

TEACHER TURNOVER



COSTLY CRISIS, SOLVABLE PROBLEM

>> Dr. Sharif Shakrani,
Co-director, Education
Policy Center

IN MAY OR JUNE of this year, bells will ring in schools across the United States of America to mark the end of another academic year. Millions of students and their teachers will leave to enjoy their summer vacations, but far too many of those elementary and secondary teachers will decide not to return to the classroom or the school in which they are teaching this year. Nearly 1,000 teachers leave the field of teaching every school day. Another thousand teachers change schools, many in pursuit of better working conditions. This deluge of teacher turnover is over and above the tens of thousands of teachers who retire each year.

Recent published research studies have documented a strong link between perennial high rates of beginning teacher attrition and the acute teacher shortages that plague teaching, especially in the major urban areas of the United States. It is widely concluded that one of the pivotal causes of inadequate school academic performance is a teacher shortage and the resulting inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers. However, analysis of national databases on school staffing reveals that staffing problems are not solely, or even primarily, due to teacher shortages, but are, to a large extent, the result of a “revolving door.” Large numbers of teachers leave teaching or transfer to more affluent schools long before they retire.

The exit of teachers from the profession and the voluntary transfer of teachers to better schools are costly phenomena. The students in these classrooms lose the benefit of being taught by experienced teachers, and schools and districts must commit time and money to recruit and train their replacements. Student achievement suffers in schools with high teacher turnover. Trapped in a cycle of teacher hiring and replacement, low-performing disadvantaged schools drain their districts of precious resources that could be better spent to improve teaching quality and student achievement.

Contrary to popular belief, teacher preparation programs at America’s colleges and universities produce sufficient numbers of teachers to meet the demand of the nation’s schools. However, too many of these teachers leave the teaching profession for other occupations. Coupled with the retirement of thousands of “baby boomer” teachers, the departure of younger teachers frustrated by low salaries and the stress of working in low-performing schools is fueling a crisis in teacher turnover that is costing school districts substantial amounts of scarce funds as they scramble to fill their ranks for the school year.

Superintendents and recruiters across the nation say the challenge of putting a qualified teacher in every classroom is heightened in subjects like mathematics, science and special education, and is a particular struggle in high-poverty schools where the turnover rate is highest. Over the past three years, thousands of classes in Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago and other major urban areas opened with substitute teachers who were not

qualified or appropriately prepared for their teaching tasks. Recruiters advertise nationwide, organizing teacher fairs on college campuses and offering large recruitment bonuses of up to \$10,000 to instructors who sign up to teach Algebra I or other rigorous mathematics and science courses.

Officials in New York City, the nation’s largest school system, report that they had recruited about 5,200 new teachers by mid-August of 2007, attracting those qualified in mathematics, science and special education with housing incentives that include \$5,000 for a down payment. Even so, the New York City schools need another 1,500 teachers for this school year. Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest in the country, was able to recruit only 500 of the 2,300 teachers it needed for this school year in spite of a \$5,000 bonus for teachers signing with low-performing schools. What about districts that cannot afford to offer a signing bonus or incentives to recruit teachers?

This year, schools in Kansas have been trying to fill “the largest number of vacancies” the state has ever faced. This is partly because of baby boomer retirement, but mostly due to teacher attrition and because districts in Texas, California and elsewhere were offering substantial recruitment bonuses and housing allowances, luring qualified Kansas teachers away.

How big is the problem?

