Teacher Retention at Low-Performing Schools

In 2004-2005, North Carolina’s average teacher turnover rate was nearly 13 percent, ranging from a high of 29 percent in Harnett County to a low of 4 percent in Clay County. Turnover among teachers in low-performing schools was substantially higher, with a low of 12 percent (Forsyth County) to a high of 57 percent (Guilford County). Out of 481 priority schools, eight schools had a turnover rate of less than 20 percent, 22 had a turnover rate between 20-30 percent; 13 had a turnover rate between 30-40 percent, while four had a turnover rate of more than 40 percent. North Carolina has put strategies in place to address teacher retention but how will these strategies impact retention at low-performing schools? This research update summarizes three studies that address issues related to teacher retention. Two studies use North Carolina data and one study is a recently published literature review that is not peer reviewed.

Evaluation of an $1,800 Teacher Bonus in North Carolina

This study examined North Carolina’s use of an annual bonus of $1,800 to certified math, science and special education teachers working in high poverty or academically failing public secondary schools.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

• This bonus payment was sufficient to reduce mean turnover rates of the targeted teachers by 12 percent.
• Responses to the program were concentrated among experienced teachers; those with ten or more years of experience are 37 percent less likely to leave. The program did not have a statistically significant effect on teachers with less experience.
• In 2003-04, 17 percent of principals in schools with the program did not know their schools had ever been eligible; 13 percent of teachers receiving the program that year did not know they were eligible.

WHAT IT MEANS

• Supplemental pay may be a promising approach to retaining teachers in hard to staff subjects and schools.
• Greater efforts must be made to promote such programs.

1 One school did not have teacher retention data. Charter schools are not included in this figure.
Examination of Teacher Perceptions of the Work Environment in Hard-to-Staff North Carolina Schools

This study examined 272 hard-to-staff schools as identified by a prior report of the Education Commission of the States (ECS). Hard-to-staff schools are those at least 15 percent above the state average in the following teacher traits: percentage of teachers not fully certified, percentage of teachers in the first three years of their career, and rate of teacher turnover.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

• Minority, disadvantaged, and academically struggling students are more likely to be in hard to staff schools and less likely to have experienced, effective teachers.
• In 2000-01, in hard-to-staff schools, 71 percent of students performed at grade level on End of Grade or End of Course tests, compared with 80 percent of students in other schools.
• In hard-to-staff schools, 62 percent of the students are ethnic minorities, compared to 39 percent of the students in other schools.
• In hard-to-staff schools, 47 percent of students were eligible for free/reduced price lunch compared to 35 percent of those in other schools.
• Forty-two percent of hard-to-staff schools are middle schools, while only 18 percent of other schools are middle schools.
• Teachers in hard-to-staff schools are less satisfied with every aspect of the school environment than their peers.

WHAT IT MEANS

• Addressing working conditions will be essential to reducing teacher turnover.
• Efforts to reduce teacher turnover should target conditions in Hard-to-staff schools.

Literature Review of Teacher Retention

This is a literature review including both quantitative and qualitative studies.

WHAT THE REVIEW FOUND

• The issue of retaining teachers is really one of retaining quality teachers who positively influence student learning, not just retaining all teachers.
• Teachers who feel effective with their students are more likely to stay.

Sources Cited


• Teachers in collaborative, collegial environments are more likely to stay.
• Increased pay is positively associated with retention; however, it is not sufficient to overcome poor working conditions.
• Turnover is highest among high poverty, high minority schools.
• Teachers entering the classroom through Alternative Certification Programs are more likely to leave the classroom, but the reason is unclear.
• Teachers teaching out-of-field and teaching courses requiring many different preps have lower job satisfaction.
• Late hiring and lack of information in the hiring process can negatively influence retention because teachers did not fully understand whether the school was a good match.
• Poor facilities are associated with increased turnover.

**What It Means**

• Many factors contribute to increasing teacher retention, so single-pronged approaches will have much less chance of success.

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