

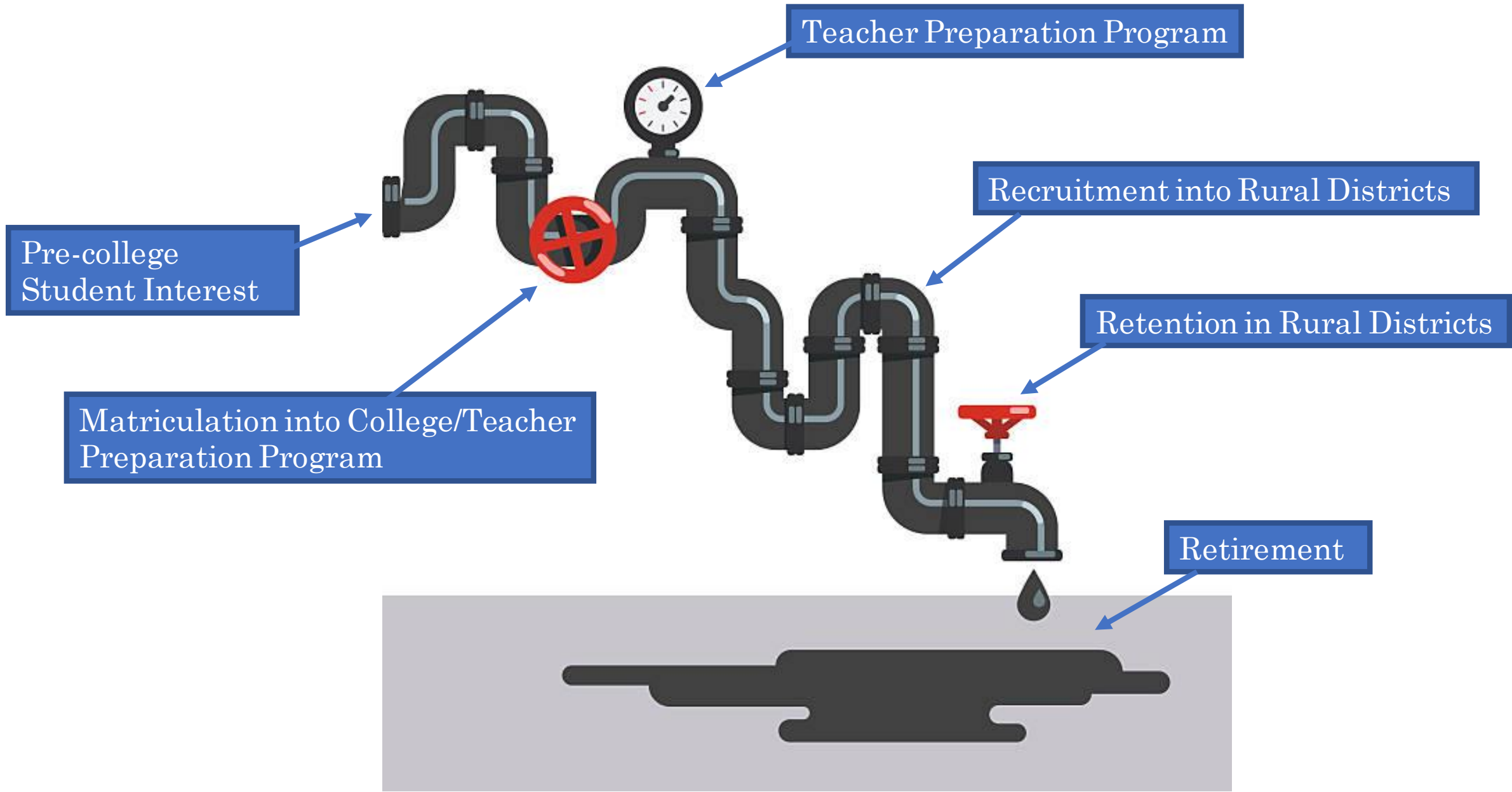
# Teachers Speak Out: Practitioner Perspectives on the Rural School Teacher Pipeline

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**Question:**  
If you could select  
three words that  
overall represent  
your teaching  
career, what  
would they be?



