

How Are States Responding to the Issue of Teacher Recruitment and Retention, and What More Needs to Be Done?

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The issue of teacher recruitment and retention has received a great deal of national attention over the past five to ten years. With the pending retirement of the “baby boom” generation and the forecast of needing over two million new teachers in this decade (Hussar 1998), the issue is clearly on the radar screen for school districts, state departments of education, and policy makers. Further exacerbating this concern is the requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the recent revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for highly qualified teachers for every student in America’s schools. As with any issue of this magnitude, an examination of the extent of the problem and the actions being taken to address it is in order.

What Do We Know about Recruitment and Retention?

There are a number of variables to consider regarding teacher recruitment and retention. In a national survey of K–12 public school teachers, 40 percent did not expect to be teaching in the next five years (National Center for Education Information 2005). In one recent research study on the issue of teacher supply and retention, Ingersoll (2003) found that the data do not indicate that there is an insufficient supply except in selected fields. Additionally, he found the following:

- Many schools—especially secondary schools—with available teaching positions have difficulty filling those positions.

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- The number of teacher education degree recipients who actually go into teaching is low—only 42 percent were teaching after one year out of college, and only 58 percent were teaching after four years out of college (7).
- The degree of supply problems has greater variance within states than between states.
- Nationwide data suggest that between 40 and 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within five years.
- Teacher turnover rates have been relatively constant.
- Teacher supply issues are more associated with teacher turnover than with increased student enrollment and teacher retirement.
- High poverty schools have greater turnover than more affluent schools, and urban schools have slightly greater turnover than suburban and rural schools.
- The largest proportion of teacher turnover is due to personal reasons, dissatisfaction with the job, or desire to seek a better job or other career.

Ingersoll concluded by saying that “the data suggest that school staffing problems are rooted in the way schools are organized and the way the teaching occupation is treated and that lasting improvements in the quality and quantity of the teaching workforce will require improvements in the quality of the teaching job” (18).

Data on Kansas teachers are similar to some of the findings by the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) and Ingersoll. Approximately half of those who receive Kansas teacher licenses annually are actually employed in the schools, and approximately 40 percent of teachers leave teaching after the first six years of practice (Kansas State Department of Education 2005). Further, approximately 36 percent of Kansas teachers are eligible for retirement in the next five years. The list of teaching vacancies still open as of August 1 of each year has been relatively stable, with openings usually in secondary fields and special education.

What Should Be Done to Address Recruitment and Retention?

Those who have studied the issue of teacher recruitment and retention have a number of suggestions for addressing the problem. Based on data from teachers, Ingersoll (2003) made several suggestions for improvement, which

involved increasing salaries, reducing student discipline problems, and giving teachers a greater role in decision making. He also reported on data related to the impact of mentoring and induction programs on teacher turnover. The results indicate that new-teacher turnover was greatly reduced, as much as 50 percent, through participation in mentoring and induction programs. This seems to be a significant finding, especially in relation to his determination that one of the biggest issues of teacher supply is turnover.

In a review of issues related to recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools, Berry (2004) notes that “salary increases alone are insufficient to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools” (13). He summarizes the following as other important initiatives to address this problem:

- Recruit from a larger pool of traditional and nontraditional candidates
- Provide strong induction and mentoring programs
- Provide a supportive principal
- Provide opportunities for leadership
- Provide opportunities to influence decision making
- Provide more time to learn from colleagues
- Provide the chance to work closely with fewer numbers of students and their families
- Improve research by the federal government

The National Education Association (2003) recommends several strategies for addressing teacher recruitment and retention. Specific recruitment strategies include the following:

- Develop a comprehensive recruitment plan
- Develop a strong marketing and outreach campaign
- Improve the hiring process
- Provide nontraditional routes into the profession
- Provide financial incentives (3)

Specific retention strategies include the following:

- Prepare teachers adequately
- Nurture new teachers
- Improve the working environment
- Provide financial incentives (21)

How Are States Addressing Recruitment and Retention?

Clearly, trends are emerging both in the data on recruitment and retention and in a set of common recommendations for addressing the issue. In order to understand what states are currently doing about teacher recruitment and retention, chief state-school officers were surveyed by email in the fall of 2005 and asked the following open-ended questions:

1. What actions has your state taken to improve teacher recruitment? Which of these have been particularly effective?
2. What actions has your state taken to improve teacher retention? Which of these have been particularly effective?

