed in [fifth grade] all year … but with the number of home visits and things that are going on right now, I just felt like I needed to let her in that [specialist] position.

Wallis prioritized the specialist position given the needs of the student population in her school.

To manage varied and unanticipated teacher vacancies, Wallis depends on relationships she has built with local retired teachers and other substitutes, as well as regional universities. Wallis' proximity to universities means she rarely has a recruitment issue and is often able to choose from among a small pool of qualified applicants, unlike her rural returner counterparts. These place-based assets enable Wallis to engage in targeted efforts aimed at improving retention. She noted, "We don't get as many applicants as maybe some other schools might get, but we have kept a lot of our staff." She believes retention success begins with an intentional hiring approach in which staff are "handpicked" based on their commitment to the school's specific population needs. She explained giving hiring preference to candidates who are "invested in the community and in the schools."

Once staff are hired, Wallis engages in extensive practice to retain them. She began her tenure as principal with a needs assessment and then made a prioritized list of reforms to better meet the needs of teachers in her school. In addition to these long-term acts, Wallis engages in daily activities designed to reduce attrition, including a "shout out board" she updates each morning and a "daily memo" every night to recognize teachers. She referred to the relationships among staff as a "family." This familial relationship includes monthly gatherings of teachers and their families to "get away from thinking and talking about school."

Place significantly shapes Principal Wallis' staffing needs, recruitment processes, and strategies for teacher retention. The location of the school enables her to have a choice in her hiring decisions, makes her staffing difficulties less dire than principals in places with similar population challenges but geographically distant from universities. She also leverages her established relationships and connections as a returner principal to recruit educators who are either local or are likely to stay in the community. Despite geospatial differences, returner Principals Green, Wilde, and Wallis all illustrate similar successful strategies to recruit teachers who are likely to stay.

Seasoned Principals

In this section, we examine the strategies of seasoned principals who are not originally from the communities where they now work. The administrators have established relationships and understanding of the school and encompassing area, yet they lack the context of being a local. As we discuss, seasoned, outsider principals employ different strategies for teacher recruitment than returner principals.

Complications of consolidated place: "If I ever leave, I have a list of people that are going with me". Principal Jackson, a seasoned administrator, leads Heritage Middle School (NCES rural: fringe). The school is located on the edge of Heritage City, and it serves "a lot of farmland. A lot of people live out in the farms or live up in a holler someplace that you know isn't easy to get to." The building opened about 12 years ago as a new, consolidated school. The Middle School is therefore a newly constructed sociospatial place that lacks established networks and ties typical of other schools in the study. Jackson notes "teacher staffing is always an issue."

According to Jackson, the school serves "doctors and attorneys … and those that are homeless and move from house to house and don't have a bed to sleep in." Approximately 70% of the middle school's students qualify for FRPL. But the majority of his school's students, Jackson says, "fit in the middle. I like to call them the working poor. You know, those people that are working, and they can barely get by." Jackson says his school includes grandparents raising children and a prevalent drug abuse issue. "It isn't an easy place to work."

Although Heritage Middle School is situated in the same county as Heritage Intermediate School, it does not enjoy the same benefits of a large student–teacher pool from which it can hire new teachers. Student–teacher interns are placed at the middle school each year, but Jackson notes this pipeline is ineffective because the interns rarely match his content hiring needs. This highlights a particular distinction in staffing a middle school versus an elementary school due to subject-specific needs. Due to retirements, Jackson is trying to address multiple unfilled positions after the start of the school year, noting "I'm not sure I'm going to fill [the positions], and I'm concerned." Jackson recruits other retired teachers, but this translates to doing "whatever it takes" to entice them to teach for another year. "If they need to leave every day at one o'clock, go ahead. I'll figure it out. So, at least I can have somebody that I can trust that's a veteran [teacher] because there's just nobody there."

For all of the principals we interviewed, openings that occur close to or during the school year highlight existing, place-specific issues around teacher recruitment, as well as state and county policies that restrict teachers from leaving positions to take others. Jackson, like others, has to navigate these dilemmas. "I have a math teacher that I hired in August 1 year, and the county that he was in would not release him until the following year because they couldn't find staff to fill his position. So, we deal with that." He ran into a similar issue with a science teacher. "By the time they let him go, he had already [applied] to another job in our county and gotten

[hired]. So, he never came to my building." Jackson believes his school will soon lose its ability to offer course credit in Spanish because he cannot find a certified Spanish teacher.