# Building mutually beneficial relationships for higher education and for rural school districts

## Common Characteristics

- Relationship between teachers and teacher educators (faculty & researchers)
- Multi-year, embedded, reciprocal
- Institutional supports
- Rural realities, diversities, and assets

## Programmatic Examples

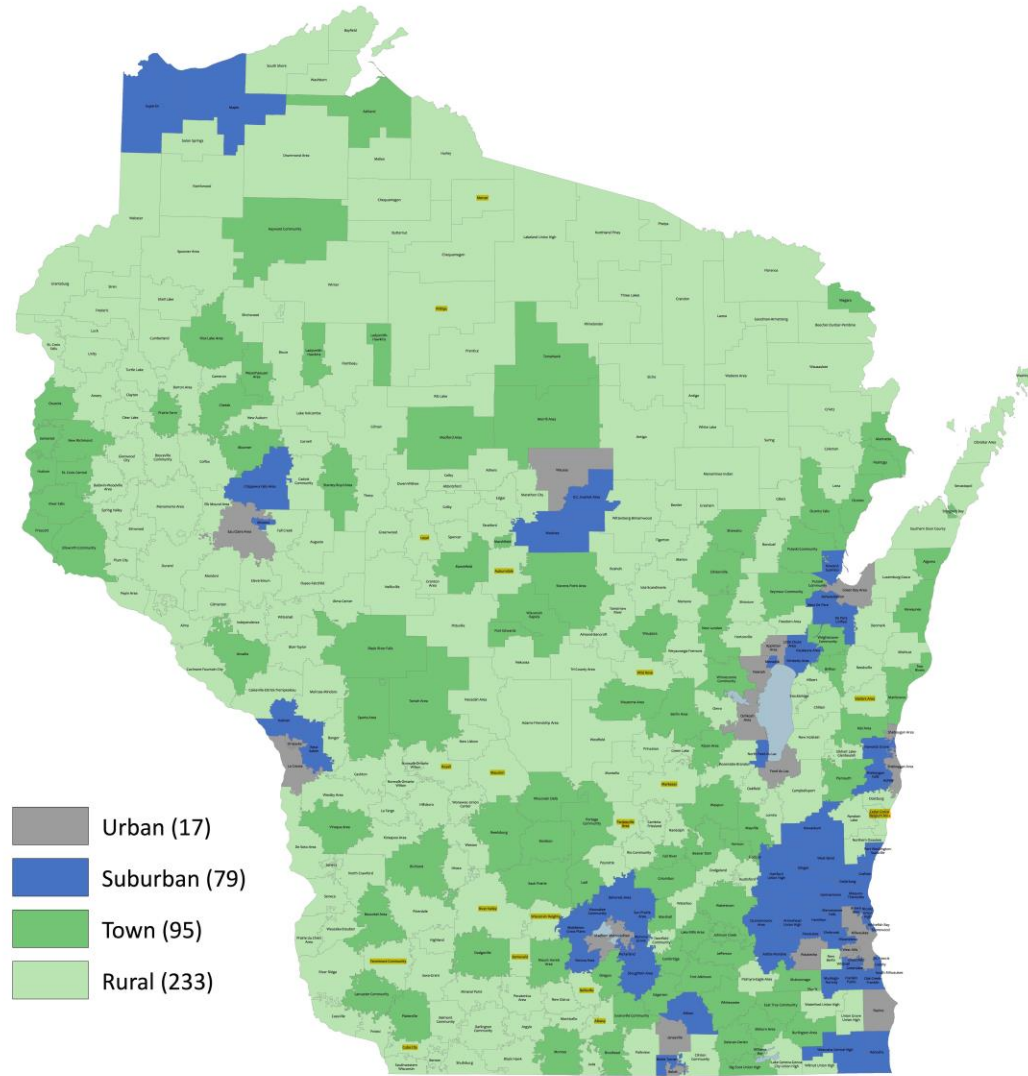
- Rural Teacher Residency Program (California State, Chico)
- Montana Rural Colloquium (Montana State, Bozeman)
- Loan forgiveness programs

Biddle & Azano, 2016; Reagan, Hambacher, Schram, McCurdy, Lord, Higginbotham, & Fornauf (2019); Schulte & Justeson, 2019; White & Reid, 2008)

# Teacher Speakout!



# School Districts by Locale



# Why Stay? The Importance of Rural Teacher Narratives

- Education research typically focused on why teachers leave the profession
- Rural scholarship often focused on why rural residents leave their communities
- Rural teacher narratives flip the model and orient teacher experiences as central to an asset-based approach to rural teacher recruitment and retention

Burton & Johnson, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006

# Research Questions

How have current rural educators in Wisconsin experienced their professional preparation? In what way have their experiences prepared them (or not) to work in a rural context?

