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ABSTRACT

The problem of attracting and retaining qualified teachers is defined; and the complicating factors, current research, and policy options and implications are outlined in this issue brief. Complicating factors cited range from increased employment opportunities for women and minorities outside the teaching profession to difficulty in objectively measuring teacher performance. Research shows that better respect, status, and working conditions are the most important factors in attracting people to the profession and getting them to stay. Advantages and disadvantages are given for each of 24 policy options that range from increasing all teacher salaries to establishing a merit pay system. Legislators are advised that no single policy is likely to solve a state's problem of recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, but rather, that what is needed are packages of policies that address specific needs and that are able to garner public support for teachers. (Author/MLF)

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ATTRACTING AND RETAINING QUALIFIED TEACHERS

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An Issue Brief of the
Education and Job Training Program
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"The laws passed in the 1984 legislative sessions will determine how effective our nationwide response will be to the almost unanimous mandate that we accomplish a sweeping reform and renewal of American education."

T. H. Bell
Secretary of Education
Indianapolis, Indiana
December 6, 1983

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING QUALIFIED TEACHERS

The Problem: Many Americans perceive that the quality of teachers in the public schools either is declining or is insufficient for the changing needs of American society. The average SAT scores of education majors are lower than for most other professions and are declining. There is a substantial and growing shortage of teachers qualified to teach science and mathematics. Many people perceive that the best teachers tend to leave the profession and the poorest teachers remain. Current policies do not appear to counter these trends.

Complicating Factors:

1. Except for teacher pay, most of the factors determining the attractiveness of the profession lie outside the direct reach of state legislatures--either in local practices or in public attitudes.
2. With the growth in employment opportunities for women and minorities in other professions, the percentage of qualified women and minorities entering teaching is declining.
3. Objective measures of teacher performance are difficult to obtain. Many aspects cannot be measured objectively. Observation and evaluation by others, including peers and school principals, is possible but tends to be expensive, and most school systems are not set up to provide appropriate training and oversight in teacher evaluation.
4. Many of the factors which determine student learning outcomes are beyond the reach of teachers--for example, the student's family background and education, the amount of family support to reinforce homework assignments and learning attitudes, community support for learning rigor.
5. In many cases collective bargaining agreements substantially restrict the scope of school systems and administrators in disciplining and dismissing poor teachers.
6. There are few institutional links between the public schools and the colleges and universities that train teachers.

What the Research Shows:

1. Higher pay is a necessary but not sufficient cause to attract better students to the field.
2. Better respect, status and working conditions are the most important factors in attracting people to the profession and getting them to stay.
3. Good teaching can be trained.
4. Teachers learn most when they observe and interact with other teachers in a collegial group, but most have little opportunity to do this.
5. Teachers like the job best, and do the best job when they are permitted to exercise professional judgment and choice in matters such as choosing curriculum materials and diagnosing and prescribing learning strategies for individual student needs.
6. The public says it is willing to pay more in taxes to support education, but only if it will produce measurable improvements in the quality of education.

7. Most teachers are attracted to the profession by the opportunity to teach.
8. Most teachers who leave the profession do so because they perceive insufficient opportunity to teach effectively.
9. The brightest teachers tend to be the ones who leave the profession first.
10. Many teachers like the opportunity to work parttime, or for less than the full year.

Policy Options and Implications:

1. Increase all teacher salaries.

Advantages:

- Improves attractiveness of the whole profession.
- Benefits existing teachers as well as the new ones.
- Is the most familiar solution, and the one most under direct control of the legislature.

Disadvantages:

- Is very expensive.
- Benefits poor teachers and good teachers alike.
- Does not provide any link between increased pay and increased teaching quality or productivity, so does not necessarily assure any better teacher performance.

2. Increase beginning salaries of teachers.

Advantages:

- Is less expensive than above.
- Puts the most resources into attracting new teachers.

Disadvantages:

- Further flattens the range between minimum and maximum compensation available to teachers (already more diminished than in many professions).
- Deals with only one factor that attracts people to the profession.
- Does nothing to help retain good teachers.

3. Provide scholarships and/or loan forgiveness for able college students who will go into teaching.

Advantages:

- Is a tested and successful approach (NDEA program).
- Cost is moderate. If loans are used, long-term costs are very low.
- Creates prestige for recipients and visibility for teaching.

