

*Supporting Rural Schools with Teacher Recruitment and
Retention — Lessons from Rural Positive Outlier Elementary
Schools*

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Educator Workforce Shortages in NYS

- Across the U.S., over 400,000 teaching positions are “either unfilled or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments” (Learning Policy Institute, 2025)
- Enrollment in NYS teacher education programs has declined by 53% since 2009; NYS Teacher Retirement System projects that 1/3 of teachers could retire in the next five years.
- U.S. Dept. of Education has identified 18 teacher shortage areas throughout NYS. A decade ago, there were only two.
- Teacher turnover is linked to lower test scores (Henry & Redding, 2020; Kaler et al., 2025)
- Teacher turnover costs range from \$12,000 per teacher in small districts to \$25,000 in larger ones (Learning Policy Institute, 2024)

Educator Workforce Shortages in Rural Schools

- Rural school systems face unique challenges such as: geographic isolation, smaller labor pool, and limited resources which can mean lower pay and professional isolation (Nguyen, 2020; Tran et al., 2020).
- Biggest driver of workforce shortages in rural locations is turnover (Ingersoll & Tran 2023)
- Rural educator turnover linked to school culture and working conditions (Goff & Bruecker, 2017)
- Strong connections between schools and their communities foster close relationships (Seelig & McCabe, 2021)
- Rural teachers report satisfaction when they see the tangible impact on students' lives (Tieken, 2014).

Where are we?

Assess your own school context in response to these questions:

(1. Disagree, 2. Somewhat agree, 3. Agree)

1. We have a good reputation for working conditions in our region (e.g., reasonable class sizes)
2. We are clear about the need for staff who are willing to take on different tasks and roles
3. We provide attractive opportunities for professional growth
4. We provide ample and effective supports for newer staff
5. We offer consistency in leadership
6. We offer traditions and some predictability from one year to the next
7. We offer a collaborative climate supportive of positive collegial relationships
8. We welcome new ideas and innovative practices

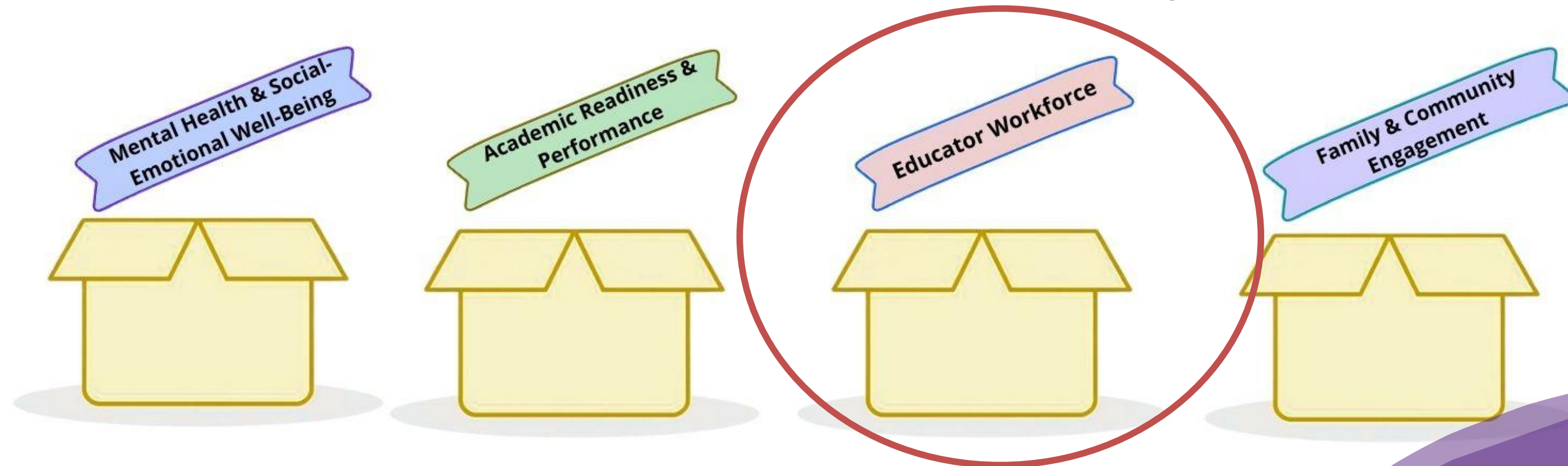
What if anything did you disagree with?

