
Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding research on how long teachers typically teach and why they leave the teaching profession. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

Question: *What does research show is the driving factor(s) for teachers leaving the teaching profession? What is the average time (number of years) a teacher stays in the teaching profession before leaving?*

Key words and search strings used in the search: *teacher AND attrition; teacher attrition AND elementary OR middle school; teacher attrition AND purpose OR reason; average years AND teaching profession*

Search databases and websites:

1. ERIC: <http://eric.ed.gov/>
2. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch>
3. Google Scholar: www.google.com/scholar
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
5. What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Citations Retrieved: (NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy):

Boe, E. E., Cook, L. H., & Sunderland, R. J. (2008). Teacher turnover: Examining exit attrition, teaching area transfer, and school migration. *Exceptional Children*, 75(1), 7-31.
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ842524>

Abstract/Summary: The purposes of this research were to quantify trends in three components of teacher turnover and to investigate claims of excessive teacher turnover as the predominant source of teacher shortages. Attrition and teaching area transfer rates were comparable in special and general education and increased substantially from 1991-1992 to 2000-2001. School migration was stable over years, but higher in special than general education. Although annual turnover was high and increased to 1 in 4 teachers (25.6%) by 2000-2001, teacher attrition was lower than in

other occupations. Evidence suggests that retention is unlikely to increase without dramatic improvements in the organization, management, and funding of public schools. Until then, an increased supply of qualified teachers is needed to reduce teacher shortages.

Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(3), 367-409.
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ896364>

Abstract/Summary: This comprehensive meta-analysis on teacher career trajectories, consisting of 34 studies of 63 attrition moderators, seeks to understand why teaching attrition occurs, or what factors moderate attrition outcomes. Personal characteristics of teachers are important predictors of turnover. Attributes of teachers' schools, including organizational characteristics, student body composition, and resources (instructional spending and teacher salaries), are also key moderators. The evidence suggests that attrition from teaching is (a) not necessarily "healthy" turnover, (b) influenced by various personal and professional factors that change across teachers' career paths, (c) more strongly moderated by characteristics of teachers' work conditions than previously noted in the literature, and (d) a problem that can be addressed through policies and initiatives. Though researchers have utilized a number of national and state databases and have applied economic labor theory to questions related to teacher attrition, the authors argue that better longitudinal data on teacher career paths and more nuanced theories are needed.

Goldring, R., Taie, S., & Riddles, M. (2014). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2012-13 teacher follow-up survey. First look.* NCES 2014-077 National Center for Education Statistics. P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED546773>

Abstract/Summary: This report presents selected findings from the Current Teacher and Former Teacher Data Files of the 2012-13 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). TFS is a nationally representative sample survey of public and private school K-12 teachers who participated in the previous year's Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). First fielded in school year 1988-89, TFS was designed as a component of SASS and was sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of SASS is to collect information that can provide a detailed picture of U.S. elementary and secondary schools and their staff. This information is collected through questionnaires sent to districts, schools, principals, teachers, and library media centers. Information from all of the surveys can be linked. The purpose of this First Look is to introduce new data through the presentation of tables containing descriptive information. Selected findings chosen for this report demonstrate the range of information available on the 2012-13 TFS data files. The tables in this report contain counts and percentages demonstrating bivariate associations. All of the results have been weighted to reflect the sample design and to account for nonresponse

and other adjustments. Comparisons drawn in the selected findings have been tested for statistical significance at the 0.05 level using Student's t statistics to ensure that the differences are larger than those that might be expected due to sampling variation. No adjustments were made for multiple comparisons. Many of the variables examined are related to one another, and complex interactions and relationships have not been explored. Statistical Analysis Software (SAS 9.3) and SUDAAN (11.0) were used to compute the statistics for this report. Appended are (1) Standard Error Tables; (2) Methodology and Technical Notes; and (3) Description of Variables.

Greiner, C.S., & Smith, B. (2009). Analyses of selected specific variables and teacher attrition. *Education*, 129(4), 579-583 <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ871606>

Abstract/Summary: The purpose of this study was to examine the possible relationship between selected variables and teacher attrition. Data were analyzed to determine if a relationship did exist between the selected variables and teacher attrition: standardized reading proficiency scores, undergraduate grade point average, gender, and ethnicity. The variables selected confirmed the findings of previous studies showing no significant relationship between such variables and teacher attrition. Studies do suggest that whether teachers remain in the profession or not depends on many external factors, such as views of teacher education training and confidence in preparedness for entry into the classroom. (Contains 1 table.)

Ingle, W. K. (2009). Teacher quality and attrition in a US school district. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(5), 557-585. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ857628>

Abstract/Summary: The purpose of this paper is to determine whether teachers with high value-added scores (as a measure of teacher quality) stay or left test grades and subjects in a medium-sized school district. Design/methodology/approach: Panel data for this paper encompass teachers providing math and reading instruction and link to individual students in grades 3-10 from a single Florida school district (2000-2001 to 2004-2005). Value-added modeling is used to estimate a measure of teacher quality, which is entered into binomial logistic regression models. This paper finds a negative relationship between reading teachers' value-added scores and attrition (p less than 0.05): a finding consistent with the few that have examined the relationship between value added and teacher attrition. A significant relationship is not found between math value added and attrition. There is also no significant relationship between value added and transferring. Secondary and alternatively certified teachers are more likely to exit tested grades/subjects. Classroom percentages of students enrolled in the free/reduced lunch program (a proxy for poverty) are associated with leaving among math and reading teachers. Practical implications include: Not all turnover is negative. Evidence from this paper suggests that schools are not losing the best teachers from tested subjects and grades: those in which schools and school leaders are held accountable. While there are costs associated with turnover, it can serve as an important matching function between workers and employers. Only a few published studies have utilized value-added

scores as the measure of teacher quality and tested their relationship with teacher attrition

Lochmiller, C. R., Sugimoto, T. J., & Muller, P. A. (2016). *Teacher retention, mobility, and attrition in Kentucky public schools from 2008 to 2012* (REL 2016–116). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Abstract/Summary: The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the rates of retention, mobility, and attrition for classroom teachers in Kentucky public schools, as well as how those rates might vary by various teacher and school characteristics. The study looks at retention, defined as teachers returning to their same classroom (“stayers”); mobility, when teachers change schools within the school system (“movers”); and attrition, when teachers leave the system (“leavers”) from one year to the next. The study used data on teachers collected by the Kentucky Center for Education & Workforce Statistics on every teacher employed in PK–12 public schools in academic years 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12. Data on schools were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. The study found that the Kentucky teacher workforce was largely stable across the study period (2008–2012). Most teachers (85.6 percent, on average) stayed in the same school from one year to the next, 6.0 percent moved to a different school, and 8.4 percent left the public school system. The study revealed some variation in rates based on select teacher and school characteristics. In particular, teachers with the fewest years of experience, teachers in urban schools, and teachers in schools where more students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch were retained at the lowest rates.

Referrals

Organizations:

- Center on Great Teachers & Leaders: <http://www.gtlcenter.org/>
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Federally Funded Resources:

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES), public search engine available at: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Disclaimer:

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