

Teacher Perceptions of the Causes and Effects of Attrition

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine causes of the phenomenon of teacher attrition and its impact on schools. Evaluating perceptions of why teachers leave the profession as well as understanding the impact of teacher attrition may help school systems better retain high-quality teachers. Based upon a review of literature about the impact of attrition on schools, the researcher developed a survey for teachers to rate the degree to which they felt factors included in nine survey items contributed to attrition and the degree to which they felt factors included in seven survey items were impacted by attrition. Descriptive analyses of teacher perceptions related to attrition were computed and comparisons of results obtained through analyses of variance were made to determine if the mean ratings were statistically equivalent across the survey items reflecting first the reasons for and then the impact of attrition. Results indicated that the survey items were not perceived as equally important in terms of contributing to or the degree to which they are impacted by attrition. A major finding of the study is that one of the major reasons teachers leave the profession is their perception of receiving inadequate pay for the job. However, salary limitations are not the only cause for teacher attrition. Heavy workloads and lack of support from parents and administrators also were rated as contributors to attrition. More research to determine how teachers' perceptions can best inform policy to reduce teacher attrition is warranted.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Of concern to educators throughout the nation is the issue of teacher attrition. Both educational leaders and researchers are seeking to learn what keeps some individuals in teaching while others leave. They need more information about what can be done to increase the number of teachers staying in the profession and create a steady, qualified teaching force in any district. Understanding how schools and school districts hire teachers and use their resources, including faculty, would shed light on the reasons for and impact of teacher attrition. Some researchers note, "The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it...The ability to create and maintain a quality teaching and learning environment in a school is limited not by teacher supply, but by high turnover among the teachers who are already there" (NCTAF, 2003, p. 6).

This researcher became interested in the issue of teacher retention in her roles as an elementary and middle public school teacher. She observed that students in the schools with high teacher attrition rates appeared to have lower performance on measures of student achievement than students in schools that had consistent instructional guidance and leadership. She wished to learn more about how teacher turnover might affect student achievement. The goal of this research study was to examine the perceived causes and effects of the phenomenon of teacher attrition, many of which affect student achievement both directly and indirectly.

Statement of Problem

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) released *A Nation at Risk*, a report evaluating the condition of education in the United States (NCEE, 1983). Central to the report is the argument that the nation's educational system at that time was in a dire state and that inadequate student achievement was plaguing the nation. More specifically, students in the United States were falling far behind their international counterparts on standardized tests and immediate changes were suggested to remedy the crisis (NCEE, 1983).

Following the release of *A Nation at Risk*, evaluating the state of the teaching workforce has been a critical issue in evaluating the nation's educational system. Understanding the factors related to teacher attrition may be a major step toward reducing it and consequently, increasing student achievement. The financial and emotional cost of having to replace teaching staff on a frequent basis increases the challenges for schools already struggling with poor student achievement. Evaluating perceptions of why teachers leave the profession and their understanding of the impact of teacher attrition may help schools retain high-quality teachers and help create and maintain classroom and school learning environments that foster achievement.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1 and 2:

Descriptive analyses of teacher perceptions related to attrition were computed. Comparisons (via analyses of variance) were made to determine if the mean ratings were statistically equivalent across survey items reflecting the reasons for and the impact of

attrition. The comparisons also revealed if teachers viewed some effects of attrition as more or less important than others. The null hypotheses tested are presented below.

- a) Ratings of possible reasons that might contribute to teacher attrition will be statistically equivalent (nine items)

$$H_{01}: \text{mean } 1 = \text{mean } 2 = \text{mean } 3 = \text{mean } 4 = \text{mean } 5 = \text{mean } 6 = \text{mean } 7 = \\ \text{mean } 8 = \text{mean } 9$$

- b) Ratings of possible impacts of attrition will be statistically equivalent (seven items)

$$H_{02}: \text{mean } 1 = \text{mean } 2 = \text{mean } 3 = \text{mean } 4 = \text{mean } 5 = \text{mean } 6 = \text{mean } 7$$

Operational Definitions

This study investigated the relationship between teacher attrition and student achievement. For purposes of this study, the operational definitions presented below are used.

Teacher Attrition refers to teachers leaving the classroom to assume professional or other responsibilities, inside or outside of education.

Student Achievement refers to student performance in school (grades) and on assessments, such as the Maryland School Assessment (MSA).