In order to fill a science vacancy, Jackson said he "took" one of the science teachers from another middle school in Heritage County. He called the teacher directly and asked him to apply for a vacancy. After Jackson hired the teacher, the other middle school was left with an unfilled science position. Jackson justifies this action because he argued, "you're in a situation where you want the best people for your kids." Jackson approaches intradistrict hiring as an active competition, recruiting and "taking" prospective teachers before his colleagues can hire them. In the case of another prospective science teacher who was once a student at Heritage Middle School, Jackson aimed to be persuasive:

> I guaranteed this guy the job because I needed someone, and … he was sup-
> posed to have an interview that day with the middle school across town. And
> I said, "Cancel the interview… You owe me because you used to be a pain
> in the butt in middle school."

Jackson referred to this recruitment practice as "beating the bushes." Rather than viewing this as additional work, Jackson sees these strategies as part of his job as principal. Wanting "the best people for your kids" and having connections to the local area enables Jackson to capitalize on personal relationships to hire specific people, much like his returner colleagues.

This is a necessary practice because, unlike his colleagues in other districts, he lacks a qualified applicant pool for vacant positions. Jackson notes there are few college graduates in the field of education who "want to stay in this area." However, unlike returner principals, Jackson does not have an explicit strategy to recruit local teachers. Furthermore, he does not articulate specific benefits of place for educators; rather, he emphasizes the absence of negative aspects of contrasting communities. This is evidenced by his theorizing on staffing challenges: Jackson believes turnover is greater in "more urban areas where the problems are maybe a little bit worse, or you're dealing with security and safety situations that we don't necessarily have in a rural environment on a daily basis." However, Jackson does have good success with retaining teachers, noting once teachers start at his school, "they pretty much stay." He attributes the lack of attrition to the "family culture" of the school. Jackson plans to continue his targeted recruitment practice even if he moves to a new school. "If I ever leave, I have a list of people that are going with me …. You form those relationships, people are comfortable with you, and they will follow you."

Jackson does not employ "grow your own" or similar recruitment strategies for returning residents. As a consolidated school, Heritage Middle does not have a common community from which he can leverage relationships for recruitment. Instead, Jackson focuses on strategies to recruit from other schools in his district, creating a shared community *within* the school building, rather than around the permeable geopolitical borders. This, in turn, is his long-term recruitment strategy: Jackson has a pool of highly qualified educators he can take with him when he transfers to a new school.

Like Principal Jackson, Principal Branch is a seasoned, nonlocal administrator. Her high school in Coal County (NCES rural: fringe) is located in the county seat of about 5,000 residents and is close to the state border. In fact, Branch's high school is situated in the shadow of a small city of about 20,000 people, directly across the state border. According to Principal Branch, Coal County experiences high teacher attrition to the neighboring city. "We have lost a lot of teachers, including math teachers—really good math teachers—for … almost a $10,000 a year pay raise [across the border]." Branch says this is a particularly prevalent occurrence among newer teachers who are "not invested very long."

However, Branch says Coal County High School has not experienced the level of turnover of the other county high school or its middle and elementary schools. She believes her staffing stability compared to that of the other high school is a consequence of the other schools' more rural positioning. Although Coal County High School's proximity to a small city increases attrition, it also translates to an increased local pool of prospective teachers. In addition to geographic location, Branch attributes some of her school's relative stability to block scheduling, which she believes is more attractive to teachers, especially in math and science. She has used this advantage in recent years to hire three math and science teachers, a special education teacher, and a business teacher from the district's other schools, including the middle school that feeds into her high school.

Even though Branch finds her school fully staffed, the staffing pipeline from Coal County High School's feeder schools causes a new set of challenges for the high school regarding student academic preparedness and discipline. "You can tell when a school is struggling [with staffing] by student academics and behavior when they get up here." It then becomes part of Branch's job to investigate academic areas of weakness for incoming students and create school-wide initiatives designed to address them. Branch's case highlights an important nuance in teacher staffing: even when a school experiences place advantages over others, it is still affected by shortages elsewhere. Branch's approach to staffing—hiring teachers from other district schools—creates academic problems in her school as she effectively exacerbates teacher shortages in feeder schools to the high school.