Based on data from a national survey conducted in 2006–07, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF), a nonprofit group that seeks to increase retention ►

Teacher Attrition Rates and Costs for Six States

STATE	TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS ¹	TEACHERS LEAVING THE PROFESSION ²	COST RELATED TO TEACHERS LEAVING THE PROFESSION ³	TEACHERS TRANSFERRING TO OTHER SCHOOLS ²	COST RELATED TO TEACHERS TRANSFERRING TO OTHER SCHOOLS ³	TOTAL TEACHER TURNOVER COST (NOT INCLUDING RETIREMENTS)
CA	279,945	14,417	\$206,213,616	17,444	\$249,518,976	\$455,732,592
IL	137,204	5,662	\$78,961,817	10,405	\$145,106,049	\$224,067,866
MI	100,221	4,558	\$67,056,880	7,610	\$111,971,866	\$179,028,746
NY	208,278	13,760	\$210,614,387	9,999	\$153,046,225	\$363,660,611
OH	123,370	8,900	\$110,627,905	7,708	\$95,816,606	\$206,444,511
TX	266,661	19,034	\$214,509,448	25,768	\$290,407,937	\$504,917,385
U.S. TOTAL	2,998,795	173,442	\$2,158,074,357	220,700	\$2,709,805,064	\$4,867,879,422

1. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education, *Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000* ("Public School Teacher Questionnaire," "Private School Teacher Questionnaire," and "Public Charter School Teacher Questionnaire"), and 2000–01 Teacher Follow-up Survey ("Questionnaire for Current Teachers" and "Questionnaire for Former Teachers," Table 1.01). Washington, DC.
 2. State estimations based on analysis by Richard Ingersoll, Professor of Education and Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, from the *National Center for Education Statistics Student and Staffing Survey*, and therefore include a slight margin of error. Additional data available at www.gse.upenn.edu/faculty_research/Shortage-RMI-09-2003.pdf.
 3. The Department of Labor conservatively estimates that attrition costs an employer 30 percent of the leaving employee's salary. Teacher salary data was taken from the National Education Association's *Estimates of School Statistics, 1969–70 through 2002–03*, and prepared August 2003. Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d03/tables/d078.asp>.

Why is teacher turnover and attrition so high?

Some attrition is inevitable. Some teachers leave for personal reasons, such as to care for family or children, and a very small number are dismissed or encouraged to leave; some teachers do retire. Close analysis of school and staffing national surveys indicates, however, that the number of teachers retiring from the profession is not a leading cause for teacher attrition. In 2005, about 275,000 (or 8.5 percent) of the nation's 3.2 million public school teachers left the teaching profession. Thirty percent of them retired, while 57 percent said they left to pursue other careers or because they were dissatisfied. (See pie chart.)

In fact, research studies clearly show that teaching has traditionally been characterized as an occupation with high levels of attrition in which teachers were lost to other occupations, especially among beginning teachers. In June 2007, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reported that almost a third of all new teachers leave the classroom within the first three years of teaching and nearly 50 percent leave within the first five years. What's worse, the best and brightest teachers in high-demand fields, such as mathematics and science, are often the first to leave. Among teachers who voluntarily transferred schools, lack of planning time (65 percent), a too heavy workload (60 percent), problematic student behavior (53 percent) and lack of influence over school policy (52 percent) were cited as common sources of dissatisfaction.

Beginning teachers are particularly vulnerable because they are more likely than their more experienced colleagues to be assigned low-performing students. Despite the added challenges that come with teaching children and adolescents with higher needs, most

of quality teachers, estimates that teacher turnover and attrition cost the nation's school districts about \$7 billion annually for recruiting, hiring and training of new teachers. The Alliance for Excellent Education has concluded that a conservative national estimate of the cost of replacing just the public school teachers who have dropped out of the teaching profession is \$2.2 billion a year. If the cost of replacing teachers who transfer to other schools is added, the total reaches \$6 billion for public schools alone. According to federal data, teacher attrition costs vary significantly for individual states and average nearly \$100 million. In Michigan, the cost of teacher turnover and attrition is an estimated \$180 million. This compares to about \$206 million in Ohio, \$224 million in Illinois, \$364 million in New York, \$456 million in California and a huge \$505 million in Texas, which has the highest rate of turnover in the nation. Many educational analysts believe the price tag will continue to rise as higher salaries, signing bonuses, subject matter stipends and other recruiting costs specific to hard-to-staff schools increase. (See table.)