Reasons for Attrition refer to perceived challenges or difficulties in teaching that would encourage teachers to leave the teaching profession.

Impacts of Attrition refers to the effects of teacher turnover on students, teachers, and schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review examines the relationship between teacher attrition and student achievement. Section one describes factors that compel teachers to leave the profession. Teachers play a significant role in educating and shaping the future of the nation. Understanding which teachers stay, leave, and move is crucial for determining how administrators can keep teachers returning to the classroom year after year. In section two, the researcher explores several factors related to student achievement. Section three examines the impact of teacher attrition rates on levels of student achievement. Other challenges and costs of teacher attrition also will be examined.

Understanding Teacher Attrition

“Currently, there are more than 3.5 million private and public school teachers in the United States, and by the year 2015, this number is expected to reach 4 million” (Good, 2008, p. 2). The No Child Left Behind Act requiring schools to staff all classrooms with “highly-qualified teachers,” creates a major challenge, especially for inner city and poor rural schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The problem does not lie in the number of teachers available; the nation’s colleges and universities prepare many more qualified teachers than are hired. The challenge is retaining the teachers that have been hired.

The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it...The ability to create and maintain a quality teaching and learning environment in a school is limited not by teacher

supply, but by high turnover among the teachers who are already there. (NCTAF, 2003, p. 6)

Hiring unqualified and underprepared replacements, who also leave teaching at very high rates, only further aggravates this high rate of teacher turnover. Thousands of unqualified individuals are in classrooms today to meet the needs of schools that are facing staffing shortages. But the real problem is that these schools are unable to retain a sufficient number of teachers with the proper experience and credentials (NCTAF, 2003).

Several factors influence and compel teachers to leave the profession. Many assume that retirement is the primary reason for teacher attrition, but when the facts are examined closely, it is clear that the number of teachers retiring from the profession is not a leading cause. “In an analysis of teacher turnover, teachers reported retirement as a reason for leaving less often than because of job dissatisfaction or to pursue another job” (AEE, 2005, p. 1). Many forces drive the issue of teacher attrition, including low salaries, job dissatisfaction, and level of experience.

Salaries

Many teachers did not join the profession because of the impressive salaries offered by their employers. However, research reported by Croasmun, Hampton, and Herrmann (1999) indicates that when faced with other challenges, salary can be a significant factor in a teacher’s decision to move to another district, assignment, or profession. Although teachers’ salaries have improved in recent decades, they remain low and are negatively affected by economic downturns and cuts in school budgets. Teachers often leave for higher paying jobs, considering teaching salaries are the lowest in comparison to salaries of similarly educated workers.

Job Dissatisfaction

Teachers' working conditions often are less than ideal. Teaching during the actual school hours consists primarily of instructing classrooms of students. Other teaching duties, such as planning, grading papers, collaborating with colleagues, conferencing with students and parents, and working with curriculum and assessments, usually are not part of the regular working day and must be accomplished outside of school hours. "No other nation requires teachers to teach more hours per week than the United States. Until working conditions improve, the U.S. is likely to continue to face a teacher attrition crisis" (Croasmun et al., 1999, p. 9). Among the factors that cause teachers to become dissatisfied with their jobs are long work hours, heavy workloads, lack of parent and administrative support, and lack of student discipline and motivation. "In one of the most dramatic findings of the report, teacher satisfaction has decreased by 15 points since the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* measured job satisfaction two years ago, now reaching the lowest levels of job satisfaction seen in the survey series in more than two decades" (MetLife, 2011, p. 5). This decline in teacher satisfaction is related to large increases in the number of teachers who indicate that they are likely to leave teaching for another occupation.

Level of Experience

One of the most important factors that can determine whether or not teachers continue to teach is how long they have been in the profession. Beginning teachers and very experienced teachers are most likely to leave the profession. Many new teachers find that they are unprepared for the reality of the classroom. Discipline problems, difficulties with parents, or lack of sufficient or appropriate teaching materials are among problems

experienced by beginning teachers. In addition, beginners often are given the most difficult teaching assignments.

First year teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than their more experienced counterparts. An additional 15% of beginning teachers will leave after their second year and still another 10% will leave after the third year. Of all beginning teachers who enter the profession, 40-50% will leave during the first seven years of their career. (Croasmun et al., 1999, p. 9)

In the last 10-15 years, the United States needed to hire approximately two million teachers to handle enrollment increases, replace the aging teacher workforce ready to retire, and respond to the chronic attrition of new teachers that plague American schools.

