This issue brief addresses the following questions: (1) How many teachers leave the profession in a year's time, and why? and (2) Are public school teachers more or less likely than private school teachers to leave the profession or move to different schools? Data were gathered from the National Center for Education Statistics 1987-88 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 1988-89 Teacher Followup Survey. Results suggest: (1) private schools regularly have to replace a larger percentage of their teacher work force than do public schools; (2) the combination of attrition and migration means an even larger proportional loss of teachers for the private sector in comparison with the public sector; (3) some reasons given for leaving the profession include better pay, other career opportunities, dissatisfaction with teaching as a career, family or personal move, health, pregnancy, or retirement; (4) teachers move to other schools for reasons such as reduction-in-force, lay-off, school closing, school reorganization, and reassignment; and (5) better salary and benefits offered in the public sector attract numerous private school teachers. For further information, three U.S. Department of Education reports are listed. (LL)
TEACHER ATTRITION AND MIGRATION
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National Center for Education Statistics
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Teacher Attrition and Migration

How many teachers leave the profession in a year's time? And why? Are public school teachers more or less likely than private school teachers to leave the profession or move to different schools?

These questions and others about teachers in the 1987-88 school year who left the profession (attrition) or moved to other schools (migration) in a year's time can be addressed by data from NCES's 1987-88 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and 1988-89 Teacher Followup Survey (TFS).

What percentage of the nation's 1987-88 teachers left the profession in a year's time? Are public or private school teachers more likely to leave teaching?

About 5.6 percent of the approximately 2,333,200 public school teachers in the 1987-88 school year had left teaching by the following year (Figure 1). This percentage is close to NCES official projections of around 6 percent for previous years. In the same school year 12.7 percent of the 307,131 private school teachers had left teaching by the following year. If this difference between public and private school teacher attrition rates were fairly constant over the years, it would mean that private schools regularly have to replace a larger percentage of their teacher work force than do public schools.

What percentage of the nation's 1987-88 teachers moved to other schools in a year's time? Are public or private school teachers more likely to change schools?

While teachers who move to other schools do not represent a loss to the profession, they do represent a loss to the schools from which they move, and replacements must be recruited and hired. The SASS and TFS data provide the first national look at the rate at which teachers move to other schools.

About 8.0 percent of all teachers in the 1987-88 school year had moved to other schools by the following year (Figure 2). The percentage of these "movers" was similar for public and private schools. Approximately 7.8 percent of public and 9.5 percent of private school teachers moved to other schools. However, nearly half of the private school "movers" left the private sector to teach in public schools, while less than 3 percent of the public school "movers" left the public sector to teach in private schools. The combination of attrition and migration means an even larger proportional loss of teachers for the private sector in comparison with the public sector.

Why do teachers leave teaching?

Popular belief is that many who leave teaching do so for better pay or other career opportunities. About 19 percent of public and 22 percent of private school teachers who left the profession picked these as their main reasons for leaving (Table 1). Another 8.9 percent of public and 6.7 percent of private school teachers who left were dissatisfied with teaching as a career.

However, substantial percentages of teachers who left teaching gave reasons that appeared to be unrelated to teaching issues. Approximately 35 percent of public and 47 percent of private school teachers gave “Family or personal move, or health, or pregnancy/childrearing” as their main reason for leaving the teaching profession. About 23 percent of public and 6 percent of private school teachers gave “To retire” as their main reason.

Why do teachers change schools?

Teachers moved to other schools for school- and nonschool-related reasons. Approximately 32 percent of public and 18 percent of private school teachers moved to other schools because of a “School staffing action”, such as reduction-in-force, lay-off, school closing, school reorganization, or reassignment (Table 2). Another 32 percent of public and 25 percent of private school teachers changed schools for a nonschool-related reason, “Family or personal move”. The remaining 36 percent of public and 57 percent of private school teachers moved for other school-related reasons.

The better salary and benefits offered in the public sector attracted numerous private school teachers. Most (about 82 percent) of the private school teachers who moved to other schools “For better salary or benefits” moved to the public sector.

For more information, see the following reports:

