



Teach For America: Teacher Retention in Texas

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What We Studied

Teach for America (TFA) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to enlist, develop, and mobilize as many as possible of our nation's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence. TFA employs a rigorous screening process to select college graduates and professionals with strong academic backgrounds and leadership experience and asks them to commit to teach in high-need schools for at least two years. Typically, TFA teachers do not have formal training in education; all recruits attend an intensive five-week training program prior to beginning their first teaching jobs. TFA teachers also receive ongoing training and support throughout their two-year commitment.

After completing their two-year assignment, TFA teachers are encouraged to remain in the teaching profession or to continue to work to achieve greater educational equity through leadership and advocacy roles. Because TFA teachers are not necessarily expected to stay beyond two years, interest in research on the retention and mobility of TFA teachers is significant both in Texas and across the United States.

This study investigated the retention and mobility of TFA teachers who began their assignments between 2010–11 and 2013–14. The study used data from the Education Research Center (ERC), which houses the Texas state longitudinal data system and is located on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin, to track teachers from their initial assignment to the present. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What proportion of TFA teachers remained employed in public school districts in Texas each year?
 - a. What proportion of TFA teachers remained employed in the same public school district in which they were assigned from the time of their initial placement to the present?
 - b. How does this compare with non-TFA teachers who began their first teaching jobs in the same districts during the same year?
2. What proportion of TFA teachers were employed in any public school district in Texas each year from the time of their initial placement to the present?
 - a. Into what types of school districts do TFA teachers move?
 - b. How does this compare with non-TFA teachers who began their first teaching jobs in the same districts during the same year?
3. What proportion of TFA teachers were employed in non-teaching and administrative positions in Texas public school districts each year following their two-year teaching commitments?
 - a. In what educational capacity are they employed (e.g., principal, administration, support staff)?

How We Analyzed the Data

This study used extant data from administrative datasets from the Texas state longitudinal data system housed on the secure ERC server located at the University of Texas at Austin. The state longitudinal data system contains data from

the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (including both student and staff data), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission. In addition, supplemental data file that would allow AIR researchers to identify TFA teachers within the TEA staff data sets. To compare the retention rates of TFA teachers to those of non-TFA teachers who began their teaching careers in the same districts during the same academic year, a comparison group was formed by identifying and selecting teachers in the TEA employment files whose records indicated that they had zero years of experience and zero years of tenure (i.e., were in their first year of teaching) in the same districts in which TFA teachers were assigned.

What We Discovered

This study used descriptive statistics to examine retention of TFA teachers in Texas. In this study, teacher retention was examined in three ways: (1) examining the percentage of TFA teachers who completed their teaching assignments in Texas, and (2) exploring the percentage of TFA teachers who remained in teaching roles in the districts of their initial placement. The study compares the retention rates of TFA teachers with those of non-TFA teachers who began their first teaching jobs in the same public school districts in Texas. For TFA teachers who move to other districts, the study investigates differences in district characteristics between teachers' initial districts and those into which they move.

Remained Employed in the Same Public School District

To answer the first research question, two sets of analyses were conducted. The first set of analyses examines percentage of TFA teachers who remained employed in the same public school district as their initial TFA assignment. For these analyses, all teachers who were members of the cohort formed the denominators, while the numerators were the number of teachers still employed in the districts of their initial assignments. Teachers were followed for up to six years depending on cohort start date. The retention rates of TFA teachers were compared to those of the non-TFA teachers who began their teaching careers in the same districts during the same academic year. Figure 1 displays the overall retention rates for TFA and non-TFA teachers for up to six years by cohort.

As shown, between 87% and 90% of TFA teachers remained employed in the same district as their initial assignment for two years. Across all cohorts, higher percentages of TFA teachers were retained in the districts of their initial assignment than non-TFA teachers. These percentages are all statistically significant. However, the percentages of TFA teachers still employed in their initial district dropped off precipitously, by more than 50 percentage points, once TFA teachers' two-year assignments were completed, with the pattern being consistent across cohorts.