The quality of a child's teacher is the most important school-based factor determining how much a student learns. Research such as that reported by the New Teacher Center (2007) provides persuasive evidence that students taught by effective teachers perform remarkably better than those assigned to ineffective teachers. Highly qualified teachers, however, are not equally distributed across schools and districts; poor and minority students are less likely to have full-licensed, highly qualified teachers. "One study found that poor and minority students that have an effective teacher four years in a row can achieve at the same levels as their more affluent white peers" (New Teacher Center, 2007, p. 1).

Student Achievement

Research reported by NCTAF (1996) has provided important information about effective teaching and learning.

We know that students learn best when new ideas are connected to what they already know and have experienced; when they are actively engaged in applying and testing their knowledge using real-world problems; when their learning is organized around clear, high goals with lots of practice in reaching them; and when they can use their own interests and strengths as springboards for learning. When teachers can work together to build a coherent learning experience for students throughout the grades and within and across subject areas—they are able to engender greater student achievement. (p. 6)

What teachers know and can do are the most important influences on student achievement. Studies such as those reported by NCTAF (1996) indicate that teacher expertise is a leading factor in student achievement.

Schools and school districts spend available funding on resources for instruction, but the most costly and important item in school district budgets is educators. “A recent study of more than 1,000 school districts concluded that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater improvements in student achievement than did any other use of school resources” (NCTAF, p. 8). Highly qualified teachers must know their subject matter so thoroughly that they can present it in a challenging, clear, and compelling way. They must also know how their students learn and how to make ideas accessible to maximize their students’ achievement. Studies reported by NCTAF (1996) have found that differences in teacher qualifications account for more than 90% of the variation in student achievement in reading and mathematics. Schools need to hire highly qualified teachers and keep training the ones they have to make gains in student achievement.

However, student learning in this country can improve only when efforts are focused on improving teaching.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* declared our schools were drowning in a 'rising tide of mediocrity.' Since then, hundreds of pieces of legislation have been enacted to improve them. The goals boldly projected that by the year 2000 all our students will come to school ready to learn; they will learn in safe, drug-free environments; virtually all of them will graduate with high levels of academic skills; and they will rank first in the world in mathematics and science. (NCTAF, 1996, p. 4)

Years later, and America is still a very long way from reaching these goals. Graduation rates, school safety data, and student achievement data in most subjects have remained flat or have increased only slightly. Administrative policies can improve schools only if the people in them are armed with the knowledge, skills, and supports they need.

Impact of Attrition on Achievement

At a time when all students must meet higher standards for learning, access to good teaching is a necessity and should not be left up to chance. Competent teaching depends on educators who deeply understand subject matter and how to teach in ways that motivate children and help them learn. "There is a growing consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important factor in determining student performance is the quality of his or her teachers" (AEE, 2005, p. 1). The exit of teachers from the profession and the movement of teachers to better schools are costly phenomena, both for students, who lose the value of being taught by an experienced teacher, and to the schools and districts, which must recruit and train their replacements.

The costs of teachers leaving the profession include those related to termination processes, hiring substitutes, recruitment and hiring processes, orientation, and professional development. All of these are costs that cannot be ignored. The resources used for factors related to teacher attrition could be spent on building an experienced and high quality education workforce. “A conservative national estimate of the cost of replacing public school teachers who have dropped out of the profession is \$2.2 billion a year. If the cost of replacing public school teachers who transfer schools is considered as well, the total cost reaches \$4.9 billion every year” (AEE, 2005, p. 1). Most analysts believe that the total cost is even higher, especially when the losses in teacher quality and student achievement are added to the bill. “The high attrition rate of beginning teachers is especially problematic, because it negatively affects student achievement levels in that teachers typically become more effective in increasing academic achievement as they gain more knowledge and expertise in planning and implementing efficacious lessons” (Riney, Thomas, Williams, and Kelley, 2006, p. 4).

The costs of teacher turnover are substantial. Thousands of dollars are lost to improving instruction each time a teacher leaves the profession. At-risk schools are more likely to have higher rates of teacher turnover. These schools are spending already scarce resources on teacher turnover, when those funds could be invested in improving teaching effectiveness and student growth.

Summary

The bottom line is that there is just no way to create good schools without good teachers. Understanding why teachers leave the profession is the first step in getting them

to stay. “The nation cannot achieve quality teaching for every child unless those teachers can be kept in the classroom” (NCTAF, 2003, p. 7). There is a better way.

