

Teacher Retention: Problems and Solutions
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Abstract

There is a teacher retention crisis in the United States. The purpose of this paper is to answer the following questions: What contributes to teachers leaving the field? How has "No Child Left Behind" affected teacher retention? What can be done to retain good teachers? What impact do school administrators have on teacher retention? After reviewing several research reports, journals, and articles, we found several problems and solutions to this crisis. Some of the problems are the lack of teacher preparation, inability to handle stress, lack of management skills, non-supporting environment and administrators, and No Child Left Behind accountability factors. Some possible solutions are that school districts can partner with education programs at higher learning institutions to better prepare pre-service teachers through providing more field bases opportunities and stress coping strategies, implementing mentorship and induction programs for beginning teachers, providing teacher incentives, administrative support and expressing concerns to government officials regarding oppositions to No Child Left Behind regulations. School districts can limit the effects of teacher retention if the problems and solutions are properly addressed.

Introduction

One of the biggest problems facing schools in the United States is teacher retention. There are too many teachers leaving the field to pursue other endeavors. School boards, school administrators, and policy makers have been trying to implement creative ways to retain good teachers. These leaders are brainstorming because they know that teacher retention has an impact on student achievement.

The Teacher Research Policy, a research partnership between the University at Albany and Stanford University that examines the behavior of teachers and administrators with the goal of developing policies that will both attract and retain high-quality teachers and leaders, especially in low-performing schools, explains that teacher retention is an important factor in determining a school's learning environment. It states that it is difficult for school administrators to implement new policies, effect necessary changes or meet higher standards when the teaching workforce is in constant flux. Also, it states that low performing, high poverty urban schools are at a greater disadvantage because teacher retention in these schools tends to be lower than in higher performing schools. More qualified teachers are more likely to transfer out of lower performing schools, leaving the least qualified teachers to teach the neediest students.

Almost a quarter of entering public-school teachers leave teaching within their first three years (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). While teachers who have stronger academic backgrounds, as measured by test scores and the competitiveness of their undergraduate institution, are more likely to leave teaching (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2005), there is remarkably little evidence that documents the effectiveness of teachers who leave low-scoring schools.

Teacher retention may affect student learning in several ways. First, in high-turnover schools, students may be more likely to have inexperienced teachers who are less effective, on average (Rockoff, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain 2005; Kane, Rockoff and Staiger, 2006). Second, high turnover creates instability in schools making it more difficult to have coherent instruction. This instability may be particularly problematic when schools are trying to implement reforms, as the new teachers coming in each year are likely to repeat mistakes rather than improve upon implementation of reform. Third, high turnover can be costly in that it takes time and effort to continuously recruit teachers. In addition to all these factors, turnover can reduce student learning if more effective teachers are the ones most likely to leave (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb and Grossman, 2007).

This paper reviews literature and other research papers on contributing factors of teacher retention and suggested solutions to the problem. The following questions will be the focus of the paper:

- * What contributes to teachers leaving the field?
 - o How has "No Child Left Behind" effected teacher retention?
 - o What can be done to retain good teachers?
 - o What impact do school administrators have on teacher retention?

The goal of this paper is to compile some of the problems and possible solutions

What Contributes to Teachers Leaving the Field?

The United States is currently facing a teacher retention crisis. Many of the educators that are leaving are doing so at the beginning of their education careers (Minarik, M.M., Perreault, G., & Thorton, B., 2003). According to a study done by Roulston, Legette, and Womack in 2005 (as cited in Chen, Y., Paquette, K.R., & Rieg, S.A., 2007), approximately thirty three percent of new teachers quit the profession during their initial years of teaching. There are many factors contributing to this rising problem. One reoccurring factor that can lead to attrition throughout all disciplines and grade levels is ones capability to manage stress. If beginning teachers are to experience success in the field, they must develop coping mechanisms to deal with the many stresses that accompany the profession. These stressors can stem from various issues related to having little experience in the classroom, including discipline management problems, limited knowledge of teaching methods and implementation strategies, and developing and maintaining positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues (Chen, Y., Paquette, K.R., & Rieg, S.A., 2007).

According to Chen, Y., Paquette, K.R., & Rieg, S.A. (2007), university education programs should educate pre-service teachers on how to identify factors that may cause stress and apply suggested strategies to manage such stressors. Stokking, Leenders, Jong, & Tartwijk (2003, as cited in Chen, Y., Paquette, K.R., & Rieg, S.A., 2007), suggested that if colleges follow their four tiered model, a successful shift from preparation to classroom teacher can occur that will prepare teachers for the upcoming challenging tasks that await them. Their model begins with colleges and universities grasping the importance of collaboration linking their institutions and schools. It moves to the curriculum and the level that it takes it to account the arrangement of the transition phase of new teachers. The third stage is related to the balanced level that supervision and mentoring take place. As the future educators reach the final phase of the model, they begin to take part in extensive reflection on their practices to identify personal strengths and weaknesses to improve skills prior to entering the profession. Many researchers have determined that multiple field based opportunities decrease pre-service teachers' stress and apprehensions as they enter the field, through providing them with a comprehensive, realistic perception of the teaching profession, as well as increasing their self-esteem in their abilities to flourish in education (Bowers, Eicher and Sacks, 1983; Sumpter, 1995, as cited in Chen, Y., Paquette, K.R., & Rieg, S.A., 2007).