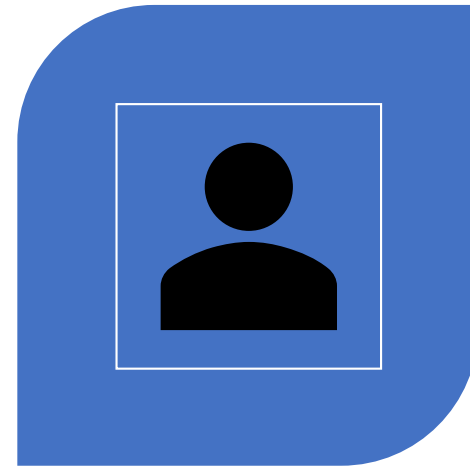
In what ways can teacher narratives provide insight into the challenges and needs in the rural teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention?



# Methods



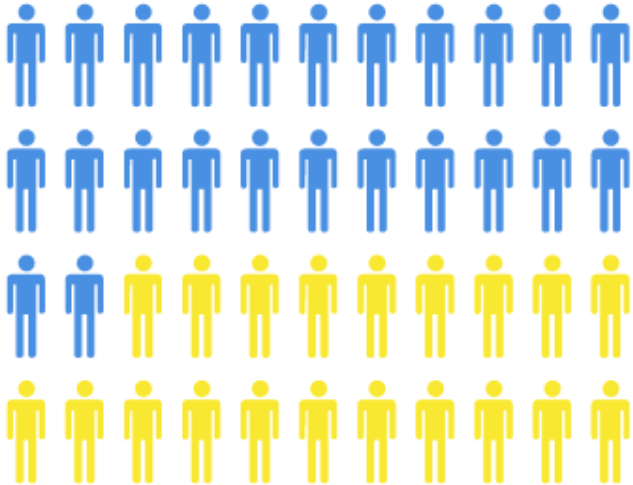
Semi-structured individual  
interviews and focus groups



