

The Challenge Of Recruiting And Retaining Teachers In The United States: Is This A Compensation Or Demand Issue?

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ABSTRACT

School districts and educational leaders as well as administrators across the nation believe they are facing teacher shortages. There is a widely-held belief that they are facing a critical shortage of teachers, primarily due to recent increases in teacher retirements and student enrollments. However, others believe that this is a superficial conclusion drawn from growing student enrollments, smaller class sizes, and retirements. The assumption incorrectly surmised is that there is not enough supply, in this case, of new teachers entering the profession, to meet demand. Studies looking at both supply and demand for new teachers entering the profession have found that the demand for teachers has indeed grown over the last decade. However, many researchers contend that there is an ample supply of teachers to not only meet, but exceed the demand. This paper explores the two sides of this topic and provides recommendations for administrators and educational leaders.

Keywords: Teachers, shortage of teachers, retention of teachers, compensation of teachers, and demand for teachers.

NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

The challenge of having an ample resource of diverse educators and schools has been around for many years and people have always worried about it to one extent or another. However, the worries and challenges are likely to increase as more diverse students are entering the classroom and are finding access to the world of learning through cyberspace technologies (Mujtaba and Salghur, 2006; Dastoor, Roofe and Mujtaba, 2005). In the early 1900, Samuel Clemens' is quoted as having said that "Every time you stop a school, you will have to build a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. It won't fatten the dog." Therefore, educators and researchers must be cautious and study the issue of demand and compensation of teachers in a methodological and careful manner.

The College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware reported the following as factors affecting supply and demand of teachers:

Teacher supply and demand is determined by a number of factors. The *supply* of qualified personnel depends on how many people complete the requirements for a teaching degree, the number of out-of-state hires, and the number of people that transfer teaching positions within the state. The *demand* for teachers is determined by student enrollment, teacher-to-pupil classroom ratios, and attrition for both retirement and non-retirement reasons.

For the purpose of this study, definitions for supply and demand will be as described above.

The problem faced by school districts across the United States is the misconception that they are facing a teacher shortage. That is, they believe that there are not enough teachers to fill their vacancies. According to the personnel records for the School District of Hillsborough County, Florida approximately 20 new teachers were hired

each year during 2002, 2003, and 2004 for each of the 200+ schools (SDHC, 2004). Of the 12,000 new teachers hired by the School District of Hillsborough County over a three-year period from 2001 to 2003, just over 8,160 of them had left the school system. This represents an approximated turnover rate of 32% during the three years (SDHC, 2004). According to Jorissen (2002), the national average for first-year teachers leaving profession is 15%. The data supports new teacher turnover rate as a problem for the School District of Hillsborough County as it is twice the national average. Additionally, the School District of Hillsborough County has opened each of the last 5 school years almost 1,500 teachers short of its need. Consequently, this study will look at possible solutions and impediments to address this “supply” shortage of teachers.

States, districts and individual schools have instituted a wide variety of programs and initiatives to recruit new teachers. Such initiatives include the ever-popular career change programs such as the “Troops-to-Teachers” program and others, that are designed to entice professionals into midcareer switches to teaching, as well as alternative certification programs geared toward attracting non-education majors into teaching immediately and earning the necessary credentials later (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003).

The teaching occupation suffers from chronic and relatively high annual turnover compared to many other occupations. According to Hammond (2003), keeping good teachers should be one of the most important agenda items for any school leader. The turnover problem, although high for the entire teaching occupation, affects beginning teachers more than others. Substantial research evidence suggests that well-prepared, capable teachers have the largest impact on student learning. A growing body of evidence indicates that teachers who lack initial preparation were more likely to leave the profession (Gilles, Hite and Evans, 2003). The uphill climb to staff schools with qualified teachers becomes steeper when teachers leave in large numbers.

