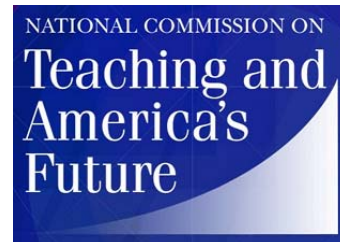# Policy Brief

The High Cost of Teacher Turnover

**Prepared for the National Commission
on Teaching and America's Future**
Thomas G. Carroll, President

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON
**Teaching and
America's
Future**

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TEACHING AND AMERICA'S FUTURE

Policy Brief

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I. Introduction

America's schools are struggling with a growing teacher dropout problem that is costing the nation over $7 billion a year. It is draining resources, diminishing teaching quality, and undermining our ability to close the student achievement gap.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) estimates that the national cost of public school teacher turnover could be over $7.3 billion a year[1]. This new estimate is significantly higher than the most recent estimate of $4.9 billion[2] in annual costs that was made in a report by the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2005, and takes into account recent increases in the size of the teacher workforce and the rate of teacher turnover.

NCTAF's estimate, which is based on the cost generated by teachers who leave their school or district during a given year, does not include the district's cost for teachers who move from school to school within a district in search of a better position. The estimate also does not include any federal or state investments that are lost when a teacher leaves. If all of these costs were taken into account, the true cost to the nation would be far in excess of $7 billion.

NCTAF's findings are a clear indication that America's teacher dropout problem is spiraling out of control. Teacher attrition has grown by 50 percent over the past fifteen years. The national teacher turnover rate has risen to 16.8 percent. In urban schools it is over 20 percent, and, in some schools and districts, the teacher dropout rate is actually higher than the student dropout rate.[3]

By allowing excessive teacher turnover to continue unabated year after year, we have been digging a deep hole for ourselves. In 1994, former U. S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, warned the nation that we would need to hire two million teachers within ten years to offset Baby Boom retirements. Over the next decade we beat that goal by hiring approximately 2.25 million teachers – but during that same decade we lost 2.7 million teachers, with over with over 2.1 million of them leaving before retirement.[4]

Teacher Turnover Is a Costly Problem Spiraling Out of Control

Until we recognize that we have a retention problem we will continue to engage in a costly annual recruitment and hiring cycle, pouring more and more teachers into our nation's classrooms only to lose them at a faster and faster rate. This will continue to drain our public tax dollars, it will undermine teaching quality, and it will most certainly hinder our ability to close student achievement gaps.

It does not have to be this way. NCTAF has found that school leaders can reduce teacher turnover and control their costs with coherent human resource policies that begin with measuring teacher turnover and understanding its consequences. Building on this knowledge, they should then focus on hiring well prepared teachers and giving them a strong start with comprehensive induction programs. To sustain these new teachers as they progress toward accomplished teaching, their schools should be transformed into genuine learning organizations. These policies will achieve the greatest return on investment if they are targeted at high-need schools. A discussion of these recommendations begins on page eight of this policy brief and additional information can be found at www.nctaf.org.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 70 Percent of New Teachers Drop Out in Six Years

In 1999, in the School District of Philadelphia, 919 new teachers began teaching and 12,000 students began ninth grade. Six years later, 58% of those students had graduated from high school, but only 30% of those new teachers were still teaching in Philadelphia. This means that the new teacher dropout rate (70%) over six years in Philadelphia was higher than the student dropout rate (42%)[5].

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1. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, estimate based on NCTAF Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator applied to the Digest for Education Statistics data for all public school teachers in urban and non-urban public schools and districts (see Appendix to this Policy Brief).
2. Alliance for Excellent Education (2005). *Teacher Attrition: A Costly Loss to the Nation and to the States*, p. 1.
3. U.S. Department of Education, *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey*, pp. 7-9.
4. Useem, E., Offenberg, R., & Farley, E. (2007). *Closing the Teacher Quality Gap in Philadelphia: New Hope and Old Hurdles*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action, p. 25; and Neild, R.C. & Balfanz, R. (2006). Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005, p. 18.
5. U.S. Department of Education, *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey*, pp. 7-9

High-need Schools Pay the Highest Price

The consequences of high teacher turnover are particularly dire for our nation's low-performing, high-poverty schools. Many of these schools struggle to close the student achievement gap because they never close the teaching quality gap – they are constantly rebuilding their staff. An inordinate amount of their capital – both human and financial – is consumed by the constant process of hiring and replacing beginning teachers who leave before they have mastered the ability to create a successful learning culture for their students.