Responses were received from twenty-one states and one territory. The responses indicated a wide variance in the level of state involvement in addressing the issue but a number of common approaches. Only one state indicated a program that had been particularly effective.

Recruitment

The four major areas in which states identified initiatives for recruitment are as follows:

1. Salary, bonuses, and other financial incentives
2. Targeted recruiting using scholarships, alternative licensing, and increased portability options
3. Ways to connect prospective candidates to districts
4. Other initiatives unique to a particular state

In the area of salaries, bonuses, and other financial incentives, the major state efforts were targeted to increasing overall teacher salaries and offering bonuses to teach in hard-to-staff schools or in high-need fields. One state offered relocation expenses to teachers willing to move to hard-to-staff schools and provided affordable housing or housing assistance.

Targeted recruiting efforts included a number of initiatives. Many states offered scholarships to prospective teachers who were minority candidates, willing to teach in either hard-to-staff schools or high-need fields. Some states implemented active recruitment efforts for high school students through programs such as Future Teachers of America. Other types of targeted recruitment programs included Troops to Teachers and Teach for America. Several states specifically targeted noncertified employees such as paraprofessionals and provided “grow your own” programs to help these people become fully licensed. Some states created Transition to Teaching

programs with help from the federal government to attract professionals from other careers who wanted a second career in teaching. In addition, several states supported efforts to provide greater flexibility for retired teachers to return to teaching within the state without loss of retirement benefits.

In order to make some of these targeted recruiting efforts possible, some states passed alternative licensing regulations to assist nontraditional and second-career candidates in entering the field. Also, some states have entered into agreements with other states to provide greater portability of licenses and have changed state regulations to recognize out-of-state licenses. One state reported that it had developed a system to improve international reciprocity for educators.

The major initiative used by states to assist prospective candidates in connecting to school districts was a Web-based job-listing system. A few states hosted job fairs and actively assisted districts in their recruitment efforts.

Other recruitment tools tended to be unique to the focus of a particular state. For example, a few states developed an entire department either within the state department or under its direction that had specific responsibilities for teacher recruitment and retention in the state. One state developed charter education colleges to assist with increasing the supply of available candidates. A few states reported the development of an annual report to increase public attention to the needs of the state. One state indicated that one of its most successful efforts was the development of a state accountability report for institutions of higher education in the business of teacher preparation. Another state has planned a national public-relations campaign to aid in its teacher recruitment efforts.

Retention

The focus of retention efforts was also varied. The main initiatives indicated by those states responding to the survey related to salaries, salary supplements, career and performance pay plans, pay for additional training, induction and mentoring programs, recognition programs, improvement in standards for preparation programs, and better working conditions.

Even though states listed increased salaries as a recruitment strategy, several also listed it as a retention strategy. A few states have tried to change their salary systems to a career ladder type of approach, and at least one state created a system in which a school district received an extra amount per pupil for teachers' salaries if it revamped its compensation system to focus on a

career ladder, professional development goals, and bonuses based on student achievement. A number of states used salary supplements, such as additional pay for teachers working in hard-to-staff schools or in high-need fields, and for those who attain certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The Teacher Advancement Program—supported by the Milken Family Foundation—was also being used by a number of states but, at this point, was targeted to selected districts. In the area of pay for additional training, states continue to offer tuition reimbursement programs, and some noted that these have been added to meet the highly qualified requirement for NCLB. One state indicated that it has been hosting teacher renewal academies for experienced teachers.

Mentor programs were offered in many of the states that responded. Several states were fully funding these programs for up to two years. Others required districts to have mentor programs, and some noted that all mentoring programs had to be approved by the state. Induction programs were mentioned by only a few states, and in those cases, either the states required that a program be offered or the program had to be approved by the state. Several states listed teacher recognition programs as strategies for retention; both state-initiated and national programs were mentioned. Another area mentioned by several states was the improvement of teacher preparation programs. Included in these initiatives were improved standards and greater research on the success of preparation programs. A final initiative noted by a few states was the assessment of teacher working conditions. This type of assessment is currently being planned in Kansas by the governor and is fashioned after a similar assessment conducted in North Carolina.

How Do These Efforts Compare to the Suggested Strategies?

Most of the strategies suggested by Ingersoll, Berry, and the NEA are being addressed somewhere in the country. The only ones not present in the data from the respondents were related to reducing discipline problems, providing opportunities to influence decision making, providing more time to work with colleagues, and providing a chance to work individually with families and their children. Due to the local nature of these strategies, state officials may consider them to be local district responsibilities rather than state responsibilities. Additionally, states did not link leadership development to this issue, even though a number of states are currently participating in leadership development programs sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wallace Foundation.