In other countries, teachers are valued, respected, and better compensated. Teachers receive extensive training and time to collaborate with colleagues to ensure their readiness for teaching.

These nations do not spend more on education, but they invest more in teaching than in bureaucracy...they work to get things right from the start. Rather than spend money to compensate for the failures of teaching, they spend their education resources on what matters most: well- trained teachers who work intensively with students and with other teachers to improve teaching and learning. And they get better results. (NCTAF, 1996, p. 19)

Student achievement suffers when students are continually faced with inexperienced and new teachers. This creates a vicious cycle; teacher turnover lowers student achievement, and lower student achievement leads to teacher turnover.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of teacher attrition and its impact on schools, including student achievement. Descriptive analyses of survey results were compiled to determine whether teachers consistently viewed the reasons for and areas affected by attrition.

Participants

Administrators at four elementary schools in the Anne Arundel County Public school system in Maryland consented to distribute the survey, which was administered to all teachers in their schools. The sample was a convenience sample based on the researcher's knowledge of the teachers at the participating schools. The schools from which teacher participants were selected were all in urban areas, and varied in size and the socio-economic status of students. Participation in the study was voluntary, respondents were anonymous, and individual responses were kept confidential.

Instrument

Based upon a review of literature about the impact of attrition on schools, the researcher developed a survey for teachers to complete. This survey was administered to all teachers from each selected school. The survey was intended to provide data that would describe teachers' perceptions of issues that contribute to teacher attrition and how teacher attrition affects schools and student achievement. The survey appears in Appendix A and contains three main sections. The first section assessed teachers' views about how important a variety (nine) of factors are in terms of contributing to teacher attrition. The

second section assessed the direction and magnitude of the impact of attrition on seven areas. The third section asked respondents to list the top three factors that they felt might encourage or dissuade teachers from leaving the profession.

Procedure

Once consent to administer the surveys was secured, teachers from selected schools in AACPS were sent paper copies of the surveys along with a request that they participate anonymously in this study. Those who opted to participate then answered a series of questions related to their perceptions of causes and effects of teacher attrition. Then, the researcher performed an item analysis for each question on the survey and ANOVAs were run to compare the mean item responses to each other for sections one and two of the survey. The top reasons teachers provided for teachers opting to quit or not quit the profession also were tallied.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of teacher attrition and its impact on schools, including student achievement. This chapter presents the outcomes of analyses testing Hypotheses 1 and 2, and descriptive analyses reflecting teacher perceptions about the causes and impact of teacher attrition. Initially, results are presented describing the participants' years of teaching experience and their years of experience at their current schools. Then, results of comparisons of teachers' specific perceptions of factors related to attrition are presented to determine the veracity of hypotheses 1 and 2.

Descriptive Results Related to Sample Characteristics

Experience

Initially, participants were asked to disclose how many years of teaching experience they had overall and how many years they had been teaching at their current schools. Descriptive statistics regarding years of experience teaching were computed for the entire sample and for each of the four schools at which participants worked and are presented below in Table 1.

Actual years of teaching among the teachers surveyed ranged from one to 32.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Years of Teaching Experience by School

School	N	Mean	s.d.	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Range
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1	25	12.120	7.742	1.5485	8.924	15.316	1-31
2	15	9.467	5.927	1.5302	6.185	12.749	3-26
3	16	10.063	8.903	2.2257	5.319	14.807	1-32
4	20	8.900	7.847	1.7545	5.228	12.572	1-28
Total	76	10.316	7.679	.8808	8.561	12.071	1-32

A one-way analysis of variance was run to compare the mean years of experience teachers had across the four schools, which were represented in the survey. Results, presented in Table 2 below, indicated that the mean years of teacher experience (which ranged from 8.9 to 12.12) were not significantly different across the four schools sampled ($F = .746, p < .528$).