As a result of high turnover, high-need urban and rural schools are frequently staffed with inequitable concentrations of under-prepared, inexperienced teachers who are left to labor on their own to meet the needs of their students. This isolation has a crippling effect on many new teachers who feel overwhelmed by the challenges they face. They leave after several years of working with a frustrating lack of support – perhaps they find a better school, but in too many cases they abandon teaching altogether. And when they go, they leave a host of problems behind for the eager young teachers who take their place.

There's a Hole in the Bucket

Some would say that this is a simple recruitment problem – just find more teachers to replace those who leave. But focusing on the hiring of new teachers won't stem the costly exodus of teachers that is undercutting our nation's ability to provide every child with quality teaching in a school organized for success. As this and previous NCTAF reports have noted, the conventional wisdom that we can improve teaching quality by increasing the supply of new teachers is a misreading of the fundamental problem facing our schools today. The problem is not finding enough teachers to do the job – the problem is keeping them in our schools.

The traditional children's song "There's a hole in the bucket, Dear Liza, Dear Liza" is an apt metaphor for the current state of affairs. In *No Dream Denied* (2003), NCTAF reported that 287,370 teachers left teaching during the 1999-2000 school year (220,582 left for other pursuits and 66,788 retired). Recently released data from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey show that this attrition is worsening. During the 2003-2004 school year, 332,700 left teaching (245,429 left for other pursuits, and 88,271 retired)[6]. Bright young teachers are leaving at an unsustainable rate.

Teacher Attrition

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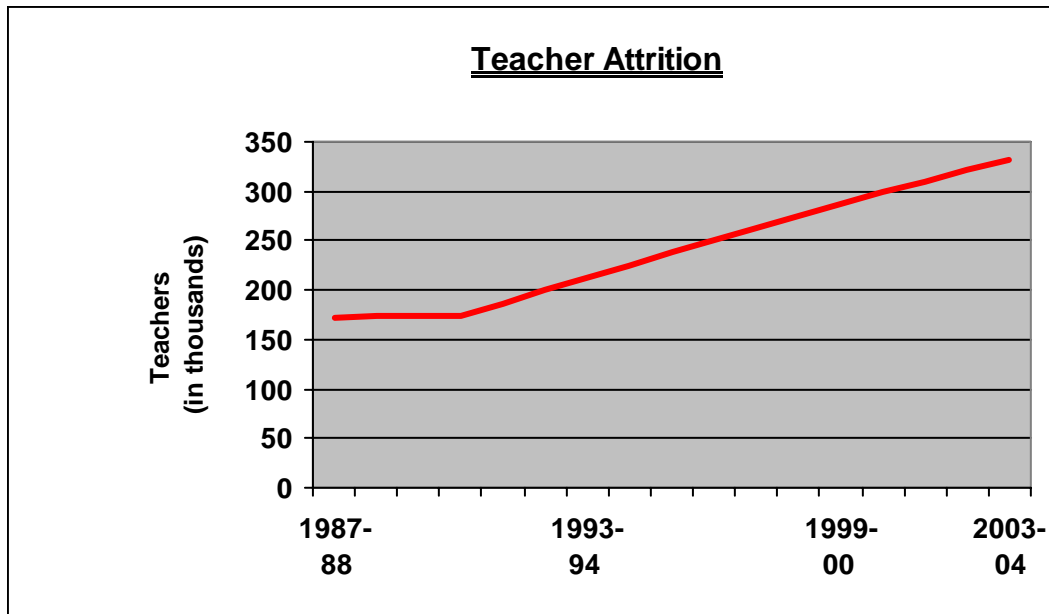
6. U.S. Department of Education, *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey*, pp. 7-9.

Is All Turnover Bad?

School leaders can't manage what they don't measure. Because they have always relied on a steady supply of new teachers, virtually no school district in the country has systems in place to track or control teacher turnover. Without these systems, they have no way to know how much money they are losing, whether they are losing good teachers or bad teachers, or which schools are suffering the greatest consequences of turnover.

