

Special Education Teachers in Rural Schools and Coping with Challenges

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Abstract

In the United States there is a severe shortage of special education teachers, and rural states have found it particularly challenging. Montana is the 4th largest state in the United States, it is 44th in the nation with respect to population size and is ranked one of the lowest in salaries paid to teachers. To meet the need for special education teachers in this state the Office of Public Instruction, created an alternative path for teachers wishing to become endorsed in special education. Providing a pathway to a special education endorsement is only the first step. The next step is to determine how teachers in rural schools meet the challenge of teaching and stay in this field.

Special education teachers in the early years of their career are faced with many challenges which can impact their ability to stay in the profession (Bettini et al., 2018). Among the factors that may impact this include the support of the administrator for new special educators (Bettini et al., 2015), the interpersonal competencies of teachers and its relationship to burnout (Pavlidou, et al., 2022) and level of teacher job satisfaction (De Stasio et al., 2017).

Montana special education teachers in this program are interviewed to ascertain the challenges they have faced and the coping strategies they have used to overcome these challenges to prevent burnout. This information can be used by faculty preparing preservice teachers.

Keywords: coping strategies, rural, special education, teachers