Edvantia (2007), suggest teacher preparation programs should partner with schools that have historically had difficulties finding and retaining teachers to provide supportive pathways to the teaching profession. Ingersol (as cited in Darling-Hammond, L., 2003) found in 2001 that retention affects schools that serve underprivileged and minority students at a turnover rate of fifty percent higher than in low-poverty schools. This is a result of teachers in high-poverty, urban schools, sometimes tend to be ill-equipped with preparation and lack of school support (Darling-Hammond, 2000). A longitudinal study done by Andrew & Schwab in 1995 (as cited Darling-Hammond, L., 2003), recommends that a possible solution to this emerging problem is more teacher preparation in undergraduate teacher education programs. The study found that pre-service teachers who graduated from the same institutions who completed five year education programs remain in teaching at higher rates than those who complete four year education programs from the

same institution. Those who complete five year teacher education programs also reported elevated levels of contentment with their preparedness and received advanced ratings from principals and other teachers. In addition, it was found that a more extensive five year teacher education program cost less than the money it cost school districts to pay for the recruitment of teachers, induction programs for beginning teachers, and replacement do to attrition (Darling-Hammond, L.,2003). According to Darling-Hammond (2003) the five year teacher education program is a solution that could possibly decrease the large amounts of teachers fleeing the field.

Another contributing factor of early departure of educators is due to beginning teachers' feelings of seclusion and lack of a cooperative setting. In many districts after teacher vacancies are filled the school feels that their job is done. This is where many problems develop because new teachers are not provided with a support system within the school that is needed to set a solid foundation in which new educators can thrive. To solve this dilemma, school systems can build team unity, while improving the work environment through creating positive social interactions amongst all faculty members by implementing team teaching, cooperative team meetings, and orientation programs to meet the needs of all teachers (Minarik, M.M., Perreault, G., & Thorton, B., 2003). According to Debra Viadero (2008), poor working conditions are made when teachers are forced to work in isolation and to deter this, teachers should be surrounded by support and motivation of colleagues.

How has "No Child Left Behind" Effected Teacher Retention?

No Child Left Behind is the most extensive effort to improve student achievement that the Federal Government has attempted in thirty eight years. This has intensified the already existing problem of teacher retention (Matthews, 2003, as cited in Barth, M. & Hill, P.M., 2004). Bower (as cited in Barth,M.& Hill, P.M., 2004), completed a survey in 2003 to identify the effect No Child Left Behind has had on rural schools. The results revealed that seventy-five percent of secondary and thirty-three percent of elementary teachers stated that the No Child Left Behind's highly qualified teacher regulations would influence teacher retention. The root of the problem is that anyone who has a bachelor degree in subject areas can enter the field as a highly qualified teacher without any training in the area of education through an alternate route (Brownell et al., 2002, as cited in Barth, M. & Hill, P.M., 2004). Many veteran teachers now have to go back to school or pass subject area test to meet the highly qualified teacher standards set by No Child Left Behind (Bowlen, 2003).

A probable solution to this ever growing problem is for school districts along with state officials to fight the Federal Government's No Child Left Behind implications (Toppo, 2004 as cited in Barth, M. & Hill, P.M., 2004). Additionally, Toppo reported that Federal Government officials have relieved requirements for rural school teachers, giving them another year to reach highly qualified standings. In addition, other considerations may satisfy government officials' requirements such as making an allowance for years of experience teaching a subject, review of past students' scores on achievement test, evaluation of continuing education credits, or other objective assessments as gauges of meeting highly qualified criterion (Barth, M. & Hill, P.M., 2004). Barth & Hill discovered that three states including Virginia, Utah, and Idaho have already begun to challenge No Child Left Behind policies and Federal Government representatives are beginning to listen to such criticism.

How Do Principals Impact Teacher Retention?

Effective school leadership is an important solution to teacher retention, which has been proven by its consistent appearance, as the most important subject in working conditions in a survey conducted by Barnett

Berry with was given in seven states in 2002 (as cited in Viadero, D., 2008). According to Murphy and Angelski (1996/1997, as cited in Minark, M.M., Perreault, G., & Thornton, G., 2003), one key factor that influences teachers to remain at schools is their relationship with the building principal. Buckingham & Coffman (1999 as cited in Minark, M.M., Perreault, G., & Thornton, G., 2003), also conducted a survey in which they found that the most crucial variable in faculty productiveness and commitment is the quality of the relationship between faculty and their administrators. Minark, M.M., Perreault, G., & Thornton, G. (2003) contend that many principals neglect to address key issues inside the school system, as well as fail to develop relationships within the school and the community. Sabrina Laine, director of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality suggest teachers in high-poverty schools leave because of inadequate resources and lack of administrative support (Edvantia, 2007). Fenwick and Pierce (2002, as cited in Minark, M.M., Perreault, G., & Thornton, G., 2003), point out that effective principals should be instructional leaders who support teacher development, generate and apportion resources fairly, reflectively lead, initiate ongoing positive communication, empower teachers, and share the leadership role amongst educators.