In various studies of teacher turnover, NCTAF has found more than a few school leaders who genuinely believe that turnover is driven by forces that are largely out of their control – and in the absence of adequate management information, they are probably right. With accurate turnover and cost data, school leaders could better manage their human resources to achieve a higher return on their teaching investments.

During our study of turnover we also have found school leaders and members of the public who believe that high teacher turnover saves school districts money by lowering the average salary of teachers – high turnover schools and districts have more beginning teachers who are concentrated at the lower end of the pay scale. This is a false economy. High turnover schools incur significant costs associated with their constant recruitment, hiring, training and separation of teachers, and these costs are not being weighed against possible salary savings; high turnover creates a constant drain on funding that offsets savings on low salaries for beginning teachers. And this is to say nothing of the lost teaching quality and diminished student achievement in schools that are consistently staffed with high concentrations of inexperienced beginners.

As school leaders work to address this problem, it is important to remember that the goal is not to achieve zero turnover. Teachers will continue to retire or leave for personal reasons that can not be controlled by the district. Some beginning teachers may also find that they are not well suited to teaching – they and their districts may be better off if they leave teaching early. Well-designed induction and peer mentoring programs that can help young teachers make this decision and are well worth the investment, especially if they are coupled with coherent human resource management systems that enable school leaders to know whether they are losing effective or ineffective teachers.

The goal is to ensure that teacher turnover is a managed process and not a random series of events. Each school district needs a comprehensive human resource plan in place that enables school leaders to achieve the maximum return on their investments in teachers. Many school leaders who are interested in controlling their turnover have asked for benchmarks or turnover targets to shoot for. In setting benchmarks, school leaders should look close to home. A school's turnover target should be the turnover rate of the schools with the highest performance in its district. Similarly, a district's turnover target should be the turnover rate of the highest-performing districts in its region.

II. The NCTAF Cost of Teacher Turnover Study in Five Districts

Several previous studies have attempted to estimate the cost of teacher turnover, but prior to this NCTAF study, only one has been based on actual cost data from specific districts[7]. Instead, the previous studies relied on turnover formulas derived from industry to estimate turnover costs in education. Those earlier estimates found that the nation was spending up to $4.9 billion dollars a year on teacher turnover.[8]

But because the majority of these estimates are not derived from a detailed analysis of actual school data, and because they do not provide school leaders with specific management tools they could use to control costs, the findings of these previous studies have been downplayed by policymakers.

To address this problem, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) completed a pilot study of teacher turnover and its costs in five school districts: Chicago Public Schools (Chicago, Illinois), Milwaukee Public Schools (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), Granville County Schools (Granville, North Carolina), Jemez Valley Public Schools (New Mexico), and Santa Rosa Public Schools (New Mexico). This pilot study was designed to develop tools for estimating turnover costs, to test the feasibility of collecting actual turnover cost data, and to determine the magnitude of these costs.

In both small and large districts, the study found that when a teacher leaves, the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement teacher are substantial. It is clear that thousands of dollars walk out the door each time a teacher leaves. The cost per teacher leaver ranged from $4,366 in rural Jemez Valley to $17,872 in Chicago. The total cost of turnover in the Chicago Public Schools is over $86 million per year.

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7. Shockley, R., Guglielmino, P., and Watlington, E. (2006). *The Costs of Teacher Attrition*.

8. Alliance for Excellent Education (2005). *Teacher Attrition: A Costly Loss to the Nation and to the States*, p. 1.

The NCTAF study also found that teacher turnover is highest in high-minority, high-poverty, and low-performing schools. As a result, these at-risk schools spend a higher percentage of available funding on teacher turnover than do high-performing, low-minority, and low-poverty schools because they spend significantly more on teacher recruitment, hiring, orientation, and separation.

For example, in Milwaukee low-performing schools have double the teacher turnover of high-performing schools. With an average school faculty of 55 and an average school cost of $8,300 per leaver, a typical low-performing school in MPS spends $67,000 more to deal with the consequences of teacher turnover every year. If saved, this sum would allow the same school to provide additional support for new teachers or pay the salary of a reading specialist.

These costs do not include what may in fact be the largest cost of teacher turnover: lost teaching quality and effectiveness. Numerous studies have shown that teacher effectiveness improves with experience during the early years of a teacher's career.[9] New teachers struggle, but as they gain more knowledge and experience they are able to raise student achievement. With the high rate of new teacher turnover, our education system is losing half of all teachers *before* they reach their peak effectiveness. Students, especially those in at-risk schools, are too often left with a passing parade of inexperienced teachers who leave before they become accomplished educators.

