



Education Commission
of the States

The Progress of Education Reform 2007

Increasing Teacher Retention

Vol. 8, No. 6, December 2007

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- Reasons for teacher turnover
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- The impact of teacher turnover on the teacher shortage crisis

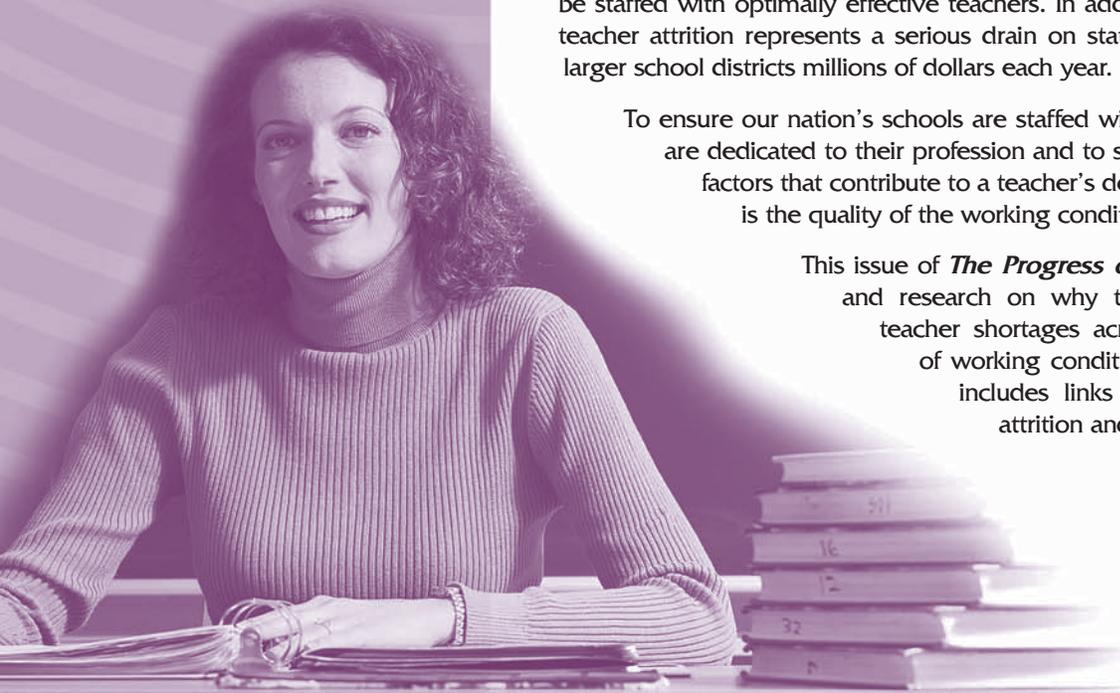
How teacher working conditions are related to teacher attrition and student learning

The ability to educate all students is the key to our future internationally and domestically. However, according to the most recent international comparison data, students in many other countries are outperforming American students in both math and science. It is not necessary, however, to look outside the U.S. to see results of struggles in our education system – achievement gaps between racial/ethnic groups in this country still persist.

Quality learning requires effective teachers and leaders in the schools. Unfortunately, most states and districts in the U.S. continue to face a serious shortage of teachers, especially in the most challenging schools. While many efforts are underway with the goal of increasing the number of teacher candidates entering into the profession, experts understand the real challenge lies in keeping quality teachers we already have in the classroom. In fact, it is estimated that 50% of teachers leave before their fifth year and that every year one-third of the teacher population is in transition, either new on the job or in the process of leaving. The ramifications of these data are twofold. First, teacher attrition contributes to the teaching shortage being faced across the nation. Second, research indicates that teachers are more effective after their first several years teaching. Having teachers leave before gaining that important experience means schools may not be staffed with optimally effective teachers. In addition to loss in student achievement, teacher attrition represents a serious drain on state fiscal resources potentially costing larger school districts millions of dollars each year.

To ensure our nation's schools are staffed with teachers who want to remain and are dedicated to their profession and to student success, we must address the factors that contribute to a teacher's decision to leave. Primary among these is the quality of the working conditions they face in their schools.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* highlights data and research on why teachers leave, how attrition affects teacher shortages across the nation and the importance of working conditions for student performance. It also includes links to additional resources on teacher attrition and teacher working conditions.



Other Resources

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2006: Expectations and Experiences

Since 1984, MetLife has conducted the Survey of the American Teacher to bring the views and voices of those closest to the classroom to the attention of policymakers and the public. The 2006 survey examined the expectations of teachers upon entering the teacher profession, factors involved in their job satisfaction, and their attitudes toward school culture and atmosphere. Available at:

<http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/81821402701160505871V1F2006MetLifeTeacherSurvey.pdf>

The National Center for Education

Statistics designed the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) to focus on teacher demand and shortage, teacher and administrator characteristics, school programs and general conditions in schools. Their Web site offers overviews, highlights, questionnaires, data tables, and information on survey procedures and methodology.