What if anything did you agree with?

What is similar or different in your contexts?

Promising Practices from New York State's Positive Outlier Rural Elementary Schools

Research Question: What policies, processes, and practices do positive outlier elementary schools share?



Methods and Sampling

Outcome Measures: Positive outlier schools were identified using New York State data across three academic years (2021-22; 2022-23; 2023-24)

Academic outcome measures

- English Language Arts (ELA) assessments for grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (where applicable) Mathematics assessments for grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (where applicable)

Participation outcome measures

- Student attendance for grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (chronic absenteeism)



- 9 Positive Outlier Elementary Schools throughout New York State
- Mix of urban and rural
- Presentation focuses on two rural schools: **Kendall Elementary School** and **Poland Elementary School**

Findings from Two Positive Outlier Rural Elementary Schools



Kendall Elementary School

346 students, K-6

52% Economically Disadvantaged

17% Students with Disabilities



Poland Elementary School

216 students, K-5

43% Economically Disadvantaged

12% Students with Disabilities

Findings: Recruitment

Attracting qualified candidates

“Small class sizes are huge, not huge. That doesn't make sense. But you know what I mean? Like we do not have an elementary class right now over 16.” – Poland, teacher

*“I think recruitment-wise, honestly, I think the biggest thing is **word of mouth**. I really do.” – Kendall, district leader*

*“I think we're looking for people that understand the needs of a small rural district... you've got to be able to **wear a lot of hats** and take on different tasks and roles and be flexible.” - Poland, district leader*

Finding the right fit

*“I want people to want to come here, and when they're here, **I want them to stay**. I don't want Kendall to be looked upon as a stepping stone.” – Kendall, superintendent*

Findings: Retention I

Supporting New Teachers

*“When you hire somebody, that's just step one. **How do you support them? That, to me, that's bigger than even hiring somebody.**”* - Kendall superintendent

*“**Consistency**... having a consistent superintendent... just having that consistent leadership makes a big difference.”* – teacher Poland

*“Like I said, it's very stable.... **we know what to expect year after year**... and the traditions we have. We know what we're walking into every year. So we decide to come back every year and want to do that.”* – Kendall teacher

Findings: Retention II

A Collaborative and Collegial School Culture (with an Experimental Twist)

*“Why are you at Poland? ... my answer to that question was honestly kind of simple. **It's the people I work with...** Yes, I would have saved money on gas, and yes, maybe I'd make a little bit more money, but I don't know if I would have the relationships that I have with my director, special at my principal, my co-teachers.” – teacher Poland*

*“There's been a lot of schools I've been in that **it just feels like- kind of a stay in your lane attitude. And that is not at all what we do here.** You know, it's like whatever, you know, throw everything in the wall, see what sticks, and whatever's working, do it twice as much.” – Kendall teacher*

Activity

1. Decide on one of the case study excerpts to skim and take 5 minutes to skim it
2. Partner up and discuss the following:
 - What is one practice that stuck out to you related to educator recruitment/retention that you want to take back to your district or school?
 - What challenges might you face in implementing this practice?
 - Who might you partner with to address these challenges?

Summing it up

- ✓ Enhance the reputation for working conditions in your region
- ✓ Be clear about the need for staff who are willing to take on different tasks and roles
- ✓ Provide attractive pathways for professional growth
- ✓ Provide ample and effective supports for newer staff
- ✓ Offer consistency in leadership
- ✓ Offer traditions and some predictability from one year to the next
- ✓ Nurture a school climate that is collaborative and supportive of positive collegial relationships
- ✓ Establish a school culture that welcomes new ideas and innovative practices

Thank you!



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