As the world of education continues to become more complex, advanced levels of knowledge and cyberspace technology are utilized; creating an interactive market that has truly become global through the guidance of professional specialized educators (Dastoor, Roofe, and Mujtaba, 2005). According to recent studies, extraordinary education programs should stand apart from others for many reasons through the help of their human resources asset, its teachers (Mujtaba and Preziosi, 2006). Education program administrators and teachers must be committed to work as a high performing team in partnering with their students to effectively meet the needs of the national community. Extraordinary programs and high performing teams of educators should seek teachers who are committed to the needs of their communities and students. Such extraordinary educators must join together as a high performing team to provide students with the needed and required knowledge, skills, and experience which can be used to produce incredible results for themselves and the community. Overall, the educational leaders and administrators along with current and prospective teachers must work together in an extraordinary manner for the creation of effective faculty recruitment and development programs to alleviate the challenges associated with the teacher shortage concern (Mujtaba, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to explore possible solutions that address the teacher supply challenges. This study looks at possible solutions and impediments to address this “supply” shortage of teachers. Additionally, it explores at what impediments there are to raising teacher salaries to attract new teachers, as well as what particular teaching areas have shortages and which have a surplus.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Industries and organizations take employee turnover seriously not only its high costs, some of which are more apparent than others, but it is also indicative of turnover patterns/reasons. Employee turnover had especially serious consequences in workplaces that require extensive interaction among participants and that depend on commitment, continuity, and cohesion among employees. Teachers are expected and required to commit to the profession, provide continuity for their students, and get along with their students, parents, peers and administration. The high turnover of teachers in schools does not simply cause staffing problems, but may also have negative influences on the school’s environment and culture, as well as on student performance. Cohesion and continuity are difficult to achieve if the group members are also changing. According to Hammond (2003), school districts across the nation need to recognize that effective teachers are a valuable asset that must be nurtured and cultivated (p. 7).

Representing almost 5% of the civilian workforce, teaching is a relatively large occupation. In fact, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) report “there were twice as many K-12 teachers as registered nurses and five times as many teachers as either lawyers or professors”(p.31). The size of the teaching force, combined with the relatively high annual turnover rate within the teaching occupation, means that large numbers of employees flow into, between, and out of schools each year. According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003), total teacher turnover was fairly evenly split between two components: attrition (those who leave teaching altogether); and migration (those who move to teaching jobs in other schools). “Teachers who leave because of job satisfaction most often link their departure to low salaries” (Ingersoll, 2003, p.150).

Additionally, the research data suggested that the roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within schools and districts (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). Mary Ellen Elia, Superintendent of the School District of Hillsborough County was recently quoted in the St. Petersburg Times as saying: “We’ve got a lot of work to do. Better pay, without other improvements, won’t suffice. We must give our teachers the tools and support they need. And, we should remember to show our appreciation.” This statement is backed by a large body of research. The research suggested that employees who felt welcome in their environment form relationships that will tie them to the organization for years to come. Teachers are just like any other type of employee, they want to feel welcome, and they want to feel like they belong. The environmental factors that enabled students to learn: structure, consistency, support, and the freedom to take risks, were the same environmental factors that teachers and principals need to teach, learn, and grow. A school that exists entirely in a crisis mode might fail to provide the necessary supportive environment, which can hinder students’ learning and eventually drive teachers away.

Ingersoll reports that demand for teachers has increased and many schools have had hiring difficulties, however the data do not show that there is overall an insufficient supply of teachers being produced. For example, the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Supply (IPEDS), at the end of the 1999 academic year there were over 220,000 new recipients of education degrees, but in 1999, approximately 160,000 of those graduates were new teachers with initial licenses, yet the SASS data show that only about 86,000 of those hired for the upcoming school year were hired from this group. Conversely, schools are able to recruit enough teachers each year, however, are unable to retain them. Ingersoll likens this to pouring water in a bucket full of holes. Previously stated, Ingersoll’s data supports that 64% of the leavers do so because of low pay.

“Recruitment and other supply-side solutions may not only fail to solve the problem but could also make the situation worse. If recruitment strategies involve lowering teacher standards, or if the effect of increasing teacher supply is to deflate salaries or to erode working conditions, then these measures may simply exacerbate the root factors behind school staffing problems” (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003).

Increasing salaries is the easiest and best solution to reduce the teacher turnover problems. However, from an economic policy perspective, this may not always be best. Increasing overall salaries nationally is going to impact our economy given the sheer size of the occupation. Ingersoll’s research supports the idea that school staffing problems are not due to teacher shortages, in the sense of an insufficient supply of qualified teachers, but rather from the “revolving door” effect; high turnover as a result of the *movers* (teacher migration: those who move to teaching jobs in other schools) and the *leavers* (teacher attrition: those who leave the teaching occupation altogether). Ingersoll says that most studies and statistics do not take into account the movers, but only the leavers. This will also contribute to the belief that the teaching profession is facing a critical supply problem.