As an experienced principal, Branch employs similar, school-based recruitment strategies as Principal Jackson. She focuses on her locus of control—the school—to create a desirable work environment for prospective educators. Yet her lack of a viable pipeline, which is likely compounded by her lack of long-term community relationships, puts Principal Branch in a precarious situation for future recruitment.

New-to-Place Leaders

In our interviews, new-to-place principals discussed their prior positions in addition to their current job. In all of these cases, this attention to their previous school seemed to be driven by those schools' increased level of challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers as compared to their current school. The principals also shared a sustained commitment to and care for those previous schools, though they had made deliberate, recent decisions to seek out new positions, mirroring both teacher turnover patterns in these places and broader trends in principal turnover (e.g., Levin & Bradley, 2019). According to these principals, rural schools were isolated and under-resourced, presenting a severe disadvantage around teacher recruitment and retention.

Spatial in/justice as a force on recruitment and retention. Principal Lewis just completed his first year as principal of Folk County Elementary School (NCES town: remote). Lewis' school benefits from its proximity to a state university, and he is able to hire new and certified college graduates when positions become available. This experience lies in stark contrast to that of his previous school across the county border, in Heartland County (NCES rural: remote), which Lewis describes as a "very, very rural county"—a largely agricultural region. Heartland County, where Lewis is from, "is struggling [economically]," the decline quickened after the high school was consolidated and relocated from the county seat. "There is no interstate that goes through the county. There's no four-lane highway. Business development is almost nothing at this point … [There] is nothing really for kids to do, so more people seem to leave Heartland than come to Heartland." Lewis notes that Heartland has also been "hit hard" by the opioid epidemic, further deepening disadvantages.

The economic crisis in Heartland further generates teacher staffing issues. "People don't want to come to a county where there's no money to spend," Lewis noted bluntly. In his current position at Folk County Elementary School, Lewis argues, "If we need something, we can get it. In Heartland County, it was just completely the opposite. And, it was very sad … [In

Heartland] things might break, and they might not get fixed … because the resources aren't there to fix them." Lewis' assessment of his prior position complicates the discussion presented by other returner principals, who articulated benefits of rural places. Yet spatial inequities persist within and across rural spaces, as evident by the economic and social disparities in Heartland County.

Principal Clark, another new-to-place administrator, leads Heritage County High School (NCES town: distant). Prior to this position, Clark spent 8 years as the principal of Union Elementary on the western edge of Heritage County (NCES rural: distant). Union Elementary had 10% to 20% teacher turnover every year, which was heavily influenced by spatial inequities: geographic isolation and lack of community "resources." For example, Union has a grocery store and a hardware store, but "there wasn't even a police station" present when Clark worked there.

Clark argued the problem of retention in Union is amplified by a lack of attractive housing options, which he contrasted to the housing options and amenities near Heritage County High School. "There are places to eat lunch. The food, the things that draw teachers, you know… [the school is located] convenient to doctors' offices…that's a draw that we have." Clark understands the pressure of place on turnover, as he accepted his new position due to the community's "proximity to resources."

Clark also raised the issue of hidden financial inequities for educators in remote schools. Teachers in remote regions have higher commuting costs, he argued, even when working and living in the same county. Yet, Clark noted, the problem was beyond his control. "There's not a whole lot we can do to compensate for that because there's not housing in the rural areas and so I, myself, get a pay raise [in my new position] just because I wasn't driving 60 miles round trip a day. You think about the expense of your tires, about the expense of your gas."

The role of teacher commutes—from more desirable places to live to schools in more isolated and underresourced parts of the county—was also emphasized by Principal George, the administrator of a newly consolidated Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade school in Bridge County (NCES: small suburb). George presents an unusual case in this study, as she is a returner, having previously lived in the community where she now works. Yet George's consolidated school is new-to-place, creating unique challenges for this community returner as she navigates her new position. Her solution to staffing challenges, unlike those of other returner principals, was more akin to other new-to-place leaders. George's school is located in the geographically isolated southern region of West Virginia, near the county seat, Bridgeville. Although Bridgeville is small, with a year-round population of 3,000, it is also a popular tourist destination for outdoor adventurers.

Principal George's prior administrative position was at Creek Elementary School (NCES rural: remote). She explained, "We had a great staff culture … but the area was not a desirable place to live… I could write a book about staff turnover." George began each school year at Creek Elementary with at least three unfilled positions. She recounted several teachers leaving because they "just can't afford to stay." George blames the long and sometimes dangerous drive over a mountain between Creek Elementary and Bridgeville, where many teachers would live, for the high turnover. Like Principal Clark, George discussed the consequences of commuting costs. "I had to get new tires almost every single year because that drive was so hard on my vehicle." After 11 years at Creek Elementary, as a teacher and then a principal, George made her own decision to leave. "It was one of the hardest things I've had to do—leave that place … But it was just a really long drive over the mountain."

Despite its geographic placement and isolation, George's definition of the Creek Elementary community was largely characterized by population characteristics. For example, she highlighted the area's widespread poverty

> Usually you have a school that's either really rural or more urban. But [Creek] was kind of a melting pot of both of these things. We had the hollows[4] where we had to drive a bus up a winding road to the top where there's a single wide trailer that has tarps over the side of it, you know, a whole lot of poverty. But, then, you have the city … This used to be this booming town. It was a railroad junction … But over the years it has changed. A lot of coal mines have moved out. It's just left this area desolate.

One community served by Creek Elementary included subsidized housing and "a place called D Block," which George called "very rough and … very much like an inner city"—an apparent coded reference, given recent Census data[5], to relative racial diversity compared to the rest of the county and state. George continued: "so we had our kids that were coming from the city, and we had our kids that were coming from the hollows, and the amount of trauma that these kids were coming from made that population of children very difficult." George's coded racial language illustrates how student characteristics can serve as definitional proxies for spatial in/justice.

Despite a "family atmosphere" at Creek Elementary, the "poverty and trauma" associated with "schools that are in outlying areas" made it "really tough to be able to get any kind of good momentum" in the building. George likened the school's constant turnover to a "big old piece of Swiss cheese"—despite having pockets of "great instruction," teacher turnover led to a lack of consistency needed to "produce high rates of learning." George

shared how every year she would take new teachers in a car caravan on a guided driving tour of the school's catchment area. When they returned to the school to debrief, "they would all be in tears" because of the deep poverty in the area. Here, George uses poverty and social class as proxies for place descriptors, which she links to teacher recruitment challenges. This discourse captures how dimensions of spatial in/justice blur geospatial boundaries.

"Training ground for the county:" spatial in/justice and teacher turnover. Spatial in/justice, as surfaced by the new-to-place leaders, generated profound challenges for teacher retention. School leaders would recruit early career teachers who were drawn to a county school system but were unable to initially secure a job in more populated areas. These teachers were subsequently more likely to leave for more populous places. At Creek Elementary, for example, new teachers used the school to get a "foot in the door" for more desirable openings closer to Bridgeville, a nationally renowned small town. Principal George said she would recruit and train novice teachers, providing multiple years of investment in professional development, only to have them transfer to other schools in the district. Creek Elementary, George shared, effectively served as the novice teacher "training ground for the county." This example highlights the effects of spatial inequity within school systems, as already-disadvantaged schools expend scarce resources for the ultimate benefit of neighboring place-advantaged schools.

Whether openings caused by departures or existing vacancies, all new-to-place principals recounted difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers to their schools. Principal Clark shared the story of his inability to fill an open position in a first-grade classroom while working at Union. "I had seven substitutes in the first 2 months of school that went through that first grade classroom." Of these seven substitutes, "none of them were elementary certified. So, you're having high school social studies teachers or retirees that worked in secondary [education] and they were doing their best." The challenges of teacher recruitment and retention in remote, rural schools had a compounding effect that strained the already limited resources in those contexts, which led to inequitable outcomes for those students. Clark ruminated on the long-term impact on students, "that really did set [the first grade cohort] behind on their trajectory, and there's no fault of their own. We tried the best we could to get that position filled, and it just, it didn't happen … The effects, I'm sure, are still lingering."

Place inequities were salient to these principals, though they also presented a point of tension, as they used their positions in better-resourced schools and their connections to their old schools to fill their own staffing needs—what

might be called "poaching." This was done despite an expressed commitment to the success of their previous schools. Principal Lewis, for example, highlighted the community benefits of his new community to recruit teachers from Heartland. Principal George also "poached" teachers for her new school, effectively exacerbating the staffing problems at the former. However, in contrast to seasoned principals who perceived intradistrict poaching as a viable recruitment strategy, the new-to-place principals had first-hand understanding of the consequences for other schools. "It's hard. It's really hard. I have a lot of guilt," George reflected.