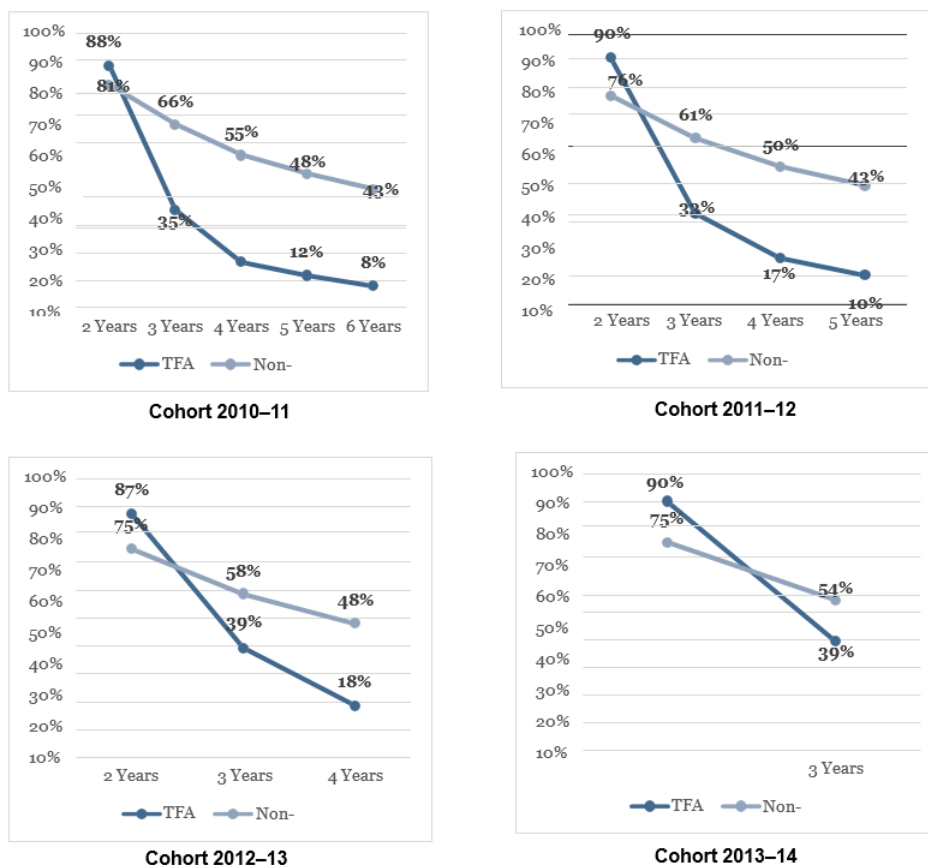


Figure 1 Percentages of TFA and Non-TFA Teachers Who Remained Employed in the Same Districts as Their Initial Assignments, by Cohort

Higher proportions of TFA teachers were employed in middle schools and high schools than comparison group teachers. As such, the analyses were conducted separately by school grade span, and the results are shown in Figures 2 through 5. With the exception of the 2010–11 cohort, significantly higher percentages of TFA teachers remained employed in their initially assigned school district for two years than comparison group teachers did across all school grade spans. For the 2010–11 cohort, TFA teachers were significantly more likely than comparison teachers to remain employed in their initially assigned school districts in high school. Similar to the overall results, after two years, comparison group teachers were significantly more likely to be employed in their initial districts than TFA teachers across school grade spans. TFA teachers were significantly more likely than comparison teachers to remain employed in their initially assigned districts for two years. For the 2010–11 cohort, TFA teachers were significantly more likely than comparison teachers to remain employed in their initially assigned school districts in Dallas and Houston.

The second set of retention analyses conducted to answer the first research question investigated the percentage of TFA teachers who were employed in any public school district in Texas for up to six years. All TFA teachers who were part of a given cohort formed the denominators for the analyses. The numerators were the numbers of TFA teachers employed in any public school district in Texas during the corresponding academic year. The proportions of TFA teachers employed in any public school district in Texas were compared with the proportions of non-TFA teacher who began their first teaching jobs in the same districts during the same academic year. Comparison group numerators and denominators were determined in the same manner as for TFA teachers. Figure 2 displays the overall retention rates for TFA and non-TFA teachers for up to six years by cohort.