III. Solving the Problem of High Teacher Turnover

One of the most important steps that school districts can take is to recognize that supply side solutions focused on recruiting more teachers will not reduce the high cost of teacher turnover. School districts must first recognize the importance of teacher retention and then develop a comprehensive and coherent human resource strategy to reduce teacher turnover.

Step One: Measure Teacher Turnover and Its Costs

Education leaders need clear, current, accurate data on teacher turnover and its costs, in formats that make it possible to analyze, manage, and control those costs. This is the first step toward reducing turnover and making sound investments in teaching quality. Prior to the NCTAF study, none of the five participating school districts tracked teacher turnover or its costs.

The data collected by the districts for the study made it possible for them to analyze which teachers were leaving, from which schools, and how much money was walking out the door each time a teacher left. Granville County Schools, for example, learned that they were losing a high percentage of new teachers across all the schools in the district. Their teachers were leaving Granville and taking jobs in surrounding districts. With a better handle on teacher turnover data collected in this study, it is pos-

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The Annual Cost of Teacher Turnover: A Five District Study

School District	Number of Teachers	Cost Per Teacher Leaver
Chicago, Illinois	25,300	$17,872
Granville County, North Carolina	532	$ 9,875
Jemez Valley, New Mexico	41	$ 4,366
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	6,139	$15,325
Santa Rosa, New Mexico	58	unavailable

Calculating the Cost of Teacher Leavers

The cost of teacher leavers was calculated using district data on turnover and resources allocated to deal with turnover. Teachers who left the district altogether were considered leavers. In terms of costs, districts, along with a small subset of schools in each district, were asked to report time and money spent on activities associated with teacher leavers including: recruitment, hiring, administrative processing, professional development, and separation.

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9. McCaffrey, Koretz, Lockwood, & Hamilton (2003); Rivkin, S. G., Hanushek, E. A., & Kain, J. F. (2005); Shkolnik, J., Hikawa, H., Suttorp, M., Lockwood, J.R., Stecher, B., & Bohrnstedt, G. (2002).

Even without a price tag on lost teaching quality and student opportunities to learn, the message is clear: high teacher turnover is draining school districts of precious dollars that could be used to improve teaching quality and student learning. Based on the pilot study, we have estimated the cost of teacher turnover in a number of selected school districts around the country.

Cost of Teacher Turnover in Selected School Districts

School District	Annual Cost of Teacher Turnover
Atlanta, Georgia	$10,920,000
Baltimore, Maryland	$19,013,750
Boston, Massachusetts	$13,020,000
Cleveland, Ohio	$12,538,750
Dallas, Texas	$28,892,500
Detroit, Michigan	$26,565,000
Denver, Colorado	$14,988,750
Fairfax, Virginia	$28,350,000
Hartford, Connecticut	$4,462,500
Houston, Texas	$35,043,750
Los Angeles, California	$94,211,250
Louisville, Kentucky	$18,208,750
Memphis, Tennessee	$21,866,250
Miami, Florida	$47,775,000
Nashville, Tennessee	$14,393,750
New York City, New York	$115,221,250
Oakland, California	$12,005,000
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	$29,662,500
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	$8,890,000
Prince Georges County, Maryland	$23,292,500
Richmond, Virginia	$6,072,500
San Francisco, California	$11,865,000
Seattle, Washington	$10,596,250
Washington, D.C.	$16,598,750

You can calculate the cost for your own school district by using the *NCTAF Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator at* www.nctaf.org.

Fixing the Hole in the Bucket: Las Vegas, Nevada

The Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada is the fastest growing school district in the country. In the 2002-2003 school year, the Human Resources (HR) Department examined turnover data and recognized that the school district was losing a great deal of money because of high teacher turnover. Year after year the HR Department had worked hard to recruit and train high quality teachers only to see them leave the district. This cycle of recruitment, hiring, training, and turnover was both time-consuming and expensive.

In examining the teacher data, the district found that twelve schools had especially high teacher turnover – the average teacher tenure was 1.9 years, and the average experience of teachers in one of the 12 schools was only 1.3 years. The teacher dropout rate in the twelve schools was higher than the student dropout rate. As a result, students were struggling on the state test and principals were struggling to create an effective learning environment. Something needed to be done.