How Should States Be Addressing Recruitment and Retention?

Before suggesting some ideas for states to consider in addressing the issue of teacher recruitment and retention, a few observations regarding local context are needed. These observations have resulted from serving nine years as a chief state-school officer and becoming acquainted with those who lead state departments of education and the particular contextual issues that each of them face.

The first observation has to do with the culture of state policy in addressing educational issues. Some states have developed a more centralized policy structure for dealing with such issues as recruitment and retention and thus spend more time and resources on developing a statewide response. For example, and as noted previously, some states have created an entire department responsible for the recruitment and retention of teachers. Other states, especially those that have done little to address the issue on a statewide basis, see recruitment and retention as a matter for local school districts and institutions of higher education. These states have neither the political will nor the policy orientation to address these issues.

The second observation is related to each state's history in the preparation of teachers. Some states have traditionally been importers of teachers. Often these states have a growing population and need to recruit large numbers of teachers each year. Other states have traditionally been exporters of teachers. These states have generally overproduced the number of teachers needed by the system in the state, especially for the elementary school level. The emergence of improved data systems and the public reporting of these data seem to be a clear response to help the general public and the policy community begin to understand the extent of the local problem.

Consideration of these options is necessary as suggestions for what states should be doing are developed. However, regardless of the state's policy inclination, the requirements of NCLB and IDEA will bring a new focus to the issue of teacher recruitment and retention, since states must include in the report card for schools an accounting of how many teachers are highly qualified. For example, Kansas has been one of the states that has traditionally been an exporter of teachers and has had no policy-maker interest in providing statewide solutions to the problem of teacher recruitment and retention. Its only real policy initiative in this regard has been funding for a teacher mentoring program, which has received only intermittent funding. Kansas has

also had a good track record of having fully licensed teachers in classrooms, approximately 94–95 percent. However, with the new requirements of NCLB and IDEA, even this record is not good enough.

So what is a state to do? First, it appears that many of the ideas previously suggested by those who have studied the issue are being implemented in some places throughout the nation. However, comprehensive approaches to the problem of recruitment and retention are few. Therefore, the most obvious step that states should take to address the issue is to develop a comprehensive strategy. This strategy should include a review of the status of the state in terms of the literature and research on the subject, a long-term plan for increasing public and policy-maker awareness of the issue, and a set of specific objectives with measurable outcomes that can be reported publicly.

The second suggestion would be to focus as much effort as possible on reducing teacher turnover. Clearly, the solution to the teacher shortage issue is not “either or” but “both and.” A state needs both recruitment strategies and retention strategies, and based on the findings from the Ingersoll (2003) study, more emphasis needs to be placed on keeping teachers in the profession. These strategies must involve knowing how many teachers are leaving the profession and the reasons why they are doing so, with specific objectives to address each cause. They must also have a strong focus on mentoring and induction programs, with a research agenda that helps account for changes in retention.

One long-term strategy that is easy to suggest but hard to implement is to substantially increase teachers’ salaries. There are many researchers willing to find fault with this strategy, claiming that paying teachers more does not necessarily raise student achievement. This is true if the only measure for a long-term commitment is in the short-term gains of students on a single academic proficiency test. However, if this strategy could be viewed by the public as a commitment to doing “the right thing,” a way to make the teaching profession both one that has the potential to attract a larger pool of talented people and one that parents would encourage their own child to pursue, then this might begin to garner public sentiment for change and would certainly raise the status of the teaching profession over time. A commitment of this type will take a great deal of political will and a cadre of servant leaders who understand that the calling of great leaders is not just to solve problems but to be good ancestors and build for the next generation.

A final suggestion that should be considered is the utilization of the voices of all segments of the community—including the business community—to support these efforts. A marketing strategy that includes a long-term

commitment must entail an emphasis on what is valued by the people. The bringing together of all segments that constitute the culture of a community and state helps mold a vision of a preferred future into the very fiber of the citizenry.

Ron Edmonds, founder of Effective Schools Movement, believed, “We can, whenever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far” (1979, 23). An appropriate closing challenge to the states in addressing the issue of teacher recruitment and retention could be best offered through a modification of this great sentiment: We can, whenever we choose, successfully recruit and retain highly qualified teachers to teach those children in the United States whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.

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