



# Teacher Retention at Low-Performing Schools

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*In 2004-2005, North Carolina's average teacher turnover rate was nearly 13 percent, ranging from a high of 29 percent in Harnett County to a low of 4 percent in Clay County. Turnover among teachers in low-performing schools was substantially higher, with a low of 12 percent (Forsyth County) to a high of 57 percent (Guilford County). Out of 48<sup>1</sup> priority schools, eight schools had a turnover rate of less than 20 percent, 22 had a turnover rate between 20-30 percent; 13 had a turnover rate between 30-40 percent, while four had a turnover rate of more than 40 percent. North Carolina has put strategies in place to address teacher retention but how will these strategies impact retention at low-performing schools? This research update summarizes three studies that address issues related to teacher retention. Two studies use North Carolina data and one study is a recently published literature review that is not peer reviewed.*

## Evaluation of an \$1,800 Teacher Bonus in North Carolina

This study examined North Carolina's use of an annual bonus of \$1,800 to certified math, science and special education teachers working in high poverty or academically failing public secondary schools.

### WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

- This bonus payment was sufficient to reduce mean turnover rates of the targeted teachers by 12 percent.
- Responses to the program were concentrated among experienced teachers; those with ten or more years of experience are 37 percent less likely to leave. The program did not have a statistically significant effect on teachers with less experience.
- In 2003-04, 17 percent of principals in schools with the program did not know their schools had ever been eligible; 13 percent of teachers receiving the program that year did not know they were eligible.

### WHAT IT MEANS

- Supplemental pay may be a promising approach to retaining teachers in hard to staff subjects and schools.
- Greater efforts must be made to promote such programs.

## Using the Evidence

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<sup>1</sup> One school did not have teacher retention data. Charter schools are not included in this figure.

## SOURCES CITED

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## Examination of Teacher Perceptions of the Work Environment in Hard-to-Staff North Carolina Schools

This study examined 272 hard-to-staff schools as identified by a prior report of the Education Commission of the States (ECS). Hard-to-staff schools as those at least 15 percent above the state average in the following teacher traits: *percentage of teachers not fully certified, percentage of teachers in the first three years of their career, and rate of teacher turnover.*

### WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

- Minority, disadvantaged, and academically struggling students are more likely to be in hard to staff schools and less likely to have experienced, effective teachers.
- In 2000-01, in hard-to-staff schools, 71 percent of students performed at grade level on End of Grade or End of Course tests, compared with 80 percent of students in other schools.
- In hard-to-staff schools, 62 percent of the students are ethnic minorities, compared to 39 percent of the students in other schools.
- In hard-to-staff schools, 47 percent of students were eligible for free/reduced price lunch compared to 35 percent of those in other schools.
- Forty-two percent of hard-to-staff schools are middle schools, while only 18 percent of other schools are middle schools.
- Teachers in hard-to-staff schools are less satisfied with every aspect of the school environment than their peers.

### WHAT IT MEANS

- Addressing working conditions will be essential to reducing teacher turnover.
- Efforts to reduce teacher turnover should target conditions in Hard-to-staff schools.

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## Literature Review of Teacher Retention

This is a literature review including both quantitative and qualitative studies.

### WHAT THE REVIEW FOUND

- The issue of retaining teachers is really one of retaining quality teachers who positively influence student learning, not just retaining all teachers.
- Teachers who feel effective with their students are more likely to stay.

The North Carolina Education Research Data Center at Duke University's Center for Child and Family Policy is home to rich databases on North Carolina's public schools dating back to the mid-1990s. Researchers use these files for policy-focused research on education.

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SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro provides support to policymakers requesting information needed for making evidence-based decisions.

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- Teachers in collaborative, collegial environments are more likely to stay.
- Increased pay is positively associated with retention; however, it is not sufficient to overcome poor working conditions.
- Turnover is highest among high poverty, high minority schools.
- Teachers entering the classroom through Alternative Certification Programs are more likely to leave the classroom, but the reason is unclear.
- Teachers teaching out-of-field and teaching courses requiring many different preps have lower job satisfaction.
- Late hiring and lack of information in the hiring process can negatively influence retention because teachers did not fully understand whether the school was a good match.
- Poor facilities are associated with increased turnover.

#### WHAT IT MEANS

- Many factors contribute to increasing teacher retention, so single-pronged approaches will have much less chance of success.

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