In collaboration with the Clark County Education Association, the district piloted a multi-faceted program in 2004. First, the principals in the twelve at-risk schools were given a two month head start in the hiring process. The principals were able to access a large applicant pool and choose teachers who fit their school improvement plan. With this early hiring, the principals had time to fill vacancies and hold a summer urban studies program to prepare the newly-hired teachers. The pilot program also offered new teachers full-time mentoring and an advance of one column on the salary schedule. Of the first cohort, 91 percent of the teachers remained at their school after one year.

An initial investment was needed to reduce teacher turnover and save money in Clark County. In this case, the initial investment came from a federal grant that paid for the summer urban studies program, the full-time mentoring, and the salary increase. The result of the initial investment was a drastic reduction in turnover and in the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training replacement teachers. And principals at the twelve schools had the opportunity to work with a stable group of teachers to transform their schools into genuine learning organizations.

Three years after this initiative began, Clark County has sustained a retention rate of 85% to 95% in the twelve pilot schools, which are actually attracting teachers from higher-performing schools in the district. The program is now being expanded to 27 schools in the district.

Step Two: Invest in Well-Prepared Teachers and Comprehensive Induction Programs

Efforts to build a comprehensive, 21st century system of teacher induction continue to be stymied by the fact that educators find it difficult to move beyond the factory-era mentality of the last century. The culture of today's schools continues to reinforce the practice of solo teaching in self-contained classrooms. This mindset is compounded by a belief that new teachers are interchangeable units who can easily be replaced by the next cohort of beginners. As a result, good teachers have little opportunity and few incentives to share their expertise with their colleagues, and beginning teachers are left to fend for themselves without the collegial mentoring and coaching support they need to succeed. The first step toward breaking this mindset is to recognize the importance of hiring and developing well-prepared teachers. In its 2003 report, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children*, NCTAF found that hiring well-prepared teachers reduced first year attrition by 50 percent.[10] Well-prepared teachers possess strong content knowledge; they understand how students learn and demonstrate the teaching skills necessary to help all students meet high standards; they can use a variety of assessment strategies to diagnose student learning needs; and they can reflect on their practices to improve instruction in collaboration with their colleagues.[11] Whether through traditional or alternative preparation, teachers need to acquire the knowledge and skills to be effective. It is not *how* new teachers are prepared but *how well* they are prepared and supported in whatever preparation pathway they choose.

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10. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003). *No Dream Denied: A Pledge To America's Children*, p. 84 [www.nctaf.org].
11. Ibid, p. 73

Once good teachers have been hired it is essential to give them a strong start with the support they need to succeed. A recent national study of support for new teachers found that comprehensive approaches to teacher induction can reduce teacher turnover by more than 50 percent.[12] In some well-designed programs, such as those conducted by the New Teacher Center, or in Las Vegas and Chattanooga, the gains can be significantly greater. But in contrast to these comprehensive approaches, too many districts use a minimal approach to teacher induction that relies on an untrained mentor or buddy who makes occasional visits to new teachers. This buddy system has a negligible effect, reducing new teacher turnover by just two percentage points.[13]

Because comprehensive induction programs reduce teacher turnover and increase teacher effectiveness, they have been found to be very cost effective. In California, a recent study of a district induction program by the New Teacher Center found that "an investment in an intensive model of teacher induction pays $1.66 for every $1 spent."[14]

Comprehensive induction programs are based on four defining principles: (1) building and deepening teacher knowledge; (2) integrating new practitioners into a teaching community and school culture that support the continuous professional growth of all teachers; (3) supporting the constant development of the teaching community in the school; and (4) encouraging a professional dialogue that articulates the goals, values, and best practices of a community.

Comprehensive induction programs provide a *package of support system*s for a new teacher that includes: (1) a mentor; (2) supportive communication from the principal, other administrators, and department chairs; (3) common planning or collaboration time with other teachers in the field; (4) reduced preparations (course load) and help from a teacher's aide; and (5) participation in an external network of teachers."[15]

Improving Induction in Chicago

NCTAF's pilot study estimates that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) lost over $86 million in one year because of high teacher turnover. To reduce this loss, CPS has been developing a growing number of induction programs for all new teachers in recent years. All first and second year teachers, for example, are required to participate in the CPS *GOLDEN* Teachers Program, which assigns each new teacher a mentor and requires them to attend 15 workshops over the course of the school year.

