

SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEWS ON FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL INCENTIVES ON TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION*

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Abstract

In this study, the researchers investigated the perceived relationships of financial and non-financial incentives on teacher recruitment and retention among public school teachers in the State of Texas from the perspective of 98 public school superintendents. Findings revealed that school districts tended to offer teachers' salaries over the state base pay, although signing bonuses were relatively infrequent. Other than contributing to teacher health care plans, financial incentives were generally not provided to teachers. Non-financial incentives were positively responded to by these superintendents. Implications of these findings are discussed.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

A growing concern throughout the country is the issue of teacher attrition. At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, teacher turnover comprised an estimated 16% of the teacher workforce or 550,000 teachers (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). Whereas half of this turnover was estimated to be teachers transferring to different schools, the other half was estimated to be teachers leaving the teaching profession. Clearly, a sizeable number of teachers leave their teaching positions annually (Ingersoll, 2003). This statement is further supported

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by an analysis of numerous national reports and database analyses (e.g., Center for American Progress, National Center for Education Statistics, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Schools and Staffing Survey, Teacher Follow-up Survey, U.S. Department of Education) which have indicated that we are on the brink of a severe teacher shortage (Ingersoll, 2002). An estimated 2 to 2.2 million teachers will need to be hired by school districts within the next decade (Chaika, 2002; National Center for Education Information, 2006).

Based on analyzing two national databases, the Schools and Staffing Survey and the Teacher Follow-up Survey, Ingersoll (2002) stated, "Substantial numbers of schools have experienced difficulties finding qualified candidates to fill openings" (p. 1). Teacher shortages exist across the nation, and Texas is no stranger to this teacher shortage problem. Fuller (2002) stated, "While there are currently 290,000 teachers employed in Texas public schools, there are approximately 420,000 individuals holding valid Texas teaching certificates who are not employed in Texas public schools" (p. 4). Why are so many certificated individuals not teaching?

Potential reasons could be low salaries, difficult working conditions such as too much paperwork, testing requirements, and state and federal requirements. The American Federation of Teachers (1999) contended that teacher workload creates stress and a resulting desire to leave the teaching field for a job in which they are treated with respect, dignity, professionalism, and are paid, on the average, \$10,000 more annually. Whatever the reason, states, districts, and schools are forced to devote attention, time, and financial resources to initiatives designed to attract additional candidates to replace those teachers who leave the teaching profession (Voke, 2002). Along with replacing teachers who leave, increasing student enrollment, new laws requiring smaller class size, and imminent retirements means that the United States needs to attract even more teachers over the next decade (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2003; Voke, 2002). This need makes recruiting teachers a top priority for many educational leaders.

The National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse stated that, "many districts are faced with an increasing need to compete with other districts for a shrinking pool of qualified candidates" (National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, n.d., p. 1). Listed in the report were various incentives that school districts could offer to enhance the retention of their teachers: signing bonuses, providing assistance with real estate costs, higher starting salaries, providing incentives for veteran teachers, and providing monetary rewards for mentor teachers. Hirsh, Koppich, and Knapp (2001) noted that a variety of initiatives has been instituted to facilitate more teachers entering the profession: career-change programs; alternative teacher certification programs; recruiting from other countries; signing bonuses, and housing assistance.

Though school districts are limited in their ability to ease pressures of mandated programs, they can control the climate of the local educational setting and teacher salaries, to the limits of available funds. To attract and retain teachers, some school districts have found ways to increase teacher pay while staying within their budgetary constraints. Blair (2000) reported that "To attract talent, districts and states are hiking salaries, adding signing bonuses, and beefing up benefits packages" (p. 5). Blair also noted that some school districts were collaborating with real estate brokers to assist their teachers with housing.

To date, an abundance of literature is present concerning the issue of teacher pay; however, research is absent regarding the availability of financial and non-financial incentives on teacher recruitment and retention. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which school districts in the State of Texas offer financial and non-financial incentives in their efforts to attract and retain teachers.

Research Questions

1. What do superintendents report as financial incentives they offer to attract and retain teachers in their school districts?
2. What do superintendents report as non-financial incentives they offer to attract and retain teachers in their school districts?