Table 2

ANOVA Comparing Years of Experience by School

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	133.310	3	44.437	.746	.528
Within Groups	4289.111	72	59.571		
Total	4422.421	75			

Duration of Employment at Current School

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics regarding the amount of time the participants have taught at their current schools. The mean number of year's participants reported they had taught at their current schools ranged from 4.6 to 7.44. Actual years of teaching at their current school among teachers surveyed ranged from one to 30.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Years at Current School

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Range
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1	25	7.44	5.493	1.099	5.173	9.707	1-26
2	15	5.33	3.222	.832	3.549	7.118	1-12
3	16	6.13	7.527	1.882	2.114	10.136	1-30
4	20	4.60	3.169	.709	3.117	6.083	1-10
Total	76	6.00	5.174	.594	4.818	7.182	1-30

A one-way analysis of variance was run to determine whether the mean years of service of respondents at the schools sampled differed significantly. The results are presented below in Table 4. The ANOVA yielded an F statistic of 1.231 with a probability value of $p < .305$, indicating that none of the mean years of service among participants at the four current schools included in the study differed significantly from one other.

Table 4

ANOVA Results Comparing Years at Current School across Schools

Years at School	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	97.957	3	32.652	1.231	.305
Within Groups	1910.043	72	26.528		
Total	2008.000	75			

Results of Tests of Main Hypotheses

Teacher perceptions of reasons for and factors impacted by attrition were assessed using rating scales. These were items three and four of the survey administered. Descriptive analyses of teacher perceptions related to attrition were computed. Analyses of variance then were computed to determine whether the mean ratings of the nine reasons for and seven consequences of attrition were or were not statistically equivalent. The comparisons also were run to determine whether teachers viewed some reasons for and effects of attrition as more important than others. Descriptive statistics and the results of the one-way ANOVAs testing the study's two main null hypotheses tested are presented below.

Hypothesis One: Causes of Attrition

As noted, to address the main questions of the study, teacher respondents rated items in terms of their contribution to attrition and in terms of how significantly (and in what direction) they are impacted by attrition. Initially, on item three of the survey in Appendix A, respondents

rated how likely the nine provided reasons were to cause teachers to leave the profession. These reasons were chosen as they were supported by the literature as typical causes of attrition. Rating options on the survey ranged from 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely). Descriptive statistics of their ratings follow in Table 5 for the entire sample.

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics of Ratings of Likelihood of Factors Contributing to Teacher Attrition
(Survey Item 3)*

	Mean	s.d.	Range
LOW SALARY	3.895	.888	2-5
HEAVY WORKLOAD	4.342	.903	1-5
POOR STUDENT BEHAVIOR	3.855	.812	2-5
LARGE CLASS SIZE	3.579	.883	2-5
LACK OF PARENT SUPPORT	3.224	.918	2-5
LACK OF ADMINISTRATOR SUPPORT	3.829	.806	2-5
LACK OF EXPERIENCE	2.605	.925	1-4
LACK OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT	2.382	.864	1-5
REACH RETIREMENT AGE	3.710	1.141	1-5
Valid N (listwise)=76		76	

The item with the highest mean response was having a heavy workload (mean rating = 4.342). Other responses rated as contributing to attrition included low salary, poor student behavior, and a lack of administrator support. The reasons for attrition with the lowest mean ratings were teachers' lack of experience and a lack of staff development. Teachers did not seem to perceive teaching experience as a major cause of teacher attrition (mean rating = 2.605; the neutral option was 3). Also, the range of responses was quite large (3-4 points per item), suggesting the nine items were not all perceived the same way by all participants in terms of their relationship to attrition.

Teachers had the option to include other factors that they felt cause attrition. Seven

teachers added possible causes of teachers leaving the profession, some of which reflected items they already rated such as workload and pay-related issues. Their specific responses included too heavy a workload, low salaries, no cost of living increases, inadequate planning time, unrealistic administrator and parent demands, classroom stress, politics in lesson planning and administrative decisions, no longer enjoying teaching, and too much focus on testing.

To test hypothesis one, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare the mean ratings for the nine response options for item three. Results are presented in Table 6. The F statistic of 37.666 was statistically significant ($p < .000$), meaning the ratings of the nine possible reasons were not statistically equivalent, or teachers did not, on average, rate them all as equally important contributors to attrition.