The recruitment strategies employed by the new-to-place principals overlap with those of other leaders in the study, particularly the seasoned principals. The practice of "poaching" teachers from their previous positions, an idea also discussed by a seasoned principal in the study, is one of the main strategies of new-to-place principals. Poaching enables new-to-place principals to recruit qualified and known teachers, despite the leaders' limited place-based connections and relationships. This suggests that the effects of spatial in/justice as well as the tenure and place-based connections of principals' influences recruitment and retention practices.

Discussion

The lens of spatial in/justice engenders analysis of the multiple contextual factors that influence teacher attrition, recruitment, and retention. Our study findings include several novel contributions to this topic, which we discuss in detail in the following section. First, the multiple complications of place and spatial in/justice influence teacher recruitment and retention strategies. Second, the tenure of principals in hard-to-staff regions can directly influence teacher recruitment, as well as retention. As with our previous work (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019), we conclude that broad policy mechanisms and centralized leadership practices lack the adequate nuance to effectively respond to educator shortages. We therefore connect the relevance of these findings to policy, practice, and future research.

Complicating Rurality: Defining and Responding to Challenges and Relative Assets

In this study, we find principals' perceptions of place are shaped by their personal and professional backgrounds, which in turn influence administrative approaches to teacher recruitment and retention. Principals' definitions of place complicate ideas of rurality as they relate to teacher staffing, particularly

the affordances and challenges of remote rural places. In some cases, geographic isolation associated with rural places makes them less desirable for teachers and principals. In these instances, teacher staffing challenges are particularly pernicious and are compounded by intra- and interdistrict "poaching," in which relatively place-advantaged leaders entice teachers from hard-to-staff schools, effectively exacerbating experienced spatial in/justice. This is facilitated by the fact that many of the teachers who end up changing schools already live in the community and were making costly and time-consuming commutes to the more isolated school. However, in remote rural tourist destinations or contexts with other unique place amenities, principals have a pool of educated locals, including returners, on which they can rely to fill most vacancies, even if these are short-term solutions.

Yet the impact of place on teacher recruitment and retention is further influenced by principals' personal and professional experiences in the communities where they worked. "Returning" principals leveraged relationships and knowledge of their communities for staffing, effectively employing "grow your own" pipelines. New-to-place principals, in comparison, lacked the tenure to employ the same strategies and were more likely to recruit or "poach" teachers from their prior schools. These findings align with DeFeo and Tran (2019) on the importance of critical place-based leadership for educator recruitment.

These divergent experiences nuance ideas about the localized phenomenon of rural teacher staffing and complicate ideas about grow-your-own initiatives. Not all rural places have an educated population from which such initiatives can be based; and those that do still grapple to find long-term solutions to hard-to-staff discipline shortages. Even remote status for rural places does not result in standard teacher staffing experiences for principals; instead, each geographically isolated community has unique attributes that alleviate or exacerbate recruitment and retention challenges. Returning principals do appear to have a greater capacity to recruit local residents due to their understanding of place. However, those principals also perceived their communities as viable places to live. This was not the experience for all principals in the study: others worked in their hometowns, yet ultimately moved to new locations because of perceived lack of economic or social viability. Although we cannot assess the extent to which these choices are personal preference versus economic or social challenges, it is evident that uneven distribution of resources influences recruitment strategies for teachers as well as administrators. Further, spatial in/justice links a common theme across the study: principals all expend scarce resources to develop new teachers, many of whom "don't pan out" in the profession, or move to more desirable school settings. As a result, all study leaders are engaged in a continuous cycle of new teacher

recruitment and preparation investment without long-term rewards, a phenomenon Ingersoll previously documented in urban and high-needs schools (2001; 2009).

School Consolidation Complicating Place Definitions, Affordances, and Challenges

Products of statewide consolidation efforts that at times incorporate rural communities and cities, some schools in West Virginia defy easy place definition for principals. In these cases, the student population became the defining characteristic of place, regardless of where the school building was situated. The emphasis on student demographics over geospatial definitions appears to be shaped by the newness of consolidated schools, as they lack established community connections. In a sense, consolidated schools are new-to-place, like administrators, and therefore, require time to develop relationships within and throughout the encompassing community.