A 2007 report by the Consortium on Chicago School Research states that strong levels of support for new teachers greatly improved teachers' experiences and intentions to continue teaching in CPS.[16] However, more needs to be done. The report found that new teacher support was uneven across the district.[17] About 20 percent of new teachers did not participate in CPS' mandatory induction program.

Seeking to address these issues, the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) in Chicago began offering a new approach to teacher preparation and support in 2001. Aspiring teachers learn to teach by apprenticing for a full year with a skilled teacher in classrooms similar to those in which they will eventually teach. Annually, AUSL recruits 45 to 60 mid-career professionals and recent college graduates to participate in an intensive 12-month teacher preparation program. By 2006, 114 teachers had graduated from AUSL to teach in CPS. Ninety-five percent of them are still teaching, most staying in the high-need schools of their initial employment.

To its credit, CPS has begun to upgrade the quality of new teacher induction and clearly recognizes that the loss of teachers is concentrated in low-performing and high-minority schools. CPS has committed to implement a comprehensive, two-year induction program run by the New Teacher Center. The program is being piloted in Englewood, an area with high teacher turnover and low student achievement. Prior to the induction program, Englewood had 140 vacancies in 20 schools. With comprehensive induction for new teachers, the number of vacancies in Englewood schools has fallen to single digits.

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12. Ingersoll, R. & Smith, T. (2004). *What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover?*, p. 705.
13. Ibid, p. 705.
14. Villar, A. (2004). *Measuring the Benefits and Costs of Mentor-Based Induction: A Value-Added Assessment of New Teacher Effectiveness Linked to Student Achievement*, p. 36.
15. Fulton, K. (2005) *Induction into Learning Communities*, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, p. 8.
16. Kapadia. K, Coca V. & Easton J. (2007). *Keeping New Teachers: A First Look at the Influences of Induction in Chicago Public Schools,* Consortium on Chicago School Research, p. 2.
17. Ibid, p.2.

Quality induction programs provide the solid foundation that novice teachers need as they enter a profession with increasing complexity and new challenges. At their best, these comprehensive programs induct new teachers into a learning community focused on improving student learning.

Step Three: Transform Schools into Genuine Learning Organizations

The need to hire and support well-prepared teachers is clear. But to sustain the growth of those teachers over time, they should be inducted into a genuine learning organization. In such an organization, the expectation is that *all* members of the school's community share responsibility for each other's continued growth and success, as well as for the success of all students in the school.

Transforming a school into a genuine learning organization calls for the creation of a school culture in which novice and experienced teachers work together to improve student achievement. This vision represents a major change from standard practice in most American schools today, which are organized around stand-alone teaching in self-contained classrooms. School transformation requires leaders committed to changing the culture of schooling to support regular, sustained collaboration among teachers, principals, and students.[18]

Schools that have become genuine learning organizations seek to guide and facilitate the learning paths of novice teachers as they become rooted in the professional culture of the school and in their academic discipline. Districts can help schools to become genuine learning organizations by providing embedded professional development, fostering collaboration around instructional improvement, and financially rewarding teachers for improving student achievement.

The Benwood Initiative: Hamilton County, Tennessee

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the Public Education Foundation's Benwood Initiative has reduced turnover and improved teaching quality in the city's most troubled schools. More importantly, the Benwood Initiative has had a positive impact on student performance. All nine of the Benwood Schools saw increases - typically of 10 percentage points or more - in the proportion of third graders reading at or above grade level.

In 2000, education leaders in Chattanooga, Tennessee recognized that high teacher turnover in urban, poor, and largely minority low-performing elementary schools was having a profoundly negative impact on student achievement.

"Teacher turnover rates were high; the faculties were made up of young, inexperienced, and, in some cases, marginal teachers. The first day of school often found numerous classrooms with no teacher at all, with staffing sometimes incomplete until 2-3 weeks into the school year. Student performance was abysmal. On average, only 12% of third-graders in these schools could read at or above grade level."[19]

In response to this dire situation, the Public Education Foundation and Hamilton County officials initiated a multi-faceted comprehensive strategy to improve teacher retention and performance. Benwood schools were eligible to earn performance bonuses (for individual teachers and for entire schools). Benwood teachers also received housing incentives and pro bono legal services. Other strategies in this comprehensive approach to school improvement included reorganizing the school day, after-school and summer school programs for all students, a full-time parent involvement coordinator, mentoring for new teachers, and enrichment activities for students.