<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>

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Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey

(Marvel, J., Lyter, D.M., Peltola, P., Strizek, G.A., and Morton, B.A., January 2007, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics)
<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007307.pdf>

The Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) is a survey given to a sample of the elementary and secondary school teachers who participated in the previous year's Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). This survey includes teachers who both remain in or leave their schools or the teaching profession. The TFS includes information on teacher characteristics and attitudes about the teaching profession, and the teachers' satisfaction with their career and particular placement.

The Teacher Follow-up Survey has been conducted five times: in 1988-89, 1991-92, 1994-95, 2000-01 and 2004-05, after the 1987-88, 1990-91, 1993-94, 1999-2000 and 2003-04 administrations of SASS, respectively. The current report is the first look at the data from the 2004-05 survey. This survey was completed by 7,429 current and former teachers.

Findings from this TFS include:

Of the 3,214,900 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2003-04 school year, 84% remained at the same school ("stayers"), 8% moved to a different school ("movers"), and 8% left the profession ("leavers") during the following year.

Of the public school teachers who moved to a different school, 38% rated the opportunity for a better teaching assignment as very important or extremely important in their decision to change schools.

Fifty-five percent of public school teachers who left teaching but continued to work in the field of education reported that they had more control over their own work in their new position than in teaching.

Among public school teachers who had moved from the school in which they had taught the previous year, the three reasons most often reported as very important or extremely important in that decision were: opportunity for a better teaching assignment; dissatisfaction with support from administrators at previous school; and dissatisfaction with workplace conditions at previous school.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future recently completed a study in which they quantified the real cost of teacher turnover in five school districts. The districts were chosen to represent both urban and rural districts. They found what we all know – the cost of teacher turnover is real and substantial:

- ⊙ In a small, rural district such as Jemez Valley in New Mexico, the cost of a teacher leaving is over \$4,000. But this number must be placed in context of fewer dollars available to the district than in larger districts.
- ⊙ In larger districts the dollar cost was much greater – over \$15,000 in Milwaukee and almost \$18,000 in Chicago. In fact, the total cost of teacher turnover in the Chicago Public Schools is estimated to be over \$86 million per year.

The full report, ***The Cost of Teacher Turnover in Five School Districts: A Pilot Study***, is available at: http://www.nctaf.org/resources/demonstration_projects/turnover/documents/CTTFullReportfinal.pdf

Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions: A Report on the 2006 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey

(Eric Hirsch and Scott Emerick with Keri Church and Ed Fuller, Center for Teaching Quality)
<http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/twcnc2006.pdf>

The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) developed a survey soliciting teacher feedback on working condition components such as time, facilities and resources, empowerment, leadership and professional development. These survey results, along with other data sources, provide insight into the impact working conditions may have on both student achievement and teacher retention.

In 2002, Governor Mike Easley led North Carolina to become the first state to implement CTQ's statewide working conditions survey. North Carolina repeated the survey in 2004, and in 2006, 66% of teachers responded voluntarily. More than 85% of the state's schools reached the minimum response rate (40%) necessary to have valid data. North Carolina's resolve to implement the CTQ working conditions survey and respond with policy changes has become a model for states nationwide.

Center for Teacher Quality's researchers, Eric Hirsch, Scott Emerick, Keri Church and Ed Fuller, produced a report on North Carolina's Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Based on the 2006 survey data, the report found that:

- ⦿ **Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions.** The report explains that, "almost one-third (29%) of teachers believe time-encompassing issues such as class size, non-instructional time available, non-essential duties assigned, interruptions and paperwork are the most important achievement element, and one-quarter indicated empowerment is most critical."
- ⦿ **Teacher working conditions affect teacher retention.** Many states, including North Carolina, collected data indicating teachers with positive perceptions about their working conditions are much more likely to stay at their current school than teachers who are more negative about their working conditions. 38% of teachers – almost double that of any other working conditions factor – report leadership as most influential on retention decisions.
- ⦿ **Teachers and administrators view working conditions differently.** The report explains that, "on all questions, the roughly 1,400 principals responding to the survey were significantly more likely to note that positive working conditions are in place, and that leadership was making efforts to address them."

Working conditions results were more likely to improve in schools where teachers indicated that they had used prior survey results. The report suggests that in schools where a majority of teachers used the survey data as a tool for improvement, it was more likely they had better working conditions already in place.

Schools vary in the presence of teacher working conditions. According to the report, elementary school teachers are more likely than secondary school teachers to describe positive working conditions, especially in the areas of empowerment and leadership. The report also found that working conditions such as school safety and trust were ranked consistently lower in schools serving a high proportion of economically disadvantaged students.

Other Resources (cont.)

