

Factors influencing Teacher Recruitment and Retention in the Texas Panhandle

RATIONALE

Schools serving rural communities often struggle to recruit and retain well-prepared teachers. Difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers in rural communities has been attributed to a range of economic, cultural, and educational factors. Yet, existing literature does not provide clear evidence regarding **what factors most influence teacher recruitment and retention in the Texas Panhandle**. As a result, existing research offers only minimal guidance for recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in the area's rural schools.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a **concurrent multistrand mixed-method design to identify factors that influence teacher recruitment and retention in the region's rural school districts** (n = 46; Region 16, rural as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics).

The quantitative strand analyzed Region 16 district data obtained from the Texas Education Agency for the **2018-2021** academic years. Counts and percentages for more than 20 variables were obtained (e.g., district-level teacher turnover and achievement, enrollment, student and teacher demographics, teacher salary, class size).

The qualitative strand involved sending a researcher-developed questionnaire to Region 16 principals (n = 224; June and July 2021). The 28-item questionnaire ended with an invitation to leaders to be interviewed about their experience in recruiting and retaining teachers. While only 14 leaders completed the survey, six volunteered to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during the fall semester, 2021.

DATA ANALYSIS

In addition to descriptive analysis, post-hoc exploratory analysis techniques were performed using Observation Oriented Modeling software (OOM) to ascertain relationships between teacher turnover rates and each variable, and to identify variable clusters. Time-based relationships between identified variable clusters and teacher turnover rates were tested using the Ordinal Pattern Analysis (Concatenated Orderings) function in the OOM software. Survey data were also analyzed using OOM (due to low response rates results are not presented here).

After removing identifying information, the PI coded transcripts in the fall of 2022, identifying major themes. A second round of coding was completed by a research assistant in early 2023 to verify themes. Open-ended survey responses were compared to themes identified from interviews.