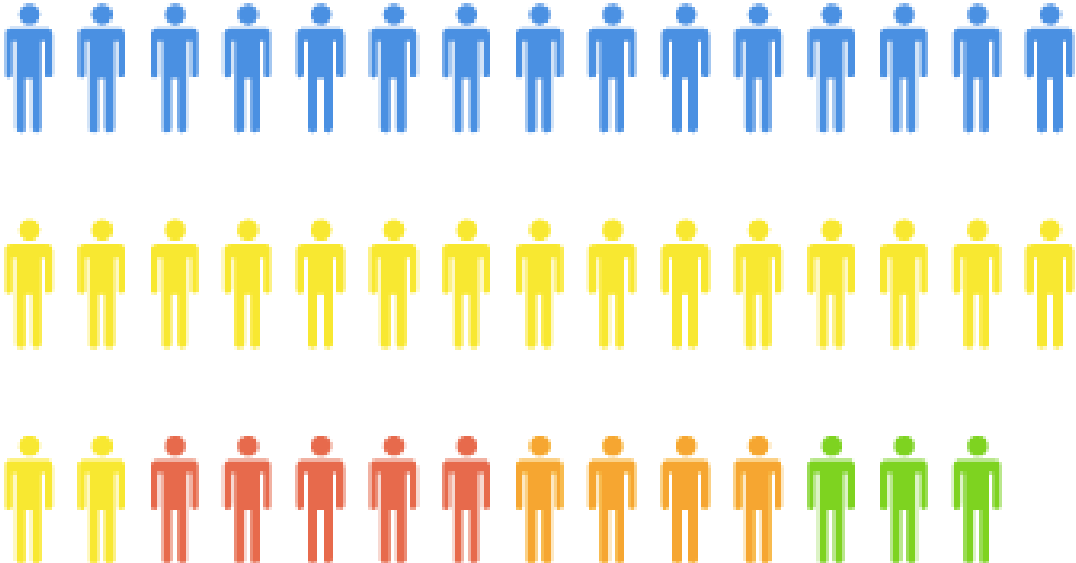
Individual administrator  
interviews

# Participants

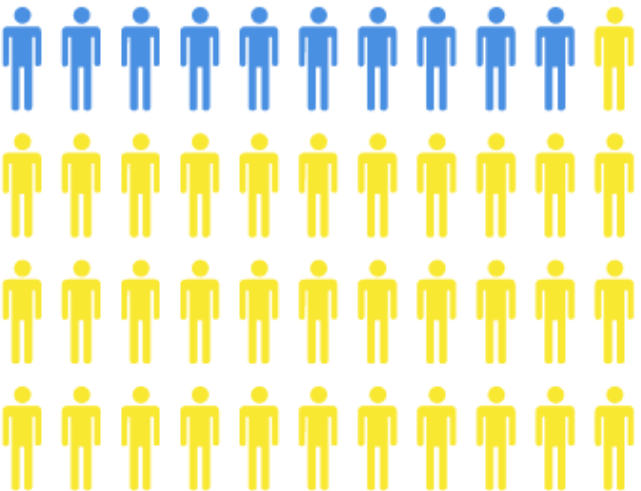
- 44 Teachers
- 25 teachers are residents of their district
- 6 teachers were once students in their districts



■ Bachelors (54.55%) ■ Masters (45.45%)