Table 6

ANOVA Results Comparing Mean Ratings of Reasons for Attrition (Item 3)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	249.053	8	31.132	37.666	.000
Within Groups	557.895	675	.827		
Total	806.947	683			

Follow-up (Scheffe) testing was conducted and the results of the multiple comparisons follow in Table 7. These comparisons indicated that the mean ratings differed significantly for the following pairs of possible reasons for attrition:

Table 7

Multiple Comparisons of Mean Ratings of Possible Reasons for Attrition (Item 3)

(I) ITEM	(J) ITEM	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low Salary	Heavy Workload	-.447	.147	.327	-1.030	.135
	Poor Student Behavior	.039	.147	1.000	-.543	.622
	Large Class Sizes	.316	.147	.800	-.267	.899
	Lack of Parental Support	.671*	.147	.009	.088	1.254
	Lack of Administrator Support	.066	.147	1.000	-.517	.649
	Lack of Experience	1.289*	.147	.000	.707	1.872
	Lack of Staff Development	1.513*	.147	.000	.930	2.096
	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	.184	.147	.992	-.399	.767
Heavy Workload	Poor Student Behavior	.487	.147	.210	-.096	1.070
	Large Class Sizes	.763*	.147	.001	.180	1.346
	Lack of Parental Support	1.118*	.147	.000	.536	1.701
	Lack of Administrator Support	.513	.147	.149	-.070	1.096
	Lack of Experience	1.737*	.147	.000	1.154	2.320
	Lack of Staff Development	1.961*	.147	.000	1.378	2.543
	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	.632*	.147	.020	.049	1.214
Poor Student Behavior	Large Class Sizes	.276	.147	.898	-.307	.859
	Lack of Parental Support	.632*	.147	.020	.049	1.214
	Lack of Administrator Support	.026	.147	1.000	-.557	.609
	Lack of Experience	1.250*	.147	.000	.667	1.833
	Lack of Staff Development	1.474*	.147	.000	.891	2.057
	Reach Retirement	.145	.147	.998	-.438	.728

	Age/Eligibility					
Large Class Size	Lack of Parental Support	.355	.147	.669	-.228	.938
	Lack of Administrator Support	-.250	.147	.942	-.833	.333
	Lack of Experience	.974*	.147	.000	.391	1.557
	Lack of Staff Development	1.197*	.147	.000	.615	1.780
	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	-.132	.147	.999	-.714	.451
Lack of Parental Support	Lack of Administrator Support	-.605*	.147	.033	-1.188	-.023
	Lack of Experience	.618*	.147	.026	.036	1.201
	Lack of Staff Development	.842*	.147	.000	.259	1.425
	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	-.487	.147	.210	-1.070	.096
Lack of Administrator Support	Lack of Experience	1.224*	.147	.000	.641	1.807
	Lack of Staff Development	1.447*	.147	.000	.865	2.030
	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	.118	.147	1.000	-.464	.701
Lack of Experience	Lack of Staff Development	.224	.147	.970	-.359	.807
	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	-1.105*	.147	.000	-1.688	-.523
Lack of Staff Development	Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	-1.329*	.147	.000	-1.912	-.746
* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Pairs of ratings that the multiple comparisons indicated were significantly different (those marked with asterisks above) are included in Table 8 to provide visual comparison of the means.

Table 8

Reasons for Attrition with Significantly Different Ratings

Variable and Mean	Items that Differ Significantly from Variable and Means
Low salary (mean = 3.895)	Lack of parental support (mean = 3.224)
	Lack of experience (mean = 2.605)
	Lack of staff development (mean = 2.382)
Heavy workload (mean = 4.342)	Large class sizes (mean = 3.579)
	Lack of parental support (mean = 3.224)
	Lack of experience (mean = 2.605)
	Lack of staff development (mean = 2.382)
	Reaching retirement age (mean = 3.710)
Poor student behavior (mean = 3.855)	Lack of parental support (mean = 3.224)
	Lack of experience (mean = 2.605)
	Lack of staff development (mean = 2.382)
Large class sizes (mean = 3.579)	Lack of experience (mean = 2.605)
	Lack of staff development (mean = 2.382)
Lack of parental support (mean = 3.224)	Lack of administrator support (mean = 3.829)
	Lack of experience (mean = 2.605)
	Lack of staff development (mean = 2.382)
Lack of administrator support (mean = 3.829)	Lack of experience (mean = 2.605)
	Lack of staff development (mean = 2.382)

Given the results of the ANOVA and the multiple comparisons, null hypothesis one was rejected as the mean ratings of the nine provided reasons for attrition were not all statistically equivalent.