TRENDS IN TEACHER TURNOVER

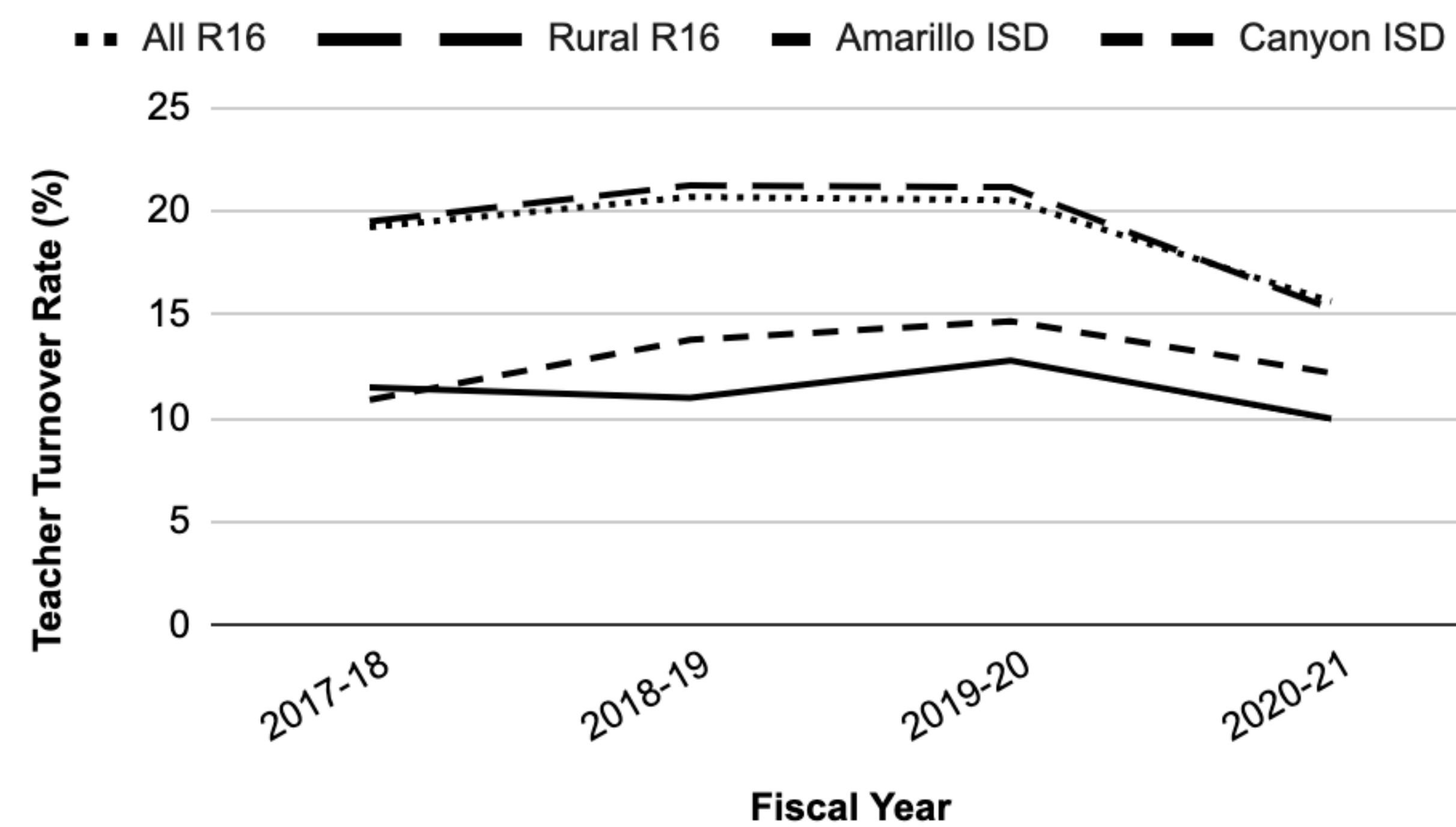


Figure 1. Comparative Trends in Teacher Turnover

Note: R16 year averages plotted (SD: high of 10.6% in 2018-19 and a low of 6.9% in 2020-21). While average teacher turnover rates declined, **37% of R16 districts experiences increases in their teacher turnover rates**.

ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

Economic disadvantage: Nearly 67% of the time, districts who experienced continuous decline in the percent of students classified “economically disadvantaged” (2017-18 - 2020-21, n = 7) had higher increases in teacher turnover rates than all other districts (n = 39, PCC = 66.67). This pattern is only somewhat plausibly due to chance (c-value = 0.08). **This condition had the most influence on teacher turnover.**

Enrollment: About half of rural-remote districts who experienced consecutive enrollment decline over the years studied (n = 12) had higher increases in teacher turnover rates than all other districts (PCC = 53.78, c-value = 0.38). This pattern was more evident for rural-distant districts (PCC = 64.29, c-value = 0.29), but not observed for rural-fringe districts. Results are, however, plausibly due to chance.

ESL: About 60% of the time, districts who experienced continuous increases in the percent of students classified “ESL” (n = 8) had higher increases in teacher turnover rates than all other districts (n = 38, PCC = 59.87). This pattern is plausibly due to chance, however (c-value = 0.20). A model including both enrollment declines and increases in percent of ESL students did not yield more robust patterns.

Combined Model: Nearly 70% of the time, districts who experienced **declines in both enrollment and the percent of students classified as “economically disadvantaged”** (n = 2) had higher increases in teacher turnover rates than all other districts (n = 44, PCC = 68.18, c-value = 0.23). **While the classification index value was the highest with this model, the less impressive c-value is noted.**