Method

Participants

A stratified random sampling procedure (Gay & Airasian, 2003) was used to select the superintendents of 10 public school districts from each of the 20 educational regions in the State of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2007). This procedure yielded a pool of 200 superintendents. Names generated from this stratified

random sampling procedure were contacted via email requesting their participation in this study. Out of this list of 200 superintendents, 98 superintendents agreed to participate and completed the online survey, for a return rate of 49%. Regarding the demographic characteristics of the 98 superintendents, 78 (79.6%) were male, 18 (18.4%) were female, and 2 did not report their gender. The majority were White ($n = 85$, 86.7%), followed by Hispanic ($n = 11$, 11.2%), with 1 African-American, and 1 superintendent who did not report his/her ethnicity. Concerning years of experience, 12 (12.2%) indicated they had between 10 to 19 years of experience, 44 (44.9%) reported having 20 to 29 years of experience, 41 (41.8%) had 30 or more years of experience, and 2 superintendents did not respond to this question.

Instrumentation

The superintendent survey titled Superintendent: Teacher Recruitment and Retention Survey was designed to determine current school district practices concerning the financial incentives of signing bonuses, above state base pay, and employee benefits. Finally, respondents were asked about specific support structures available to teachers in their districts, as well as about their teacher turnover rate.

For this questionnaire, developed from a thorough review of the research literature, content validity was assessed through the use of a panel of expert witnesses. Three superintendents reviewed and made suggestions that resulted in a revision of the initial superintendent survey. Once revised, the survey was placed online for superintendents to complete.

Results

Financial Incentives

Concerning the extent to which their school districts paid at or above the state base pay level, 11.2% of the superintendents reported that their district did not pay teachers above the minimum level. Interestingly, 9.2% of the school districts made \$7,500 or more above the state base pay for their teachers. Readers are referred to Table 1 for these findings.

Table 1

Superintendents' Responses to "The teacher salary scale includes above state base pay of (excluding extra duty stipends)"

| Pay | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Do not pay above state base | 11 | 11.2 |
| \$500 to \$1,999 above the state base | 37 | 37.8 |
| \$2,000 to \$4,999 above the state base | 29 | 29.6 |
| \$5,000 to \$7,499 above the state base | 12 | 12.2 |
| \$7,500 or more above the state base | 9 | 9.2 |

Table 1

Regarding superintendents' school districts offering signing bonuses to teachers, Table 2 shows the majority of the school districts did not offer a signing bonus. Signing bonuses, when offered, tended to be in the \$500 to \$1,999 range.

Table 2

Superintendents' Responses to "Our district offers signing bonuses of:"

| Signing Bonus | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Do not offer signing bonuses | 83 | 84.7 |
| \$500 to \$1,999 signing bonus | 14 | 14.3 |
| \$2,000 to \$4,999 signing bonus | 1 | 1.0 |
| \$5,000 to \$7,499 signing bonus | 0 | 0.0 |
| \$7,500 or more signing bonus | 0 | 0.0 |

Table 2

Next superintendents were asked about the extent to which they contributed to their teachers' health care benefits. As might be anticipated, given the high costs of health care, about 2/3rds of the school districts paid less than 100% of the contributions to health care benefits. Table 3 shows the percentages for responses to this item.

Table 3

Superintendents' Responses to "Teacher compensation packages in our district include contributions to health care benefits of:"

| Health Care Benefits Contribution | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Less than 100% of employee premium | 66 | 67.35 |
| 100% of employee premium | 22 | 22.45 |
| 100% of employee and family premium | 10 | 10.20 |

Table 3

Superintendents were next queried about whether their teacher compensation plans included free dental insurance. Almost all, 89 (90.8%) of the superintendents responded no and only 9 (9.2%) of the superintendents reported that they provided for free dental insurance for their teachers. Life insurance was the next financial benefit about which superintendents responded (see Table 4). Over a third, 41.8%, indicated that their school districts provided no life insurance benefit for their teachers. Nearly half, however, of the school districts provided a minimal amount of life insurance.