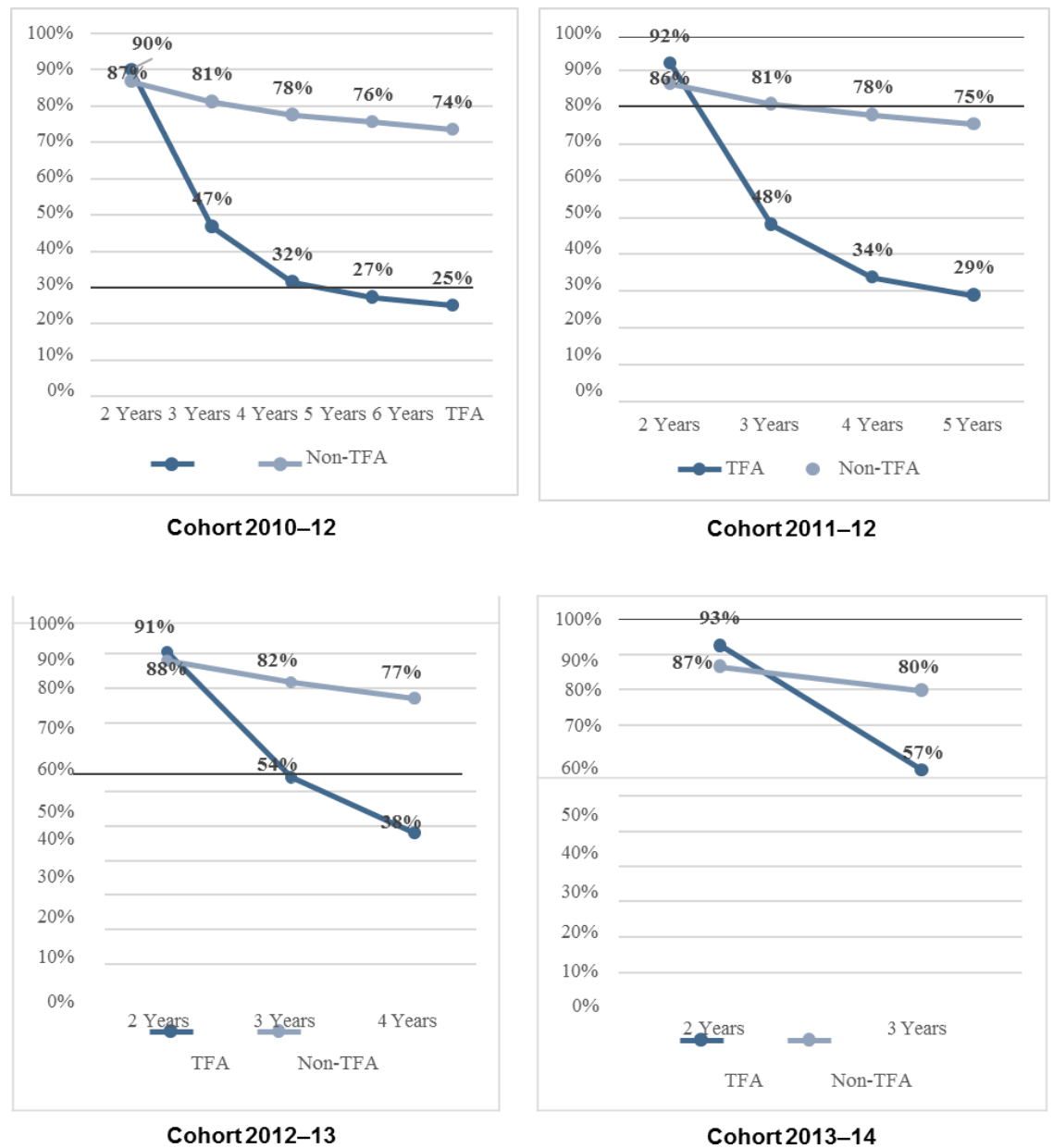


Figure 2. Percentages of TFA and Non-TFA Teachers Who Were Employed in Any Texas Public School District