Research data suggests that the roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within the schools and districts (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). According to Ingersoll and Smith, “the working conditions identified by new teachers were factors in their decision to leave teaching: lack of administrative support, poor student discipline and student motivation, lack of participation in decision making, may offer a more effective focus for improvement efforts” (2003, p. 33). Previously reported data supports that 64% of those leaving the profession do so due to low pay. Ingersoll and Smith’s research suggested that employees who feel welcome in their environment form relationships that would tie them to the organization for years to come. The environmental factor that enabled students to learn, structure, consistency, support, and the freedom to take risks, made up the same environment that teachers and principals need to teach, learn and grow. A school that exists entirely in crisis mode

fails to provide the necessary supportive environment, which hinders students' learning and eventually drives teachers away.

Supporting the belief that 64% of those leaving the profession, the National Education Association conducted a study to determine whether teacher salaries had kept up with inflation. They found the following:

- teachers are losing spending power for themselves as inflation outpaced increases in teacher salaries for several years running
- teacher salaries, which rose 2.3 percent to \$47,808 in 2005, failed to keep pace with the nation's 3.1 percent increase in inflation during the same year
- average teacher salaries actually declined in three states – Maine, West Virginia, and Alabama
- education revenue increased 4.1 percent in 2005
- education expenditures rose 4.7 percent in 2005

Additionally, the study found that in 41 states and the District of Columbia teachers saw decreases in their spending power as a result of "rising inflationary costs and in three of these states – Maine, West Virginia and Alabama – average teacher salaries dropped below the previous year's level" (NEA, 2005). It has been stated that "Public education in America must raise teacher salaries at a rate faster than inflation in order to attract and retain the quality teaching force necessary to remain competitive in the global marketplace, as well as to maintain a high functioning society" (NEA, 2005). In a summary report for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), research shows teacher retention has become a national crisis. Moreover, "teacher turnover is now undermining teaching quality and it is driving teacher shortages" (NCTAF, 2003). As previously stated, during the 1999 academic year there were over 220,000 new recipients of education degrees, but Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data show that only about 86,000 of those hired for the upcoming school year were hired from this group. Additionally, the survey found that "in 1999-2000, the nation's schools hired 232,000 teachers who had not been teaching the year before (i.e., new and reentering teachers, not just those changing schools). But one year later, the schools lost more than 287,000 teachers – 55,000 more than had been hired." At this rate it is no wonder school districts believe that there is a shortage of teachers.

The prevailing practice is to attempt to increase the supply of teachers. Several studies conducted by Ingersoll point out that "the conventional wisdom on teacher shortages, although partly correct, also errs in important ways" (2003, p.147). Thus, school districts need to broaden their focus, instead of only worrying about attracting new teachers, the need to take measures to ensure that they keep the teachers they have.

An important point to note is the critical shortages of teachers in specific positions, such as working students who have a disability and those who come to the United States with a language other than English being their primary communication mode (Mujtaba and Mujtaba, 2004). There are actual teacher shortages existing in special education, math, the sciences, English as a Second Language, and some foreign languages like Spanish, according to the American Association for Employment in Education. The following depict the 10 most critical shortage areas in districts across the United States: multicategorical special education, including severe/profound, mild/moderate, emotional/behavioral, learning disabilities, and mental retardation disabilities education, math, physics, chemistry, and bilingual education.

The United States Department of Education annually publishes a nationwide list of designated Teacher Shortage Areas that qualify the teacher for such incentives as loan-forgiveness, affordable housing programs and the like. Compounding this subject area teacher shortage, consider the following. High-poverty public schools suffer from a higher turnover rate than do their more affluent counterparts. Urban schools have a slightly higher turnover rate than do suburban and rural public schools. The School District of Hillsborough County has schools that fall in each of the demographic areas mentioned. Private schools across the nation typically have lower salaries than those of the public school system, and therefore have higher turnover than public schools. One anomaly is that of the large private school. Their turnover rate has the lowest average of 13.5%, while smaller private schools have the highest average turnover rate: about 22%. These data raise the questions of why does teaching have such a high turnover rate, and why such difference among school types.