Disadvantages:

- Does not insure that recipients will stay in teaching beyond end of their fiscal obligation (perhaps an advantage, as well).
- Can produce competition between "short-timers" and career teachers in schools.

4. Establish a merit pay system to reward good teachers and weed out poor ones.

Advantages:

- Provides incentives for good teaching performance.

- Reassures the public that additional support will produce actual improvements in teaching.
- Provides a basis for raising the status of the profession.

Disadvantages:

- Requires adequate base pay, adequate incentive, and employee confidence that performance determines pay.
- Is moderately expensive. Substantially increases the cost of teacher evaluation.
- There is not complete agreement among experts or the public on the criteria of teaching merit, or on how to ascertain merit fairly.
- Can create competition among teachers in a school, whereas the research shows teachers and students learn the most in an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual help.
- Is very threatening to many teachers.
- Must be implemented correctly with careful design and training for evaluation scheme.
- Must be sustained for many years to instill employee confidence that performance does determine pay.

5. Provide scholarships and/or loan forgiveness for able college students who will agree to teach needed subjects such as math, science, and computers.

Advantages:

- Same as #3 above.
- Targets money where the need is greatest.

Disadvantages:

- Same as #3 above.

6. Provide higher pay for teachers of subjects with the most need--such as science and math.

Advantages:

- Attacks the root of the problem--opportunities for higher pay in the private sector for teachers with these skills.
- Is relatively inexpensive.
- Targets money where the need is greatest.

Disadvantages:

- Creates a "caste" system among teachers of different subjects.
- May be unfair to teachers of subjects of high social worth, but not in demand in the private sector.

7. Provide more opportunities for in-service training in colleges for mediocre teachers to improve their teaching skills.

Advantages:

- Is a familiar approach.
- Is relatively easy to enact.

Disadvantages:

- Does not affect the school atmosphere that teachers work in, so has little impact on the major factors that influence teacher quality or teacher retention.
- By itself, has proven to have little impact on teacher performance.

8. Provide incentives for colleges and school systems to conduct in-service training in the schools.

Advantages:

- Provides opportunities for teachers to improve skills and improve learning atmosphere of the entire school.
- Feeds back information about practitioners' needs to the teacher-training institutions.
- Permits working with principal and a team of teachers, or the entire faculty to turn around and reinforce a new philosophy, and new classroom and administrative styles of an entire school.

Disadvantages:

- Does not recruit better students to teaching in the first place.
- Does not directly weed out poor teachers.
- Threatens some principals if they do not have appropriate management skills and style.

9. Provide incentive grants to individual schools and teachers for special projects and/or improved student performance.

Advantages:

- Is a tried and effective approach--popular with teachers.
- Gives teachers incentives to try to improve their teaching.
- Gives teachers and schools some influence and choice over their own working conditions.
- Can encourage teachers or an entire school to work together toward a common goal.
- Is relatively inexpensive--perhaps as little as \$200-\$500 per grant.

Disadvantages:

- Must be administered fairly, and not get bogged down in red tape.
- There must be a sufficient number of grants to offer credible hope of winning one.
- Is a limited step; it needs to be supplemented with other actions (better pay, higher public appreciation) to make a significant improvement in the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

10. Provide a career ladder with greater pay for teachers who receive superior evaluations and accept greater teaching responsibility.

Advantages:

- Requires greater responsibility for greater pay.
- Increases the compensation available to teachers over a lifetime career.
- Otherwise, has similar advantages to merit pay plan above.

Disadvantages:

- Can be quite expensive.
- May create competition rather than collegiality among teachers if not administered properly.
- Otherwise, has similar disadvantages to merit pay plan above.

11. Increase certification requirements of teachers to ensure that only qualified persons are allowed to teach.

Advantages:

- Weeds out the unqualified.

Disadvantages:

- Unless requirements are clearly related to characteristics of good teaching performance, it may not improve teaching performance, or retain the right people in the field.
- Without more specifics, this approach may not mean much.

12. Require all teachers to have a college major in a teaching subject other than education.

Advantages:

- Is a tried approach; some states already do this.
- Helps assure that teachers will have subject-matter expertise.

Disadvantages:

- Deals with only one aspect of effective teaching. Requires appropriate selection and teacher training schemes to be successful.
- Will have little effect if teachers are not assigned to teach the subjects in which they were trained.
- Does not necessarily recruit more talented people to teaching.

13. Relax certification requirements--especially required education courses for able students with degrees in other fields who agree to enter teaching.