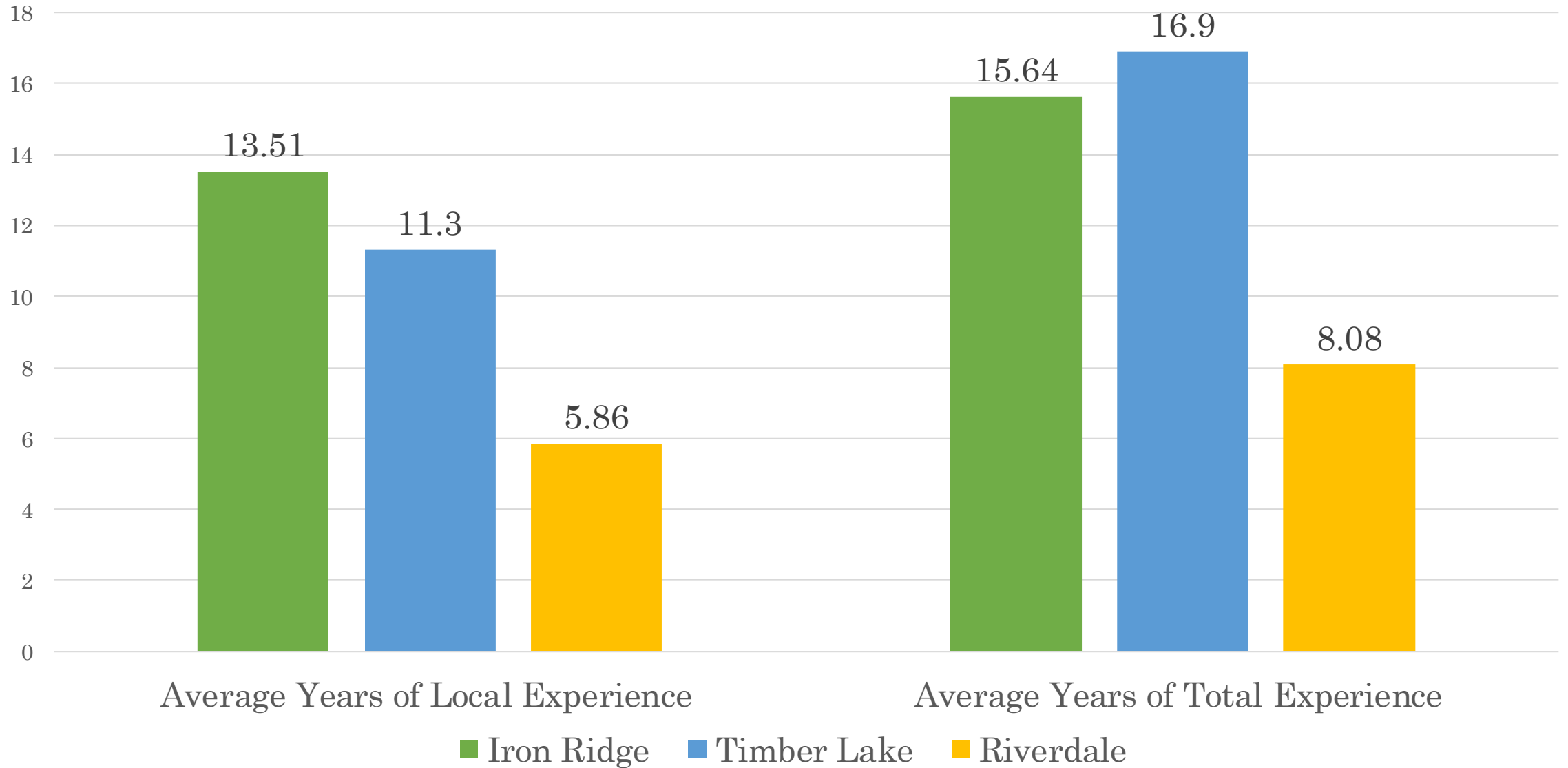


■ Middle or High School (34.09%)  
■ Elementary School (38.64%) ■ Special Education (11.36%)  
■ District-Wide (P.E., Ar..) (9.09%)  
■ Reading or Literacy Specialist (6.82%)

