**Summary of Article** – “Financing Rural Schools: Characteristics of Strong Rural School Finance Systems”

In the article, “Financing Rural Schools: Characteristics of Strong Rural School Finance Systems” Lambert (2011) looks at the financial issues facing rural schools. Because funding plays a role in the type, frequency, and quality of professional development I felt this article was an appropriate choice for analysis.

Lambert (2011) introduces the concept of the article by declaring that the largest portion of school district budgets is spent on teacher salaries. She states, “Unfortunately, teacher recruitment and retention have historically been serious challenges for many rural districts” (p. 1). It is this difficulty that leads to high turnover in staff, which can translate into a less experienced staff in need of professional development. Continuing on, Lambert reports that the number of teachers working in rural schools exceeds 400,000. She argues that rural teachers face challenges that are far different than their urban counterparts. “For example,” Lambert states, “Rural teachers are more likely than any other teachers to have multiple teaching assignments and to be required by NCLB to become ‘highly qualified’ in more than one subject. Yet, rural teachers have less access to college coursed and less access to professional development and mentoring. Moreover, what is provided is infrequently targeted to rural circumstances or need” (p. 1). As a teacher, and now administrator in a small, rural district and school, I would agree with Ms. Lambert’s assertions.

In addition to the challenges of multiple assignments and needed certifications, Lambert (2011) reports that rural teachers and administrators often make $10,000 to $20,000 less than similarly assigned urban teachers. Lambert lists two factors that figure into this disparity in compensation. These are isolation and high poverty. Isolation is an issue because rural schools often do not have the “retail, medical, and entertainment amenities that people…from urban areas…are accustomed to” (p. 2). High poverty affects the ability to keep teachers because of low salaries and because “they almost always lack basic teaching material, equipment, books, and playground equipment. And, their buildings are often in severe disrepair” (p. 2). Lambert argues that these issues need to be addressed in any discussion with rural school leaders.

To conclude the article, Lambert (2011) suggests several policy suggestions to help address these issues including: increasing the salaries of rural teachers; making sure that working conditions are acceptable by providing adequate supplies and professional development opportunities; encouraging local residents to become teachers; working with universities to address rural issues in their pre-service programs; incorporating technology to the greatest extent possible; and encouraging greater community support and engagement in the educational process.

**Analysis:**

I thought that Lambert’s evaluation of the issues facing rural educators was quite accurate. Teaching and leading in a rural setting does have its own challenges that are quite different from those faced in urban schools. That is not to say that urban schools do not have difficulties, simply that they are different and often addressed in more detail than those in rural schools. I agree that in order to address these disparities there need to be significant efforts made to increase both the salaries of rural educators and the quality of the conditions they work in.