SALARY TRENDS

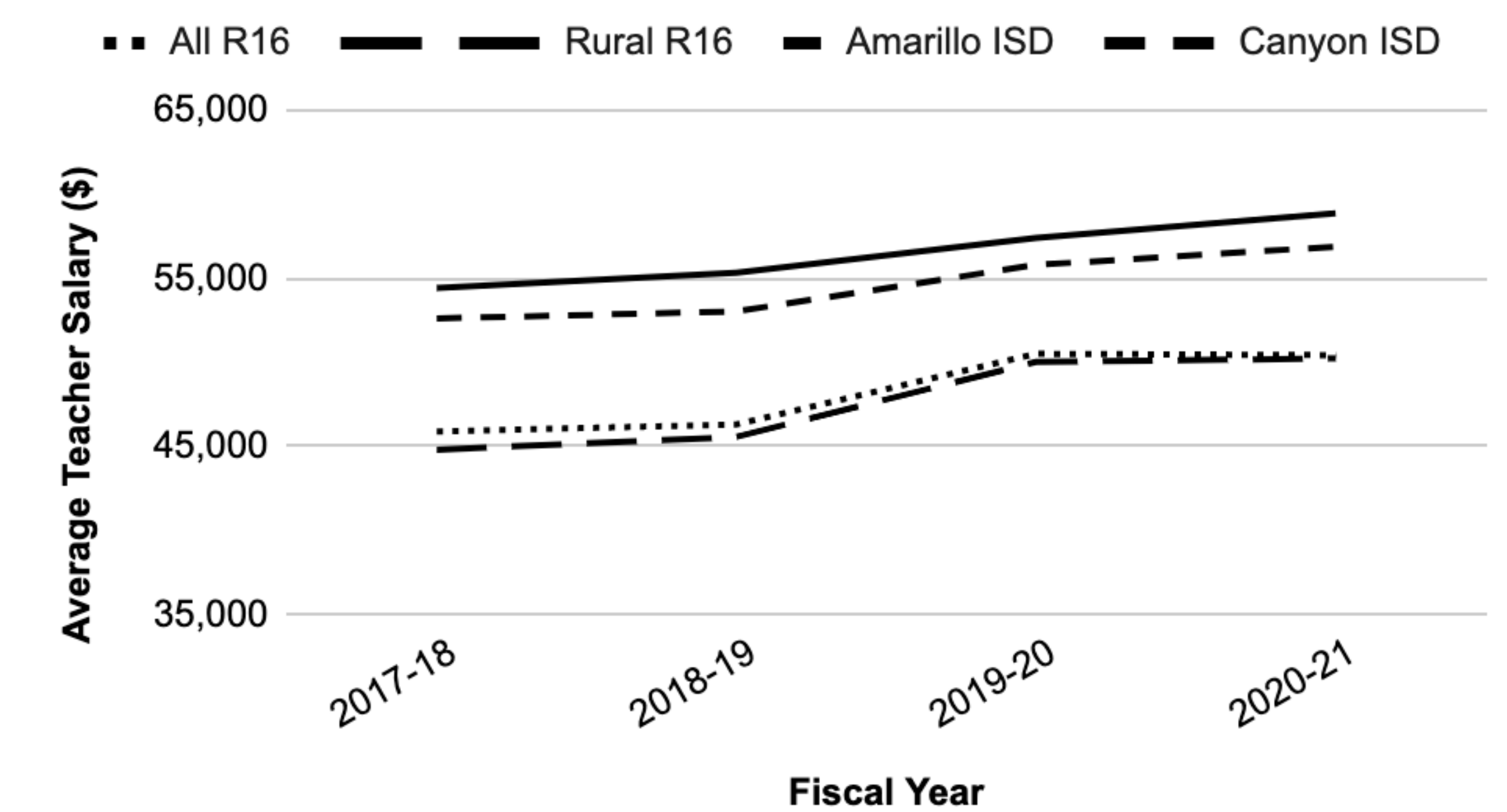


Figure 2. Comparative Trends in Teacher Salary

Note: Median salaries plotted for R16; comparison ISDs are average salary.

More than 60% of the time, districts with greater increases in average teacher salary show the highest decrease in teacher turnover (PCC = 62.18). This modest pattern is only somewhat plausibly due to chance (c-value = 0.03). This pattern is most evident among rural-remote districts (n = 34, PCC = 64.75, c-value = 0.02), less so for rural-distant districts (PCC = 54.17, c-value = 0.39) and not evident among rural-fringe districts, those closest to urban areas.

LEADER EXPERIENCES

TABLE 1: Factors influencing teacher recruitment and retention

| Theme | Quote |
|--------------------------|---|
| Leadership | "[Teachers] may leave ... maybe more, more supportive administration." |
| Resources | "Yes, we're competitive ... but not quite as com-... I mean, we just can't ... keep up pay-wise with Canyon and Amarillo." |
| Community context | "The price of housing will shoot through the roof and we'll go through times when like you literally cannot find a single house available to rent no matter how low your standards are." "They had a pretty decent time attracting teachers because they were close enough to Lubbock for people to live in Lubbock and drive in." |
| Status of the profession | "Social media has not been friendly to education ... what ... educators around the country are posting ... that everybody is, you know, drowning and everything is bad." |

Conclusion: Enrollment and salary have modest influence on retention, and do not fully explain trends. The nature of industry in a community, economic trends, school culture, perceptions of teaching as a profession, and the hiring trends of surrounding districts, including of coaches, can be decisive. Improving recruitment and retention requires responses tailored to school and community context.

Acknowledgements

Funding was provided by the Graduate School. Special thanks to Valda Kabia and Christine Dorsett. References upon request.