



## Heartbeat of the Community

### Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Schools

#### About the Documentary

Recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers in rural districts is a persistent struggle in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Compared to suburban schools, rural schools are more likely to experience teacher recruitment and retention challenges because of low compensation, geographic isolation, and limited ability for teachers to specialize.<sup>2</sup> To unpack the complexity of this issue, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest collaborated with Detroit Public Television to create a 30-minute documentary about the research on teacher preparation and recruitment across the country and specifically in rural Michigan, and the actions that state and local education leaders are taking to recruit and retain teachers. This effort is also a part of the [REL Midwest Alliance to Improve Teacher Preparation](#), a research alliance created to leverage existing data on education preparation providers to explore teacher preparation models, study relationships among existing models and teacher and student outcomes, and examine the implementation of changes in state policy across the Midwest.

In the documentary, experts Yinmei Wan, PhD (REL Midwest) and Dan Goldhaber, PhD (Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research at the American Institutes for Research) discuss teacher recruitment and retention challenges in Michigan, as well as national trends in teacher staffing issues. They highlight strategies states and districts can use to recruit teachers to rural areas and retain them.

The documentary also features the perspectives and experiences of state leaders, district leaders, current teachers, and prospective teachers in Michigan. These stakeholders share how teacher recruitment and retention issues have impacted their rural communities and the initiatives created to improve these issues. Featured programs include the Central Michigan University teacher education program and Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District's Teacher Academy.

#### Intended Audience

REL Midwest created this documentary for Michigan policymakers, district leaders, and educators involved in recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas, as well as community members, parents, and students interested in the topic. The documentary focuses on examples from Michigan, but the information and evidence shared in the program offer important learnings for people and groups based outside the state. REL Midwest hopes viewers will watch the program and use the following questions as a starting point for a discussion on recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas.

*If somebody asked me if they should teach in a rural area, I would say absolutely. We need good teachers in rural areas. You're going to have your share of challenges. You might have to wear more hats in a rural area. Be ready for that, but it's worth it.*

—Anissa Klaft, Student Teacher, Lakeland Elementary School, Elk Rapids, Michigan

<sup>1</sup> Azano, A. P., & Stewart, T.T. (2016). Confronting challenges at the intersection of rurality, place, and teacher preparation: Improving efforts in teacher education to staff rural schools. *Global Education Review*, 3(1), 108-128.

<sup>2</sup> Monk, D. H. (2007). Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in rural areas. *The Future of Children*, 17(1), 155-174.

## ? Discussion Questions

- What concepts or themes from the documentary resonate with you?
- What are your reactions to the approaches and strategies presented in the documentary?
- What challenges do you see in recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas? What are possible ways to overcome these challenges?
- What are the unique characteristics of rural areas? How might rural districts build off those strengths to encourage more individuals to teach in their districts?
- How have teacher recruitment challenges affected your local schools and community? What types of state, district, and/or school-level supports are needed to recruit teachers, specifically in rural areas?
- How have teacher retention challenges affected your local schools and community? What types of state, district, and/or school-level supports are needed to retain teachers, specifically in rural areas?
- How can teacher preparation programs partner more effectively with rural districts to address teacher recruitment and retention challenges? What approaches have worked in your school, district, and/or state?

## For More Information

Read REL Midwest's study [Past and Projected Trends in Teacher Demand and Supply in Michigan](#). This study examined trends in teacher supply and demand in Michigan over the past five years and projected those trends five years into the future to better understand where potential teacher shortages might occur.

## About REL Midwest

REL Midwest is part of a network of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. REL Midwest works in partnership with practitioners in seven Midwest states to conduct applied research and provide training, coaching, and technical support to create a more evidence-based education system. Visit the REL Midwest website to learn more: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/default.aspx>.