Table 4

Superintendents' Responses to "Teacher compensation packages in our district include a life insurance policy in the amount of:"

| Life Insurance Policy | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| No life insurance | 41 | 41.8 |
| \$1,000 to \$25,000 | 45 | 45.9 |
| \$50,000 | 7 | 7.1 |
| \$75,000 | 3 | 3.1 |
| \$100,000 or higher | 2 | 2.0 |

Table 4

Superintendents were also asked about four other financial incentives: day care for teachers' children; low-interest housing loans; subsidized apartment complexes; and, tuition reimbursement. Only 9 (9.2%) of the superintendents reported that their districts offered day care for their teachers' children. Low-interest housing loans were provided in only 1 of the 98 school districts. Four of the superintendents stated that their districts provided subsidized apartment complexes for their teachers. Superintendent response was more positive concerning tuition reimbursement as 30 (30.6%) of the school districts offered tuition reimbursement to their teachers.

Non-Financial Incentives

In this set of questions, superintendents were queried about whether or not they offered specific campus and district support variables.

Table 5

Superintendents' Responses to Non-Financial Incentives

| Support Available for Teachers | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Timely and effective professional development | 98 | 0 |
| Readily available supplies and materials for teaching | 98 | 0 |
| Teacher mentoring program | 88 | 10 |
| Active and effective site-based decision-making | 96 | 2 |
| Positive learning environment | 89 | 9 |
| Student/teacher ratio of 18 or less | 65 | 32 |
| Additional planning time | 50 | 46 |
| Consistent and fair student discipline | 97 | 1 |

Table 5

Note. For the non-financial incentives of student/teacher ratio of 18 or less and additional planning time, some superintendents did not respond to these items.

All of the 98 superintendents indicated that timely and effective professional development was offered to teachers in their school districts. The same level of agreement was present for having readily available supplies and materials for teachers to use in their classrooms. Teacher mentoring programs were present in most (89.9%) of the school districts as was effective site-based decision-making (98.0%) and consistent and fair student discipline (98.0%). Interestingly, 9.2% of the superintendents reported that their school districts did not have a positive learning environment. Student-teacher ratio was higher than an 18 to 1 ratio in 32.7% of the school districts in this study. The non-financial incentive rated as least present in these school districts was additional teacher planning time which was available in only 51% of these school districts. Readers are referred to Table 5 for these numbers.

Discussion

Recruiting and retaining teachers in education is an ongoing concern throughout the country. This problem is exacerbated in the State of Texas due to a rapidly growing student population. Still, the average teacher salary in Texas remains below the national average (Texas State Teachers Association, 2001). Once teachers are in the classroom, they face many challenges: lack of administrative support, excessive paperwork, apathetic students, and low salary, among others. Numerous researchers have suggested that school districts need to raise salaries, add signing bonuses, and enhance their benefits packages to attract and to retain teachers (Blair, 2000). Additionally, Reichardt (2001) recommended that districts look at teacher working conditions and new and innovative teacher-driven staff development as ways of retaining and attracting new teachers.

Clearly, in this study, superintendents expressed awareness that teacher pay above the state base was needed to attract and retain teachers as 11.2% of the school districts did not pay teachers a salary above

this level. It is perhaps due to this high percentage of districts paying teachers above the state base pay that signing bonuses were not provided to teachers. Only 15.3% of the districts offered teachers a signing bonus. As more teachers are needed in the profession, school districts may have to become more aggressive in their teacher compensation packages. Knowing what other school districts are doing in their efforts to recruit teachers can assist school districts in developing their own financial and non-financial benefits to recruit and attract teachers.

Therefore, it is crucial for school leaders to retain qualified beginning teachers in the profession and support and help them develop into quality professionals. To retain highly qualified teachers in the profession, school districts and schools need to support quality teaching (NCTAF, 2003).

This study adds to the limited body of research on incentives to recruit and attract teachers. Insufficient research exists concerning the availability of these factors in teacher compensation packages. Readers are urged to be cautious in any generalizations they make from these findings. The sample size was relatively small and consisted of superintendents from only one state. Moreover, the survey by which information was obtained was created specifically for this study. Thus, the reliability of its results is uncertain. Until such time as these descriptive findings are replicated, any generalizations made should be tenuous, at best.

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