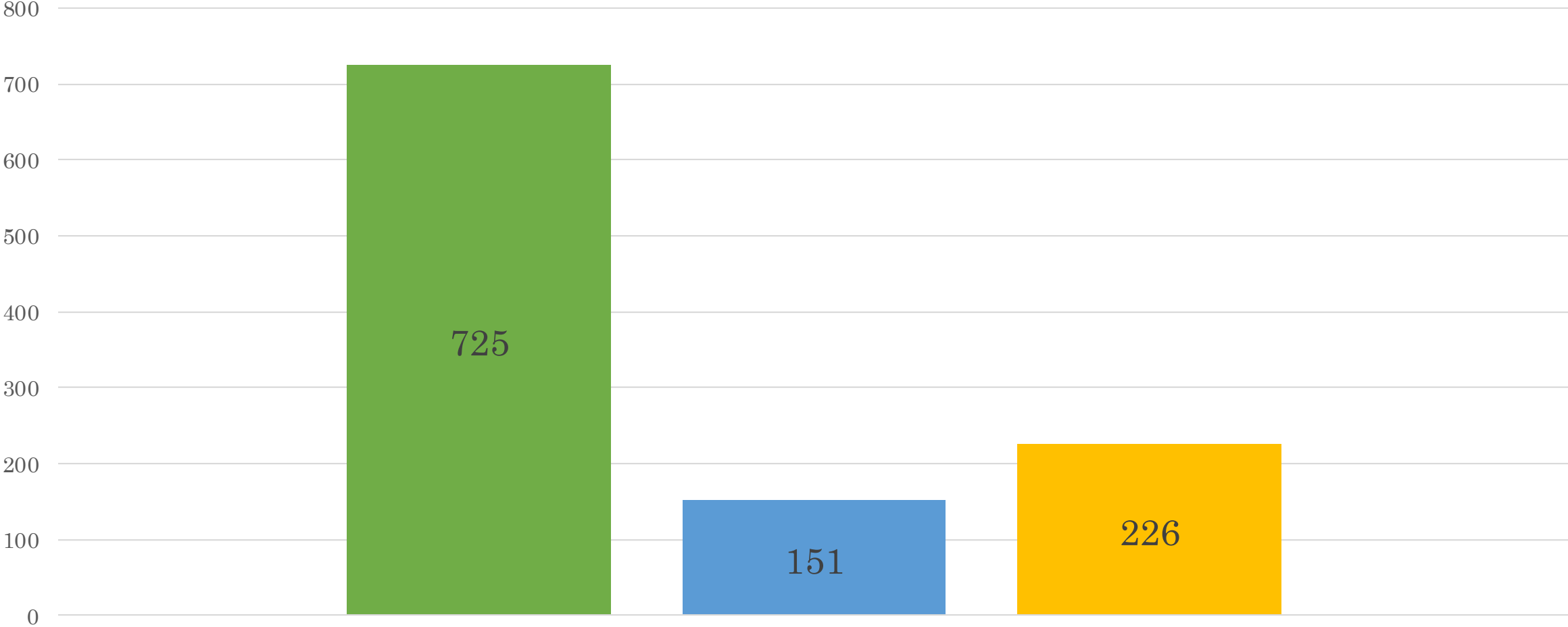


■ Males (22.73%) ■ Females (77.27%)