Teaching and Learning Conditions Improve High School Reform Efforts

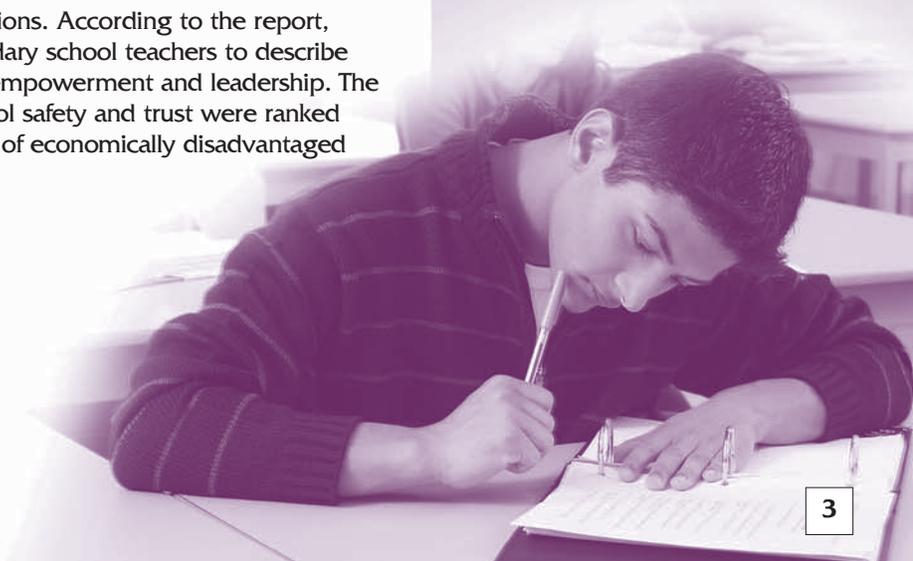
This report by the Center for Teaching Quality reviews North Carolina's high school reform efforts. The report uses CTQ working conditions survey data and includes North Carolina's high school reform goals, research and strategies. Available at: <http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/hsconditions.pdf>

Creating Non-instructional Time for Elementary School Teachers

This brief was prepared by the Center for Teaching Quality on behalf of Governor Mike Easley and the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Advisory Board. The brief reviews CTQ's North Carolina working conditions survey findings on non-instructional time and recommends strategies to increase non-instructional time for teachers. Available at: http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/twc2006timebrief_full.pdf

Teacher Working Conditions Toolkit

This online resource provides information on data analysis, time, leadership, empowerment, professional development, facilities and resources. Available at: <http://www.teacherworkingconditions.org>



Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?

(Richard M. Ingersoll, Center for the Student of Teaching and Policy and The Consortium for Policy Research in Education, September 2003) <http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Shortage-RI-09-2003.pdf>

In this report, the researcher explores the widely held belief that a primary cause for inadequate school performance is the inability of the schools to hire an adequate number of qualified teachers. Data for this report comes from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for four cycles of data (1987-1988; 1990-1991; 1993-1994; 1999-2000) and its supplement, the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). Each cycle includes a random sample of about 53,000 teachers, 12,000 principals and 4,500 districts. A follow-up questionnaire obtained information on about 7,000 teachers who had departed from their original schools. The resulting survey data includes the reasons teachers gave for their departure from their schools or the profession.

The data suggest challenges in schools are not due to an inadequate supply of teachers, but rather because of a “revolving door” created when large numbers of qualified teachers end their teaching careers for reasons other than retirement. In this report, Ingersoll explains the “revolving door” varies greatly among different kinds of teachers at different kinds of schools and works as a major factor behind school staffing problems. According to SASS data, in the 1999-2000 school year, 534,861 teachers entered schools and by the following school year 539,778 teachers had moved from or left their schools, which translates to almost one-third of the entire teacher workforce of almost 3.5 million being in transition – either entering into or preparing to leave their schools. Ingersoll emphasizes that this high turnover rate is important not only because it may be indicative of underlying problems in the schools, but also because it can be disruptive for student performance.

In questioning why teacher turnover is so high, Ingersoll conducted multivariate statistical analyses of data from different cycles of SASS/TFS to determine which characteristics of teachers and schools are associated with the likelihood of teacher turnover. After controlling for other background factors, Ingersoll found the following of those who leave because of job dissatisfaction:

- 61% reported a poor salary
- 32% reported poor administrative support
- 24% reported student discipline problems
- 18% reported poor student motivation
- 15% reported a lack of faculty influence

More generally, the report indicates that teachers leave the profession for a variety of reasons, but most frequently because they are dissatisfied with their job, for personal reasons or for other career opportunities.

Ingersoll concludes with policy implications and recommended strategies to increase teacher retention. He emphasizes that, rather than focus on recruitment programs, policymakers need to address the “organizational sources” of low teacher retention. The report maintains that “low pay, isolated job conditions, little professional autonomy and a faint sense of career ladder” factor into the “revolving door” of underperforming schools.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* was made possible by a grant from the GE Foundation. It was written by Tricia Coulter, director, ECS Teaching Quality and Leadership Institute, and Ashley Zaleski, researcher, ECS Teaching Quality and Leadership Institute. If you have any questions regarding this or other teaching quality issues, please contact Tricia at tcoulter@ecs.org or 303.299.3657.



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