Although it cannot be measured in

dollars, the cost of the loss in teacher quality and student achievement is even higher. According to the NCTAF report, "Low-performing schools rarely close the student achievement gap because they never close the teacher quality gap—they are constantly rebuilding their staff due to attrition and turnover." An inordinate amount of their capital—both human and financial—is consumed by a 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.

There is a growing consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important indicator in determining student academic performance is the quality of instruction provided by teachers. A major component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates that all teachers in mathematics, science and English language arts be "highly qualified." Therefore, if the national goal of providing an equitable education to all students is to be met, it is critical that efforts be concentrated on developing and retaining high-quality teachers in every school district and at all grade levels.

new teachers are given little professional support, feedback or demonstration of what it takes to help their students succeed.

What can be done to retain new teachers?

New teachers come into the profession having invested years of their lives and tens of thousands of dollars with the vision of making a difference in the lives of young people. It is counterproductive, to say the least, when they are thrown into the classroom with little or no training and support. To address this problem, many states and school districts have adopted innovative induction and mentoring programs to assist and work with new teachers in an effort to retain these teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. (See box, page 4, top.)

Historically, the teaching profession in the United States has not had the structured induction and mentoring process common to many countries in Europe and Asia. In recent years, there has been significant growth in induction programs across the United States. These programs provide support, orientation and mentoring for beginning elementary and secondary teachers to ease the transition into their first professional teaching experiences. Although teaching involves intense interaction between teachers and students, it is largely done in isolation from other teachers. This isolation is especially difficult for new teachers, who are often left to their own devices to succeed or fail within the confines of their classrooms.

What is a teacher induction program?

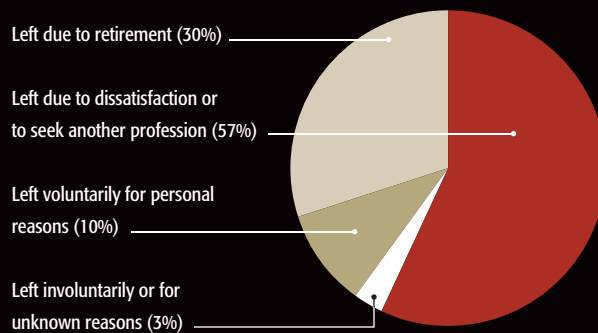
Induction is the process of preparing, supporting and retaining new

teachers. A comprehensive induction program may include components such as:

- New teacher orientation to learn about the district and the school in which they work.
- Mentoring relationships that provide the beginning teacher with an opportunity to work closely with and learn from a veteran teacher.
- Support teams that link beginning teachers with a network of veteran teachers on whom they can rely for assistance and guidance in addition to their mentors.
- Workshops and training for beginning teachers. These professional development opportunities provide new teachers with vital information on topics relevant to their first year in the classroom.
- Mentor training in the skills of effective mentoring. Prior to their assignment to a new teacher, this training is an important component of the mentor's professional preparation.

Mentoring is an integral component of an effective and sustained induction program, a one-on-one process where an experienced teacher helps guide, advise and support a new teacher. Effective mentoring helps new teachers face their new challenges; through reflective activities and professional conversations, they improve their teaching practices as they assume full responsibility for a classroom. Mentoring fosters professional development of both new teachers and their mentors. Induction and mentoring programs are designed to address the roots of new teachers' dissatisfaction by providing them with the support and tools they need for success by guiding their work, further developing their skills to handle the full range of their performance

Reasons for Leaving the Profession



during the first few years of teaching.

For new teachers, a structured induction program typically lasts three years. Through induction, new and veteran teachers regularly gather to plan instruction. This common planning creates a community of educators committed to raising the performance of their school and district, allowing more teachers input into their work and improving overall working conditions. The benefit of induction to all teachers, new and seasoned alike, should not be underestimated.

Why are induction programs needed?