## Average Years of Service



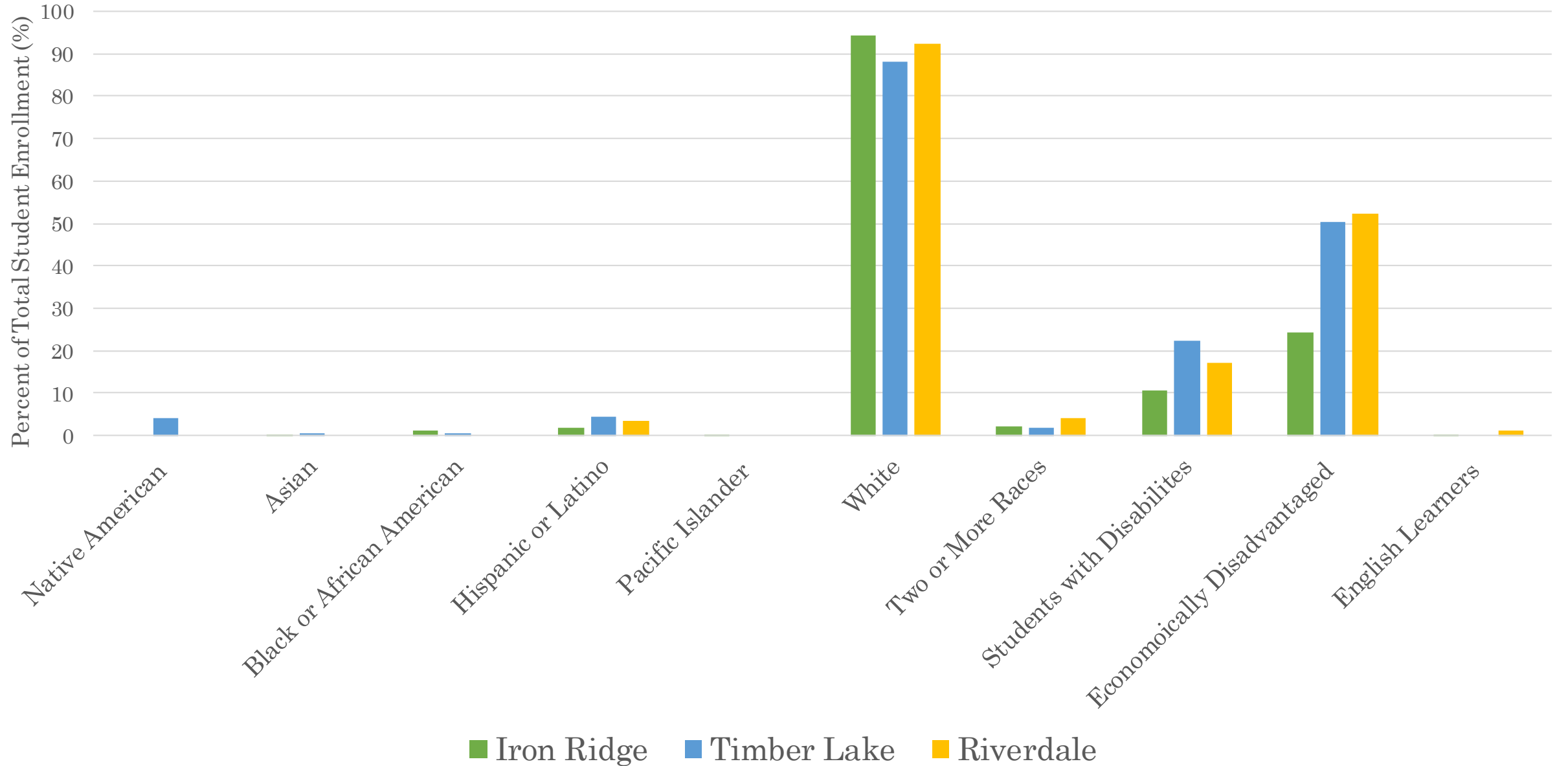
# Student Enrollment



Student Enrollment

■ Iron Ridge ■ Timber Lake ■ Riverdale

# Student Demographics (%)



# Three Rural District Cases

- What are the community characteristics?
  - What are the community challenges?
  - What is the role of the school district in the community?
  - What are the school's challenges?
- 
- Why do teachers stay in their rural school districts?

# Iron Ridge

- “Hub” of the community
- Cultivator of identity and local history
- Gathering place and social connections

Role of School

Community Descriptors

- Welcoming or inclusive
- Art-focused
- Community is invested in the school
- Historical legacy
- Closest to Madison
- Close proximity to university with a teacher education program

- Administration turnover
- Limited funding
- Resistance to change
- Low teacher salaries

School Challenges

Community Challenges

- Lack of employers
- Middle range housing
- Gap between the have's and have-not's

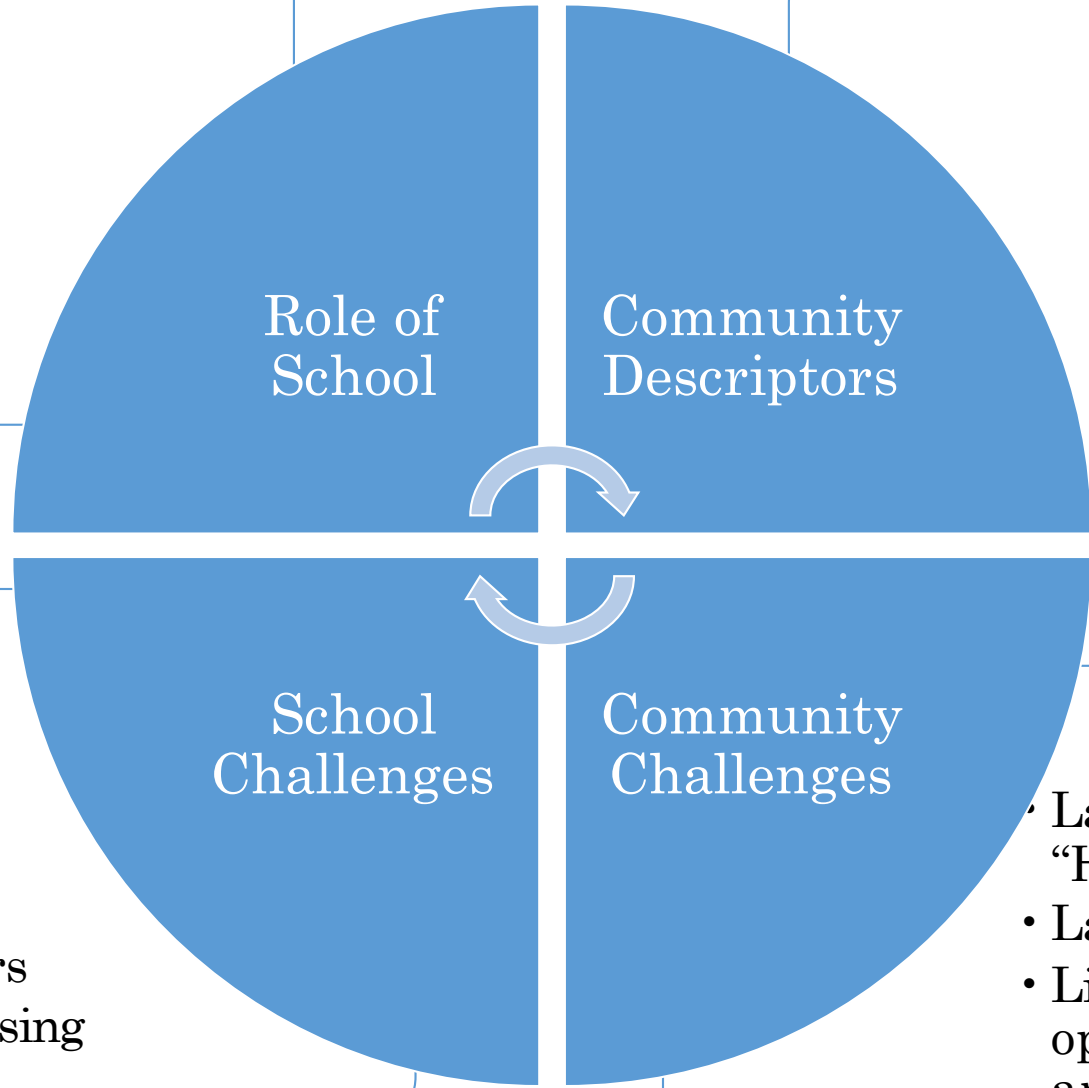
# Why Stay in Iron Ridge School District?