But beyond financial and other incentives, the main focus of the Benwood Initiative was providing excellent teaching. Teachers were trained in reading instruction, Benwood schools were given extra funds for reading specialists to work with struggling readers, and a wide variety of books were available in all classrooms. In addition, the school district provided coaches for new teachers and leadership coaches to help principals and assistant principals guide and evaluate teachers.

This comprehensive approach is paying off. Whereas teachers used to flee the low-performing Hamilton County schools for teaching positions in the suburbs, teachers in the suburbs are now applying for positions in the nine schools. Teacher turnover rates have dropped, and principals receive many applicants for every job opening.[20] All Benwood schools posted gains in all subjects according to the state's value-added assessment system, with all third-graders increasing reading proficiency to 74.4%.

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18. Fulton, K. (2005) *Induction into Learning Communities*, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, p. 3.
19. Public Education Foundation (2006). *Lessons Learned: A Report on the Benwood Initiative*, p. 1.
20. Ibid, p. 1.

The National Staff Development Council has produced a set of guidelines to help school leaders build strong learning communities in schools that commit to continuous improvement – schools that retain their teachers by engaging them in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of their students. This information is available at www.nsdc.org.

The Benwood Initiative is not an isolated case. With the support of MetLife Foundation, NCTAF is documenting the work of schools that use collaborative teamwork to retain teachers, improve teaching quality, and close the achievement gap. Through this support, and in partnership with PBS, NCTAF has produced video vignettes of these schools, which are available at www.nctaf.org. NCTAF also is partnering with Pearson Achievement Solutions to bring recognition to schools that have done an outstanding job of building true learning teams in their schools. A similar partnership is under way with Microsoft's Partners in Learning Initiative, which is in its second year of making national awards to strong school learning teams.

IV. Recommendations

Recommendations for Federal and State Action

Given the high cost of teacher turnover, it is imperative that education leaders recognize the importance of teacher retention as a major policy objective in maintaining a high caliber teaching corps in every school.

Make the retention of highly effective teachers a focus of No Child Left Behind

One of the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act is to equitably distribute teaching quality across the education system. Currently, the students who need the best teachers are consistently taught by inexperienced, under-qualified teachers.[21] There are three common approaches to creating a more equitable distribution of teachers:

1. Recruit high quality beginning teachers into at-risk schools
2. Move high quality teachers from high performing schools into at-risk schools
3. Retain high quality teachers in at-risk schools

The first two approaches will only work if the high quality teachers decide to stay in the at-risk schools. Federal and state governments can improve the distribution of teaching quality by placing a greater emphasis on policies that improve the *retention* of high qual-

ity teachers in these schools. If the retention challenge is not met, we will struggle in vain to fill a leaky bucket, and talented teachers and millions of dollars will continue to drain out of the system.

Amend NCLB to hold school leaders accountable for teacher turnover and its costs

To ensure that every child has access to a school with a rate of teacher attrition and experience comparable to all other schools served by its local education agency, each local and state education agency should be required to publicly report the distribution of qualified teachers, the average years of teaching experience in each school, the annual rate of teacher and principal attrition, and the cost of that attrition for each school it serves.

Support the development of coherent school district human resource data systems

Rather than providing access to relevant information, most district data systems stand as formidable obstacles to managing and controlling turnover. The costs of turnover are hidden in mounds of teacher records, school data, and district financial information. Without new, coherent data systems that break down the silos of existing systems, calculating the full cost of teacher turnover is difficult for many districts. Federal and state investments are needed to build the capacity of school districts to collect and analyze data. Data-based decision-making has become an effective method for improving classroom teaching; it will be as effective in improving district management of human resources. In order to facilitate data-based decision-making at the district level, data systems must:

- Track the patterns and relationships between teacher characteristics and school characteristics, including teacher turnover and teacher effectiveness in specific schools;
- Measure data over time in order to highlight trends;
- Provide a comprehensive picture across all human resource data, rather than focusing within the separate silos of particular programs; and
- Allow for data sharing across schools and districts.