A teacher induction program can help new teachers improve practices, learn professional responsibilities and ultimately affect student learning positively. In addition to providing support to beginning teachers, these programs allow veteran teachers to reflect upon practice and can unite the learning community as each individual works toward the same goal—improving student learning. Induction programs also have the potential of elevating the teaching profession and fostering a collaborative learning community for all educators. These benefits can lead to a much higher ▶

Michigan Public Act 335

Michigan Public Act 335 mandates new teacher induction and mentoring programs. Section 1526 states:

For the first 3 years of his or her employment in classroom teaching, a teacher shall be assigned by the school in which he or she teaches to 1 or more master teachers, or college professors or retired master teachers, who shall act as a mentor or mentors to the teacher. During the 3-year period, the teacher shall also receive intensive professional development induction into teaching, based on a professional development plan that is consistent with the requirements of . . . Michigan Compiled Laws, including classroom management and instructional delivery. During the 3-year period, the intensive professional development induction into teaching shall consist of at least 15 days of professional development, the experiencing of effective practices in university-linked professional development schools and regional seminars conducted by master teachers and other mentors.

rate of retention, as new educators find themselves in an environment that cultivates continual growth and success.

According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), well-designed mentoring programs lower attrition rates of new teachers and improve their classroom

teaching skills. A study of new teachers in New Jersey reports that first-year attrition rates of teachers trained in traditional programs without mentoring was 18 percent, whereas the attrition rate of first-year teachers whose induction programs included mentoring was only 5 percent.

Similarly, an analysis of national data by Professor Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania concludes that effective teacher preparation programs can significantly reduce the attrition of first-year teachers. Ingersoll found that when teachers come into the classroom unprepared to deal with the classroom teaching environment, their attrition rate is 25 percent. But when teachers have engaged in a coherent preparation program that assesses knowledge and teaching skills, including extensive clinical experience during teacher preparation programs, and when the new teachers are provided support in their first years of teaching, rates of beginning teacher attrition drop to 12 percent, comparable to attrition rates in other professions.

These and other studies seem to provide support for the hypothesis that well-conceived and well-implemented teacher induction and mentoring programs are successful in increasing the job satisfaction, efficacy and retention of new teachers. However, there are important limitations to the existing studies. To determine effectively whether there is, in fact, a relationship between induction and teacher retention, a more comprehensive study is necessary to control for other relevant factors.

Comprehensive and sustained induction and mentoring of beginning teachers have shown a potential effect on teacher retention. Nonetheless, across the nation, states and large school districts spend millions of

dollars each year to replace teachers who leave the classroom instead of investing in these programs, which simultaneously retain newer teachers and help them become better, more effective teachers in a shorter time. The loss—to taxpayers, schools, educators, students and communities—is immense. The costs of induction programs would at least be partially offset by increases in teacher retention and subsequent decreases in the cost of turnover and attrition. It is possible that states could save money by investing in a sustained and comprehensive induction program that reduces turnover and attrition rates by 35 percent.

The reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act should be amended to include provisions to make the retention of highly effective teachers a focal point of school improvement efforts at disadvantaged schools. Schools should be required to report publicly the distribution of qualified teachers, average years of teaching experience in each school, the annual rate of principal and teacher attrition and the cost of that attrition for each school.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future report concludes that "the good news is that when districts address this problem and take it on directly, when they start to invest in better-prepared teachers and offer them strong support, they can see progress . . . It is a solvable problem."

Improving beginning teachers' work environments, providing more professional development in areas that new teachers find most challenging and increasing support such as induction and mentoring are bound to have a positive effect on new teacher retention rates in Michigan and across the nation. ■

MSU's Preparation and Induction Programs

The MSU College of Education's five-year teacher preparation program is designed to provide prospective teachers with a yearlong internship in a school environment. This year of clinical practice helps teacher candidates build connections between theoretical principles and practical situations that teachers confront daily. They benefit from continued instruction and mentoring from university and school faculty as they refine their skills and build more elaborate understandings of teaching and the needs of the schools and students they will serve. But it doesn't stop there. MSU also provides comprehensive induction support for beginning full-time teachers on a face-to-face basis in their schools, connecting them with trained mentor teachers and professional development seminars. A series of one-credit online courses and a resource-rich Web site, assist.educ.msu.edu, link many more new educators with skills and support they need.