



Teacher Effectiveness, Mobility, and Attrition in Florida: A Descriptive Analysis

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In “Teacher Effectiveness, Mobility, and Attrition in Florida: A Descriptive Analysis”—a paper presented at the February 2008 National Center on Performance Incentives research to policy conference—Martin West of Brown University and co-author Matthew Chingos of Harvard University address the topic of teacher effectiveness in Florida. More specifically, they examine how teacher effectiveness is related to teacher mobility and attrition between the 2001-02 and 2005-06 school years, and find that the most effective teachers are not disproportionately leaving their initial job postings, but are slightly more prone to exit the state’s teaching workforce.

Teacher Effectiveness and Mobility

While there has been substantial research studying the factors that influence teachers’ career decisions, there is far less literature on the relationship between teacher effectiveness, mobility, and attrition. The studies that have examined this relationship find that there is a positive relationship between effectiveness and retention; that is, more effective teachers, on average, stay in the profession longer.

Previous research indicates there is a preference among teachers to work in schools with more advantaged students and better working conditions. Additionally, there is some evidence that the prospect of better compensation motivates teachers’ workplace preferences. Teacher mobility between schools may

not be a bad thing if it results in teachers self-sorting into schools where they will personally be most effective. Unfortunately, they may also sort themselves out of schools with the greatest need for high-quality teachers.

Teacher quality plays a critical role in determining student achievement outcomes, but the distribution of high-quality teachers varies substantially within states, districts, and even within individual schools. Consequently, there has been an increased interest among education researchers and policy makers about strategies for improving teacher quality within all schools and retaining the best teachers in the workforce.

Existing Policy in Florida

Some public schools in Florida, particularly those with the highest-achieving students, already successfully retain their most effective teachers. The demand for public-school teachers has substantially increased in Florida in recent years, resulting from legislative pressures and a notable population increase. Legislation passed in 2002 placed caps on class size which must be achieved by the 2010-11 school year. This demand has driven the need for more teachers.

In response to this legislation, two alternative certification programs have been introduced in Florida. Policy makers have also made efforts to recruit out-of-state teachers and to encourage military personnel

and their spouses to enter the teaching profession. These initiatives have not sufficiently met the state's demand for more public school teachers.

In addition, Florida has passed two pieces of legislation requiring public-school districts to implement performance-based pay plans in hopes of retaining high-performing teachers and improving the performance of less-effective teachers. Teachers are eligible for salary bonuses based on their students' academic progress. Under Florida's School Recognition Program, classroom teachers are eligible for bonuses of less than \$1,000 per year, and most state funds are distributed equally among teachers and staff in a school rather than in the form of individualized bonus awards. Rarely are these bonuses targeted on the recruitment or retention of teachers in hard-to-staff schools and subjects.

Other bonus awards are available for teachers who earn National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification or whose students pass Advanced Placement tests. However, beginning teachers or those who teach elementary grades often find themselves ineligible for these bonuses.

Research Findings

West and Chingos' study advances the body of research on the relationship between teacher effectiveness and mobility by tracking the mobility and attrition of public-school teachers across an entire state over multiple school years. For this analysis, they measure teacher quality as the effect a teacher has on student test scores, and they specifically examine the kinds of schools that do a better job retaining their

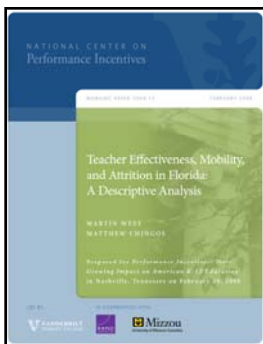
highest-performing teachers. They also study what happens to lower-performing teachers.

West and Chingos find that, during the first three years in the teaching profession, the most effective teachers are more likely to stay in their initial school posting than are lower-performing teachers. However, roughly 60 percent of the top-third of teachers in Florida remained in the state's public school system after five years, compared to just over 65 percent of lower-performing teachers. Although weaker teachers are more likely to leave their original school, they often find jobs elsewhere within the state's public schools.

Conclusion

West and Chingos conclude that schools can raise student achievement by implementing targeted policies that keep the highest-performing teachers in the classroom. Reducing overall attrition is not necessarily the best solution. High attrition among low-performing teachers can be beneficial. Future policy should strategically shape attrition rates so as to retain highly effective public school teachers, improve the performance of lower-performing teachers, and encourage chronically low-performing teachers to exit the profession.

Learning which factors influence the retention of high-performing teachers is paramount for achieving these goals. Furthermore, policies that combine performance-based pay with retention bonuses merit consideration as a means of improving the quality and distribution of teachers in Florida's public schools.



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