Support the up-front investment in well-designed teacher induction

School districts need help in breaking the constant cycle of recruiting, losing, and replacing teachers. Building on federal and state funding directed toward improved teacher preparation, comprehensive induc-

Recommendations for School District Action

The reality is that, in many districts, teachers are mismanaged. This mismanagement diminishes the ability of teachers to improve student learning and it dampens the desire of teachers to remain in the classroom. To increase student achievement and teacher retention, school districts need to create coherent management systems based on accurate and timely data. A coherent management system enables a district to hire well-prepared teachers, induct these teachers into the profession, and support their continued professional development in genuine learning organizations.

Measure teacher turnover and its costs

Information about teacher turnover and its costs is an important tool in school improvement efforts. By tracking teachers and costs year by year, school leaders will be able to determine where to invest in teacher retention, how much to invest, and the impact of these investments. The turnover rates in the schools with the highest performance and lowest turnover in their districts should become the targets for all the schools in the district. Similarly, each district should use the turnover rates in the highest-performing districts in their region as the target for their district-wide retention initiatives.

Invest in coherent data-based management of the teacher workforce

Currently, many school districts don't have the information they need to manage their most important educational resource: teachers. Robust data systems should track the effectiveness of teachers who stay and teachers who leave. With comprehensive data systems and training in how to collect and analyze data, district leaders will be able to make informed decisions about recruiting, training, and retaining teachers. Robust data systems that provide sufficient information about teacher effectiveness in specific schools will also enable district human resource departments to be increasingly accountable for the retention of high quality teachers.

Hire well-prepared teachers

Hiring well-prepared teachers will significantly cut the rate of new teacher attrition and its costs. Whether through a traditional or an alternative program, new teachers need deep content knowledge, training in learning theory and the use of instructional materials, and opportunities to practice such learning through extensive clinical experiences that include structured observations of accomplished teachers.

Target the implementation of high quality induction programs to at-risk schools

High quality induction programs are proven to reduce teacher turnover and to help teachers develop the skills they need to create an effective learning environment for their students. In at-risk schools, induction programs help stabilize the teaching staff and give principals a chance to develop genuine learning organizations.

Use the NCTAF Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator to generate an initial estimate

Using the data collection and analysis protocol from its study of five school districts, NCTAF has created a Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator to make its findings accessible to school leaders and members of the public. Using the NCTAF Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator, educators and members of the public can estimate the dollars spent on teacher turnover for a specific school or school district anywhere in the country. The Calculator contains enough background information on this tool to enable school leaders to design and conduct their own detailed turnover cost analyses. NCTAF's Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator can be found at www.nctaf.org. At the site, NCTAF will host a Wiki for discussion and comparison of costs that have been calculated by users in communities around the country. We encourage those who use the Calculator to join the NCTAF Wiki to share their findings and suggestions about how to improve teacher retention and control costs. We hope that the site will become a national online workshop for controlling teacher turnover and reducing its costs and consequences.

APPENDIX

Calculating the National Cost of Teacher Attrition

In order to estimate the national cost of teacher attrition, NCTAF utilized cost data from its five district study and demographic data from the National Center for Education Statistics. The demographic data allowed NCTAF to determine the number of teachers, schools, and districts in urban and non-urban settings:

3,447,000 public school teachers
- 1,229,398 urban public school teachers (in districts with greater than 15,000 students)
- 2,217,602 non-urban public school teachers (in districts with less than 15,000 students)

14,383 school districts
- 850 urban school districts
- 13,533 non-urban school districts

95,726 public schools
- 29,886 urban schools (in districts with more than 15,000 students)
- 65,840 non-urban schools (in districts with less than 15,000 students)

The cost data allowed NCTAF to determine a district cost per leaver and a school cost of leavers in both urban and non-urban districts.

$8,750 urban district cost per teacher leaver
$6,250 non-urban district cost per teacher leaver

$70,000 urban school cost of teacher leavers
$33,000 non-urban school cost of teacher leavers

By multiplying the number of teachers by the national average leaver rate of 12.5%, NCTAF generated the number of district leavers. Multiplying the number of leavers by the district cost per leaver generated a national district cost of attrition of $3.08 billion. When the number of schools was multiplied by the school cost of attrition, the national school cost of attrition equaled $4.26 billion. Together, the school and district costs resulted in a national cost of teacher turnover of $7.34 billion.

Acknowledgements

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