As shown, between 90% and 93% of TFA teachers were employed in the same district as their initial assignment for two years. Across all cohorts, higher percentages of TFA teachers were employed in any public school district in Texas compared to non-TFA teachers. With the exception of the 2012–13 cohort, all of these percentages are statistically significant. Again, the percentages of TFA teachers employed in any public school in Texas district dropped off considerably once TFA teachers’ two-year assignments were completed, with the pattern being consistent across cohorts. However, the graphs show that the percentage of TFA teachers employed in Texas appears to begin to level off around year 5. Although, many non-TFA teachers leave their initial districts after their first year of teaching, a considerable percentage of them simply switch districts and are employed in teaching roles in public school districts across Texas.

Characteristics of Districts into Which TFA and Non-TFA Teachers Move

Across cohorts, the highest percentage of TFA teachers changed districts after their second year of teaching. Table 1 compares the characteristics of the districts to which TFA teachers’ were initially assigned to the characteristics of the districts into which they moved. In Table 5, the *Ns* under the Assigned District headings indicate the number of Texas public school districts into which TFA teachers were initially assigned, the *Ns* under the Changed District headings indicate the number of Texas public school districts into which TFA teachers moved following their second year of teaching. The values in the table represent the characteristics of these districts. To avoid weighting the districts characteristics by the number of teachers employed in the district, each district and its associated characteristics are only included one time in the calculations. As shown, for all cohorts, with the exception of cohort 2011–12, TFA teachers who changed districts after their second year of teaching moved into districts that had statistically significantly higher percentages of White students and significantly fewer economically disadvantaged students.

Table 1. Comparison of the Characteristics of TFA Teachers’ Initial Districts and Those of the Districts They Move Into for TFA Teachers Who Changed Districts after Two Years, by Cohort

District	2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		2013–14	
	Assigned District (<i>N</i> =20)	Changed District (<i>N</i> =27)	Assigned District (<i>N</i> =20)	Changed District (<i>N</i> =25)	Assigned District (<i>N</i> =28)	Changed District (<i>N</i> =41)	Assigned District (<i>N</i> =21)	Changed District (<i>N</i> =45)
Number of students	32,886	30,458	33,404	30,318	27,222	36,403	32,588	31,936
% Black	14.32	19.23	13.71	17.01	12.80	14.23	16.11	13.08
% Hispanic	81.21*	63.80	76.82	68.24	78.63	68.06	74.79*	57.43
% White	2.38**	12.91	5.33	9.43	5.09**	12.34	5.34**	23.05
% Economically disadvantaged	87.74**	72.17	82.39	75.52	82.07*	71.48	79.92**	62.45
% English learners	32.65	24.63	29.30	26.61	28.52	24.66	24.92	20.39
% Special education	6.90	7.09	6.80	7.12	7.20	7.72	6.79	8.15**

p* < .05, *p* < .01

Table 2 compares the districts into which TFA teachers moved after their second year of teaching to the districts in which non-TFA teachers moved after their second year of teaching. The results show that, in comparison to the districts into which non-TFA teachers moved, the districts into which TFA teacher moved contained higher percentages of non-White and economically disadvantaged students.

Table 2. Comparison of the Characteristics of Districts into Which TFA and Non-TFA Teachers Move for Teacher Who Changed Districts After Two Years, by Cohort

District Characteristics	2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		2013–14	
	TFA (N=27)	Non-TFA (N=130)	TFA (N=25)	Non-TFA (N=149)	TFA (N=41)	Non-TFA (N=179)	TFA (N=45)	Non-TFA (N=241)
Number of students	30,458	21,548	30,318	21,446	36,403*	18,594	31,936	15,594*
% Black	19.23	13.18	17.01	14.67	14.23	13.76	13.08	12.92
% Hispanic	63.80	63.43	68.24**	54.54	68.06*	58.78	57.43	52.71
% White	12.91	18.74	9.43	25.18**	12.35	22.70**	23.05	29.35
% Economically disadvantaged	72.17	69.58	75.52**	63.58	71.48	65.46	62.45	62.28
% English learners	24.63	21.22	26.61**	19.30	24.66*	18.82	20.39	16.90
% Special education	7.09	7.88	7.12	7.97*	7.71	7.85	8.15	8.19