According to the supply and demand theories, “where the quantity of teachers demanded is greater than that supplied, there are two basic policy remedies: increasing the quantity supplied or decreasing the quantity demanded” (Ingersoll, 2003). Empirical data shows that recruitment programs are not enough. Teacher supply strategies will never be able to keep up with the hemorrhage rate of turnover. School districts across the nation are left with no choice but to give equal importance to teacher retention programs. “The number of teachers required in a district depends largely on K-12 enrollment growth patterns, the pace of teacher retirement and attrition, and desired teacher-student ratios. Other factors, such as high immigration rates within the population or policies on reducing class size, also contribute to the demand for new teachers” (Yasin, 1998).

METHODOLOGY, DATA AND ASSUMPTIONS

A study of relevant literature was conducted to determine what impact, if any, do higher teacher salaries have on turnover rates. Table 1 depicts the average salaries of public school teachers during the 2004-2005 school year.

The American Association of Employment in Education reports “surpluses of teachers in most fields in the northwestern, Rocky Mountain, northeastern, and Middle Atlantic states, alongside shortages in the West and South. Thus, of the 10 highest paying districts, they are all experiencing teacher surpluses. A look at the lowest 10 paying districts as depicted in Table 2 supports the American Association of Employment in Education’s report of teacher shortages in the West and South.

Table 1 – Top 10 Salaries

Rank	State	Salary
1	Connecticut	58,688
2	District of Columbia	58,456
3	California	57,876
4	Michigan	56,973
5	New Jersey	56,682
6	New York	56,200
7	Illinois	55,629
8	Massachusetts	54,325
9	Rhode Island	53,473
10	Pennsylvania	53,258
32	Florida	41,587

Table 2 - Lowest Paid Salaries

Rank	State	Salary
51	South Dakota	34,040
50	North Dakota	36,449
49	Mississippi	36,590
48	Oklahoma	37,879
47	Alabama	38,186
46	West Virginia	38,360
45	Montana	38,485
44	Louisiana	38,880
43	Missouri	38,971
42	Kansas	39,175

The National Education Association points out the following deficiencies regarding teacher pay:

- Weekly wages for all teachers have fallen behind comparably skilled workers by 11.5% and even more – 13% for female teachers.
- Teachers get less premium pay, less paid leave, and fewer wage bonuses than professionals with similar skills.
- Teachers receive somewhat better health and pension benefits than other professionals, these benefits are partly offset by lower employer payroll taxes because some teachers are not in the Social Security system.
- When compared with workers in 16 professions requiring similar skills, teachers earned \$116 less per week in 2002, a wage disadvantage of 12.2%.
- Because teachers worked more hours per week, the hourly wage disadvantage is even larger, 14.1%.

The National Education Association has undertaken the initiative to have all new teachers earn a minimum of \$40,000 annually, affectionately known as “\$40K-Right Away!”

Table 3, interestingly enough, depicts the 10 largest school districts in the United States in 2004. Four of them; New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Hawaii have teacher surpluses, while the remaining six; Los Angeles, Clark County, Nevada, Houston as well as the Florida counties of Miami-Dade, Broward and Hillsborough are all experiencing teacher shortages.

Table 3 – Largest School Districts

Rank	District	Enrollment
1	New York City	1,063,609
2	Los Angeles	746,610
3	Chicago	438,589
4	Miami-Dade County, FL	362,319
5	Broward County, FL	271,339
6	Clark County, Nev.	267,894
7	Houston	212,099
8	Philadelphia	211,003
9	Hawaii	182,434
10	Hillsborough County, FL	179,466

In 2005, Hawaii and Hillsborough County, FL, swapped rankings, when Hawaii’s enrollment remained the same, and Hillsborough County, FL swelled to 190,000 students enrolled.

The United States Department of Education estimates that teacher turnover averages about 20% nationwide. Consequently, individual data are unavailable by district. They do however warn that turnover is highest where teacher pay is the lowest. Teacher compensation is a considerable deterrent to recruitment. Moreover, the National Education Association warns its members “the published national average salary, although useful as a benchmark statistic, hides vast differences among states, with statewide averages likewise clouding significant local variations.” However, they do not explain that some districts whose salaries look somewhat inflated when compared to other districts have allowed for a cost of living adjustment.

The data suggest that the teacher supply shortage stems from the fact that they are due to people unwilling to work at the salaries and working conditions offered in specific locations. Hammond states “contrary to popular perceptions, the United States has many more prepared and certified teachers than it has jobs for those teachers. In California, for example, about 1.3 million credentialed teachers compete for about 280,000 teaching positions....despite this oversupply, California has more than 40,000 teachers with emergency credentials and waivers, a number that has increased each of the last three years.” The National Education Association cautions

that there are truly shortages in specific teaching disciplines such as math, sciences, special education and bilingual education, but there are also surpluses in elementary education, English, social studies, and physical education. School districts should offer “agreement to earn” programs that would allow an employee with a certification area that falls in the surplus area to train for another teaching position in a shortage area. A sort of “grow-your-own” program if you will.

Additionally, the data supports the idea of raising teacher salaries as an effective way of curtailing shortages. However, given the enormous size of the occupation, this would have serious financial impediments to states struggling to stretch their budgets. “Public education in America must raise teacher salaries at a rate faster than inflation in order to attract and retain the quality teaching force necessary to remain competitive in the global marketplace, as well as to maintain a high functioning society,” says Reg Weaver, president of the National Education Association. Conversely, there is a large body of research that cites such issues as poor working conditions, lack of support, bureaucracy, weak financial incentives and growing job demands as reasons teachers leave the profession (Mujtaba and Preziosi, 2006). However, a large amount of the research found turnover to be reduced not by increasing salary alone, but by also increasing support from school administrators, providing ample supplies, pairing new teachers with mentors and improving overall working conditions.

Programs such as “Troops-to-Teachers” and alternative certification do attract new employees, as do financial incentives such as signing bonuses, federal student loan forgiveness, housing assistance and tuition reimbursement. However, the data supports that while we certainly hire enough employees each year, it’s those that are leaving that are causing the perception of a teacher shortage. Rotherman (2003) has said the following regarding raising teacher salaries:

Overall salary increases alone are better rhetoric than policy. That’s because even when state and national coffers are flush, there simply is not enough money to raise all salaries a sufficient amount to make hard-to-fill positions attractive. Moreover, fiscal constraints aside, across-the-board raises do nothing to address the differentials between more and less challenging schools or among various subject areas. Such raises also assume that all teachers are equally deserving of substantial pay increases.

Wender (2002) summed up the topic of teacher salaries as they relate to turnover and across the board salary increases.

From an economic standpoint, the only general question relevant to teachers’ pay is: what mix of salary, benefits, and other job dimensions are necessary to hire competent individual teachers? Since these vary across states, school districts, schools, and teachers’ talents and competencies, there is no rational one-size-fits-all answer.

SUMMARY

According to many educators, there is a widely-held belief that they are facing a critical shortage of teachers, primarily due to increases in the retirement of baby boomers and student enrollments. However, others contend that there is an ample supply of teachers to not only meet, but exceed the demand. This paper explored possible solutions that address the teacher supply challenges. As stated before, the teacher supply and demand are determined by and influenced by a number of diverse factors. For example, the *supply* of qualified teachers are not necessarily influenced by compensation but rather it tends to heavily depend on how many people actually complete the requirements for a teaching degree in the United States, the number of out-of-state hires, and the number of people that transfer teaching positions within the state. Furthermore, it is stated that the *demand* for teachers in the United States is determined by and heavily influenced by student enrollment in each location, teacher-to-pupil classroom ratios in the classroom, and attrition for both retirement and non-retirement reasons in current as well as prospective years.

The problem faced by school districts across the United States is the misconception that they are facing a teacher shortage. However, many schools are facing huge teacher turnover problems. It is mentioned in this paper that the teaching occupation suffers from chronic and relatively high annual turnover compared to many other

occupations. Therefore, keeping good teachers should be one of the most important agenda items for any school administrator. A growing body of evidence indicates that teachers who lack initial preparation were more likely to leave the profession. Mujtaba (2007) recommends effective and standardized mentoring program for all new faculty members once they are hired. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the administrators to find, recruit and retain qualified diverse teachers through effective mentoring and development programs if they are to decrease the teacher turnover problem (Mujtaba and Mujtaba, 2004). Overall, the educational leaders and administrators along with their teachers must work together in an extraordinary manner to alleviate the challenges associated with the teacher shortage concern.

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NOTES