Lacking the social pipeline of established schools, consolidated school leaders are unable to fully implement grow-your-own methods or other local recruitment efforts. Instead, we found principals focused on the community within the consolidated school building as a means to reduce teacher turnover. Over time, consolidated schools might develop relational ties in their communities that could ameliorate teacher shortages through returners and other pipelines; this topic warrants further study. School consolidation and the closing of rural community schools are a contentious issue, with decisions made for administrative and financial efficiency, though with the risk of negative impacts on communities, such as those in Heartland County described by Principal Lewis. Perspectives from these principals regarding definitions of place and teacher recruitment and retention reveal a new aspect of consideration regarding the impact of school consolidation and a new feature through which unique definitions of place emerge.

Implications

Biddle et al. (2019) argue, "Rural, urban, and suburban continue to exist cleanly within their NCES classifications, as if some types of space could exist as completely disconnected and disentangled from other types of space," (p. 11). This research highlights the interconnectedness of place and spatial in/justice as it relates to schooling, influencing teacher staffing not just across countywide school systems, but across schools within the same system. The recognition of this spatial in/justice by school leaders, in

turn, influences their perceived ability to be responsive to staffing challenges and defines their responsive leadership practice as they attempt to overcome such in/justice. As such, this research problematizes statewide policy mechanisms and prescribed best practices to ameliorate teacher staffing issues. The unique and specific challenges to places served by schools require targeted, place-specific responses, grounded in the experiences of teachers and leaders as opposed to top-down place-neutral initiatives aimed at mitigating shortage problems across place.

Although there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to rural teacher recruitment due to the intersecting complexities of place and spatial in/justice, our qualitative study provides critical implications for place-based recruitment and retention strategies in hard-to-staff regions. One of the major points of significance from these findings is the role seasoned principals can have on teacher *recruitment* in potentially hard-to-staff regions. Prior research discusses the significance of seasoned principals on teacher retention and development (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2009), yet few studies have linked teacher recruitment to the tenure of principals. This finding aligns with recent scholarship on the importance of school leaders (Grissom et al., 2021) and the need for principal stability in underresourced communities (Pendola & Fuller, 2018). Recommendations to facilitate leadership tenure include recruiting potential returner school leaders and reducing involuntary intradistrict leadership transfers. Additionally, new-to-place principals would benefit from mentor-facilitated relationship development with key community stakeholders to develop a critical place-based understanding of their school communities (Bailey, 2020; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Budge, 2018).

This research also provides new insights into the dimensions that shape successful grow-your-own and alternative track teacher recruitment strategies. We found principals were more successful recruiting staff when the school had close proximity to teacher education programs. A policy and preparation recommendation that could address the uneven distribution, and the placement of teacher education candidates is to place intern teachers across the state, including hard-to-staff areas. Research on similar, diverse teacher placements in Australia suggests this strategy could effectively prepare teachers for underresourced communities (Kline et al., 2013; White, 2008). However, such placements would also necessitate the development of mentor teachers who are well qualified to supervise novice teachers (LaBerge, 2021). Teacher licensing agencies could work in tandem with teacher preparation programs to facilitate both veteran teacher development and intern teacher placements in hard-to-staff regions.

Finally, our study complexifies research about community-type and teacher recruitment and retention challenges. Increased in-depth qualitative

research across place, including within-district research and cross-state comparisons, particularly in racially diverse communities, would further nuance our understanding of the ways spatial inequities exacerbate teacher shortages.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. The state has experienced a decline in total enrollment for the seventh year in a row (a 7.3% decline in total enrollment over that time), with projected continual declines over the next two and a half decades (O'Leary, 2020).
2. West Virginia is a universal Pre-Kindergarten state, and pre-kindergarten classes are located in elementary schools.
3. Pseudonyms have been provided to all district, place, and people names.
4. According to the University of South Carolina's Dictionary of Southern Appalachian English, "hollow" refers to "a small, sheltered valley that usually but not necessarily has a watercourse. The term occurs often in place names, especially informal ones, as Hell's Holler (NC) and Piedy Holler (TN)"; the term is often pronounced "holler." Retrieved from http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/appalachianenglish/node/492
5. The "city" Principal George refers to as a population of about 1,500 residents. The racial demographics are as follows: 75% White, 15% Black or African American, 5% Hispanic, and 4% multiracial (non-Hispanic) (Data USA, 2020).

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