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Employment in Non-Teaching and Administrative Positions

Finally, a set of analyses were conducted to examine whether TFA teachers were employed in non-teaching or administrative roles in public school districts in Texas. For these analyses, the numerator was the number of teachers employed in an administrative position divided by the total number of TFA teachers who were employed in a Texas public school district during the corresponding academic year in each cohort. For example, to obtain the percentage of TFA teachers in the 2010-11 cohort who were employed in non-teaching or administrative positions during the year following their two-year teaching assignments (third year employed), the number of TFA teachers employed in administrative positions during the 2012-13 academic year (N = 14) was divided by the number of TFA teachers who were employed in a Texas public school district during the 2012-13 academic year (N = 279). The result of 14/279, shown in Table 7, is 5.02%. Table 3 presents the percentage of TFA teachers employed in non-teaching or administrative roles across cohorts.¹ Although the percentages of TFA teachers employed in Texas public school districts decreased over time, increasing percentages of these teachers were employed in non-teaching or administrative roles during the years following their two-year teaching assignments.

Table 3. Percentage of TFA Teachers Employed in Non-Teaching or Administrative Positions Following their Two-Year Teaching Assignments, by Cohort

	Third Year Employed	Fourth Year Employed	Fifth Year Employed	Sixth Year Employed
2010-11	5.02	24.47	43.56	47.33
2011-12	8.26	20.50	39.29	
2012-13	6.04	20.69		
2013-14	1.94			

The types of non-teaching and administrative roles in which TFA teachers were employed are shown in Table 4.

¹ In all cohorts, a small percentage of TFA teachers were employed in both teaching and non-teaching or administrative roles during the same academic year.

Table 4. List of Non-Teaching or Administrative Roles in which TFA Teachers Were Employed during the Years Following their Two-Year Teaching Assignments

Roles
Assistant Principal
Assistant Superintendent
Counselor
Department Head
District Instructional Program Director
Educational Diagnostician
Other Campus Professional Personnel
Other Non-instructional District Professional Personnel
Principal
Teacher Facilitator
Teacher Supervisor

Conclusions

The results of the analyses show that, across cohorts, most TFA teachers, more than 90%, complete their two-year teaching assignments in Texas, with completion patterns being similar across school grade spans and regions. Moreover, across cohorts, a large percentage, between 87% and 90%, of TFA teachers remained employed in the same district as their initial assignment for two years, significantly higher percentages than comparison group teachers. Similarly, across all cohorts, higher percentages of TFA teachers continued to be employed in a in any public school district in Texas compared to non-TFA teachers for two years. However, the percentages of TFA teachers still employed in their initial districts or any public school district in Texas district dropped off considerably once TFA teachers’ two-year assignments were completed, with the pattern being consistent across cohorts, school grade spans and regions.

When TFA teachers changed districts, they tended to move into districts that had significantly more white students and significantly fewer economically disadvantaged students. Yet, in comparison to the districts into which non-TFA teachers moved, the districts into which TFA teachers moved contained higher percentages of non-White and economically disadvantaged students. Although the percentages of TFA teachers who remained employed in a Texas public school district decreased over time, the percentages of TFA teachers who took on administrative roles following their two-year teaching assignments increased considerably over time across all cohorts.

The University of Texas at Austin ERC is a research center and P-20/Workforce Repository site which provides access to longitudinal, student-level data for scientific inquiry and policymaking purposes. Since its inception in 2008, the Texas ERC’s goal is to bridge the gap between theory and policy by providing a cooperative research environment for study by both scholars and policy makers. As part of its mission, the ERC works with researchers, practitioners, state and federal agencies, and other policymakers to help inform upon critical issues relating to education today.

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