- ✓ Relationships with students and families
- ✓ Professional relationships
- ✓ Opportunities to wear multiple hats and take on leadership responsibilities
- ✓ Positive working environment
- ✓ Support from the community
- ✓ Well known and high academic success



# Timber Lake

- Entertainment
- “Centerpiece of our town”
- Keeps the town on the map
- Community celebrations
- Student social services



Role of School

Community Descriptors

School Challenges

Community Challenges

- Economy: Outdoor Tourism
- Significant Second-Home Owners/Seasonal Residents
- Farthest from Madison

- Local politics & taxes
- Single teachers per grade/subject
- Limited student teachers
- Increasing costs, decreasing revenue

- Large division between “Haves” and “Have-nots”
- Lack of housing options
- Limited work/career opportunities and distance to amenities

# Why Stay in Timber Lake School District?

- ✓ Professional autonomy in the classroom
- ✓ Building meaningful and consistent relationships with students
- ✓ Small school experience is desirable for their own children
- ✓ Vertical alignment with other teachers across curriculum and student needs
- ✓ Nature/outdoors
- ✓ “You get the right people on the team, overnight you can change the entire culture of the district.”  
(Superintendent/Principal)

# Riverdale

- A partnership district
- Provide support services to the community
- Center of the community

Role of School

Community Descriptors

- Multiple townships incorporated into one district
- Organic dairy plant
- Agriculture base
- Supportive and invested in the school

- Single teacher per grade/subject
- Administration and teacher turnover
- Teachers have blurred role as a social worker
- Young staff

School Challenges

Community Challenges

- Limited housing options
- Geographically isolated: "Poverty of access"
- 100 year floods
- Increasing poverty

# Why Stay in Riverdale School District?

- ✓ Autonomy in classrooms
- ✓ Support from district for personal growth
- ✓ Opportunities to enter into leadership positions
- ✓ Relationships with students
- ✓ Family in the area
- ✓ Commitment to the school and community

# Pipeline Leaks and Patches

	<b>Leaks</b>	<b>Patches</b>
Iron Ridge	New Teacher Retention New Teacher Recruitment	PLC time during school day; “Matchmaker” or “Fairy Godmother;” Offer classes through a consortium of districts; personal recruitment; teachers recruited from teacher preparation programs
Timber Lake	New Teacher Retention New Teacher Recruitment	Rigorous hiring and selection process; individually-negotiated salaries; start people as subs and then bring them in with emergency licensure
Riverdale	New Teacher Retention New Teacher Recruitment	Post positions early; investing in their own teachers; provide teachers with PD opportunities that fit their needs; upward job mobility within the district

# Asset-Based Reframing

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Iron Ridge Case  
**Cultivator of  
Local  
Sustainability**

Timber Lake  
Case  
**The Equalizer**

Riverdale Case  
**First Responder**

# Concluding Thoughts

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Using an asset-based perspective to foster reciprocal relationships



Support schools in recognizing their deep roots in community as a recruitment and retention tools

# Thank You



**RERIC**  
RURAL EDUCATION RESEARCH  
& IMPLEMENTATION CENTER

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