

## **A National Issue: Whether the Teacher Turnover Effects Students' Academic Performance?**

**Loretta A. Terry**  
**PhD Student in Educational Leadership**  
The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education  
Prairie View A & M University  
Prairie View, Texas

**William Allan Kritsonis, PhD**  
**Professor and Faculty Mentor**  
PhD Program in Education Leadership  
The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education  
Prairie View A & M University  
Member of the Texas A&M University System  
**Visiting Lecturer (2005)**  
**Oxford Round Table**  
University of Oxford, Oxford, England  
**Distinguished Alumnus (2004)**  
College of Education and Professional Studies  
Central Washington University

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### **ABSTRACT**

**The high teacher turnover rate and low student academic performance are two urgent issues that threaten the education of American's children---our greatest resource. The technical core of schools nationally is to provide a quality education to produce literate generations to function in our global society. If the United States is to equip its young people with the problem-solving and communication skills that are essential in the new economy it is more important than ever to recruit and retain high-quality teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). This article focuses on whether teacher turnover effects students' academic performance.**

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### **Introduction**

Each year teachers enter, leave, and move within the K-12 teacher workforce in the United States (Education Statistics Quarterly, 2005). Asserting that teaching has become "a revolving door occupation," the report cited national Center for Education Statistics figures showing that about one-third of the country's new teachers leave teaching sometime during their first three years on the job (American School Board Journal, 2004). The Bureau of National Affairs puts the annual national turnover rate—that is, people leaving one job for any other—at 11 percent (2004). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) reported that beginning

teachers have an attrition rate of 14 percent—that is, 14 percent leave the profession entirely after one year.

Today, more than ever teacher shortage and demand for substitute teachers plague the American school systems. Schools districts with high turnover often respond to a shortage of effective teachers at the prevailing wage not by leaving teaching position vacant, but by filling them with ineffective teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Staffing classrooms with a continuous string of short-and long-term substitute teachers contributes to the instability, low quality of instruction and as a consequence leads to low student performance. Therefore, staffing classes with substitute teachers has a direct effect on student academic performance. These teachers frequently change, have insufficient preparation and cause curricular consistency.

“No teacher supply strategy will ever keep our schools staffed with quality teachers unless we reverse the debilitating turnover rates” (Colgan, 2004, p.23). NCLB required that all teachers be highly qualified in the subjects they teach by 2006 (Porter-Magee, 2004). Excessive teacher turnover in low-income urban communities appears to have an impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). The high teacher turnover rate results in a low teacher commitment rate where many urban high school teachers are poor adult role models and choose not to engage with students. Teacher turnover is receiving increased attention in education research and policy. The focus of this attention associates the turnover problem with the shortage of high quality teachers in low-achieving schools, suggesting that teacher turnover—due to teachers either quitting the profession or transferring to a higher performing school—leaves low achieving schools with the least qualified teachers (Haycock, 1998).

### **Purpose of the Article**

The purpose of this article is to examine the existing research and data that address the issue of whether teacher turnover affects student academic performance. The intended outcome is to generate dialogue that will lead to viable remedies and encourage ongoing research of this devastating issue.

### **The Problem of High Teacher Turnover and Student Performance**

Teacher turnover is a rising problem in the United States that must be addressed if a quality education is to be provided for all children. Studies suggest that America is spending over a billion dollars on teacher turnover (Love & Kritsonis). Excellence in education requires that highly qualified teachers should be recruited and retained. Recent studies of teacher effects at the classroom level have found that differential teacher effectiveness is a strong determinant of differences in student learning

far outweighing the effects of classroom variables (Sanders & Rivers 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). These studies reveal disturbing indications for efforts to achieve educational equity, including indications that African American students are nearly twice as likely to be assigned to the most ineffective teachers and half as likely to be assigned to the most effective teachers (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). The unequal distribution of effective teachers is the most urgent problem facing American education (Murnane & Steel, 2007). Although schools' racial compositions and proportions of low-income students predict teacher turnover, salaries and working conditions—including large class sizes, facilities problems, multi-track schools, and lack of text-books—are strong and significant factors in prediction high rates of turnover; when these conditions are taken into account, the influence of student characteristic on turnover is substantially reduced (Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005).

Contemporary educational theory holds that one of the pivotal causes of inadequate school performance is the inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers. A case study of a representative sample of 15 elementary schools selected was conducted by one researcher based on their geographic location, demographic characteristics and seven-year average rate of turnover. Of the 15 schools selected, only five participated in the study representing five of seven geographic clusters in the district with variation in their student demographics and teacher turnover rates. The study found correlations between student performance and turnover rates were also significant, but negative (Guin, 2004). "Schools with higher turnover rates had fewer students meeting standard on statewide assessments in both reading (Pearson Correlation:  $-.306$ , Sig. (2-tailed): $.000$ ,  $n = 418$ ) and math (Pearson Correlation:  $-.282$ , Sig. (2-tailed): $.000$ " (Guin, 2004, p. 7). These correlations between teacher turnover and student statewide assessments in reading and are only one example. Nevertheless, additional statistical analysis beyond the scope of this study is necessary in order to determine the causal effects, if any between turnover and student performance. Addressing the issue of low performing schools isolated from the source of the problem is difficult to say the least. School districts and school boards that are genuinely concerned with improving low-performing schools should begin paying attention to teacher turnover rates at the school level (Guin, 2004).

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, results this examination of exiting research indicates that teacher turnover problem and school staffing issues are not primarily due to teacher shortages, but rather to an insufficient supply of qualified teachers. The data indicates that school staffing problems are primarily due to excessive demand resulting from a "revolving door"—where large numbers of qualified teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement and their positions are filled with unprepared and unqualified teachers.

Finally, America's children are indeed the greatest resource for our future. Consequently, it is incumbent upon educators of the twenty-first century to bring the pressing national issue of teacher turnover to the forefront for vital resolutions through continuous focused research.

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