As North Carolina was implementing the "Mission Possible" plan to increase the teacher retention rate and student achievement they discovered most principals in the schools were young and lacking experience, which was contributing to their problems. The state then used the STAR principal selection program created by Martin Haberman from the University of Wisconsin to recognize potential effective school leaders and then positioned them in Mission Impossible schools to attempt to decrease teacher retention and increase student achievement. After reviewing principal evaluations and principal mentor reports, the results revealed successful outcomes by all new building principals selected using the STAR principal system (Grier, T.B. & Holcombe, A.A., 2008).

How Can Good Teachers Be Retained?

Darling-Hamond (2003) suggests that good teachers can be retained by providing efficient teacher preparation and a positive support system for new teachers. One possible strategy that schools can implement to reduce teacher retention rates is to provide a solid introduction program and assign mentors to beginning teachers in their first years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, L., 2003). Corbis & Marinsky (2004) reported that the state of Virginia passed a law in 2002 that states all schools must provide mentors for first year teachers. In Fairfax County, Virginia, schools have implemented the "Great Beginnings" program, in which veteran teachers meet with new teachers the summer before they begin teaching, every month during their first year, and continue to collaborate with them until their third year in the field. The superintendent of Fairfax County Schools, Kevin North, admitted that in the past they had primarily focused on teacher recruitment and not retaining the teachers that were already employed in their schools. The program has experienced success and now many school districts are emulating "Great Beginnings" induction and mentoring plan of action (Corbis & Marinsky, M., 2004).

Additional districts in Rochester, New York and Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo, Ohio experienced success with mentor programs through reducing retention of new teachers by over two thirds. They accomplished this by giving mentors free time to collaborate with new teachers in their beginning years (NCTAF, 1996, as cited in Darling-Hammond, L., 2003). The NCTA also discovered that new teachers in the mentor program, stayed in the field at sizable rates as well as became effective much faster than the teachers who had to learn on their own (as cited in Darling-Hammond, L., 2003). Mentor

programs can also be beneficial for experienced teachers as well, because it allows veteran teachers to be challenged while staying motivated and passionate about teaching (Darling-Hammond, L., 2003).

According to Corbis & Marinsky (2004), some schools and states are using incentives as a means to solve the teacher retention problem, through developing ways to increase teacher pay. Minnesota's Governor, Tim Pawlenty, is exploring strategies to pay accomplished educators one hundred thousand dollars a year. The Governor of Virginia suggests that schools should provide tenure and additional benefits for those teachers teaching in hard to staff schools (Corbis & Marinsky, 2004). Grier & Holcombe (2008) reported that in designated schools in North Carolina, English teachers are awarded a bonus of twenty-five hundred dollars yearly and secondary math teachers are paid an additional incentive up to ten thousand dollars per year. In addition, teachers whose students score above the districts means can receive incentives up to four thousand dollars per year. After the first year of implementing the incentives only ten percent of the educators left as opposed to previously having the highest attrition rates in the district for a period of five years (Grier, T.B. & Holcombe, A.A, 2008).

Conclusion

In closing, several causes of teacher retention have been identified such as: lack of teacher preparation, absence of stress management skills, nonsupporting environment and administrators (Chen, Y., Paquette, K.R., & Rieg, S.A., 2007), and No Child Left Behind accountability factors (Matthews, 2003). Prior research has shown clearly that these high-turnover schools are likely to serve large populations of low-performing, non-white, and low-income students, just the students likely to be most in need of a consistent and supportive school experience. (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2005; Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino, & Mejia, 2000; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2005).

Several solutions to these retention issues have been provided. School Districts can partner with education programs at various institutions to collectively prepare pre-service teachers to cope with stress as well as provide more field based experiences prior to entering the classroom (Bowers, Eicher and Sacks, 1983; Sumpster, 1995). School officials can begin to speak out about their concerns of No Child Left Behind regulations to ensure the Federal Government is aware of educators' views (Hill, P.M., & Barth, M., 2004). New teachers can be mentored by veteran teachers to create a support system in which they can begin to experience success (Darling-Hammond, L., 2003). Finally incentives can be awarded to teachers in hard to staff areas and for those who are deemed as accomplished teachers (Grier, T.B. & Holcombe, A.A, 2008).

Teacher retention is becoming an educational crisis. However school districts can limit its effects, if the problems and solutions are properly addressed. Educational Leaders must begin supporting beginning teachers entering the field or the problem will continue to increase.

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