Advantages:

- Gives teacher trainees an opportunity to find out what the field is like while they still have time to choose another college major.
- Assures teacher trainees have some classroom knowledge and experience before they enter teaching fulltime.
- Gets teacher-training institutions more involved in the public schools.

Disadvantages:

- Is more expensive than conventional teacher education.
- Can be disruptive of school classrooms and teachers' time if not organized and administered properly.

15. Put beginning teachers on probation for an apprentice period, and require periodic examination or evaluation for acceptance into professional status and for renewal of that status.

Advantages:

- Provides incentives for improved teaching performance.
- Requires periodic evaluation and/or examination of teachers.

Disadvantages:

- Requires evaluations and/or examinations to relate directly to teaching performance to be fair.
- Requires greater expenditure on evaluation and examination scheme.
- Unless accompanied by greater public appreciation, it can give teachers the feeling they are trusted less than other professionals, and thus be counterproductive.

16. Require local school systems to give teachers greater say over curriculum, instructional materials, instructional activities, and student assignment.

Advantages:

- Deals directly with a key problem of the teaching profession - teachers' feelings of powerlessness.

- Enables schools to gain the advantage of professional judgments tailored to the local needs of the school.
- Takes advantage of an under-utilized national resource--the judgments of educated, trained teachers.

Disadvantages:

- Unless coordinated with a program to develop professional agreement on the goals of a school and school system, it can disperse and water down the curriculum.
- If teachers have not been trained in these matters, it risks the possibility of poor choices by teachers.
- Is difficult to monitor from the legislature to ensure that local school systems are complying.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

17. Require local school systems to conduct schools with fewer interruptions in class instruction time.

Advantages:

- Improves student learning as well as teacher working conditions.

Disadvantages:

- Is difficult to enforce and monitor from the legislature.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

18. Require local school systems to provide more facilities and time for teachers to plan together and prepare for classes.

Advantages:

- Can improve student learning as well as teacher working conditions.

Disadvantages:

- Is expensive.
- Is difficult to enforce and monitor from the legislature.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

19. Require local school systems to assign aides and other employees to student monitoring duties in order to free more teachers' time for actual instruction.

Advantages:

- Improves student learning as well as teacher working conditions.

Disadvantages:

- Is expensive.
- Is difficult to enforce and monitor from the legislature.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

20. Require parents by law to meet and confer with teachers and school officials when requested by the school.

Advantages:

- Helps strengthen hand of teachers in getting support from parents.
- Symbolizes public commitment to learning and teachers.
- There is a precedent in the federal requirements for the education of the handicapped.

Disadvantages:

- Introduces more legalism into school procedures.
- Is difficult to enforce and monitor from the legislature.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

21. Require local school system to provide day care for teachers' children.

Advantages:

- Can make it possible for some qualified teachers to work who could otherwise not afford to work.

Disadvantages:

- Is expensive.
- Does not provide the same incentive to all teachers.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

22. Require local school systems to provide parttime opportunities for good teachers teachers who do not wish to work fulltime.

Advantages:

- Can make it possible for some qualified teachers to work who would not wish to work fulltime.
- Is a proven approach.

Disadvantages:

- Makes school organization somewhat more complex (scheduling faculty meetings, extra duties, etc.).
- May create more overhead expense.
- Is difficult to enforce and monitor from the legislature.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

23. Require local school systems to set up peer evaluations of teachers.

Advantages:

- Makes evaluation of teachers similar to evaluation of other professionals.
- Encourages collegiality among teachers, and emphasis on professional growth.
- In most cases, will expand the amount of teacher evaluation that is done.

Disadvantages:

- Is expensive (mainly in additional teacher time).
- Can reduce authority of principals if not designed and administered carefully.
- Is difficult to monitor from the legislature.
- Is a state mandate - may generate local resentment.

24. Require local school systems to limit the number of students a teacher deals with each day to a manageable number.

Advantages:

- Improves student learning as well as teacher working conditions.

Disadvantages:

- Is expensive - requires more teachers.
- Is most difficult to arrange the place where it is most needed..secondary schools.

Conclusion: No single policy is likely to solve a state's problem of recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. The most effective policies are likely to be packages of policies that address a variety of specific needs, and are carefully crafted to 1) reinforce each other, and 2) garner political support for all the parts. Once a package is enacted, obtaining greater public support for teachers may be just as instrumental and important to the success of the effort as the specific policies themselves.

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