Hypothesis Two: Impact of Attrition

The second main null hypothesis was that teachers' mean ratings of the impact of attrition on seven areas possibly contributing to it would be equivalent. These ratings were assessed by item four on the teacher survey. A one-way analysis of variance also was run to test this hypothesis. It is notable that one respondent only rated the seventh option; hence the sample sizes differ for response options one to six and response option seven (school budget). Response/rating options for survey item four ranged from 1 (attrition has a significant negative impact on this item) to 5 (attrition has a significant positive impact on this item). Descriptive statistics of the teachers' ratings follow in Table 9 for the entire sample. Ratings ranged from one to five for each item, which suggests that the respondents' opinions varied. With ratings under 3 indicating the item was perceived as negatively impacted by attrition, the mean ratings for all of the areas possibly affected indicated that attrition is seen as having negative effects overall, with the exception of the area of school budget, for which the mean rating fell in the neutral to slightly positive range. The lowest mean ratings, suggesting these areas were seen as those most negatively affected by attrition, were for staff morale, teacher morale, and achievement test scores.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics of Ratings of How Much Teacher Attrition Impacts a**Variety of Factors*

Area Impacted by Attrition	N	Mean	s.d.	Range
STUDENT GRADES	75	2.280	.938	1-5
ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES	75	2.187	1.023	1-5
STUDENT BEHAVIOR	75	2.333	.991	1-5
TEACHER COLLABORATION	75	2.347	.966	1-5
STAFF MORALE	75	2.147	1.123	1-5
TEACHER MORALE	75	2.147	1.111	1-5
SCHOOL BUDGET	76	3.066	.822	1-5

Teachers also had the option to include other areas they feel may be impacted by attrition. Six teachers added responses indicating they felt areas that are impacted by attrition include new teachers hired more often for lower salaries, quality of teachers, teacher impact on students' lives, difference between teachers leaving mid-or end of year, and increased lesson planning with new teaching teammates.

Table 10 below presents the ANOVA results, which compared the mean ratings of the impact of teacher attrition on the seven factors in item four. The ANOVA yielded an F statistic of 7.905, which was statistically significant ($p < .000$), indicating that the mean ratings of the impact of attrition on the seven areas were not statistically equivalent.

Table 10

ANOVA Results Comparing Mean Ratings Impact of Attrition on Seven Areas (Item 4)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	47.485	6	7.914	7.905	.000
Within Groups	519.604	519	1.001		
Total	567.089	525			

Follow-up (Scheffe) testing was conducted and the results of the multiple comparisons follow in Table 11. These comparisons indicated that the mean ratings were statistically significantly different for several pairs of the areas impacted by attrition. The mean differences for those that were significantly different are marked with asterisks.

Table 11

Multiple Comparisons for Mean Ratings of the Impact of Attrition on Seven Areas (Item 4)

(I) ITEM NUMBER	(J) ITEM NUMBER	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Student Grades	Achievement Test Scores	.093	.163	.999	-.489	.676
	Student Behavior	-.053	.163	1.000	-.636	.529
	Teacher Collaboration	-.067	.163	1.000	-.649	.516
	Staff Morale	.133	.163	.995	-.449	.716
	Teacher Morale	.133	.163	.995	-.449	.716
	School Budget	-.786*	.163	.001	-1.366	-.206
Achievement Test Scores	Student Behavior	-.147	.163	.992	-.729	.436
	Teacher Collaboration	-.160	.163	.987	-.742	.422
	Staff Morale	.040	.163	1.000	-.542	.622
	Teacher Morale	.040	.163	1.000	-.542	.622
	School Budget	-.879*	.163	.000	-1.459	-.299
Student Behavior	Teacher Collaboration	-.013	.163	1.000	-.596	.569
	Staff Morale	.187	.163	.971	-.396	.769
	Teacher Morale	.187	.163	.971	-.396	.769
	School Budget	-.733*	.163	.003	-1.313	-.152
Teacher Collaboration	Staff Morale	.200	.163	.959	-.382	.782
	Teacher Morale	.200	.163	.959	-.382	.782
	School Budget	-.719*	.163	.004	-1.299	-.139
Staff Morale	Teacher Collaboration	-.200	.163	.959	-.782	.382
	Teacher Morale	.000	.163	1.000	-.582	.582
	School Budget	-.919*	.163	.000	-1.499	-.339
Teacher Morale	School Budget	-.919*	.163	.000	-1.499	-.339

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Pairs of ratings that the multiple comparisons indicated were significantly different (those marked with asterisks above) are included in Table 12 to provide visual comparison of the means.

Table 12

Areas Impacted by Attrition with Significantly Different Ratings

Variable and Mean	Items that Differ Significantly from Variable and Means
School budget (mean= 3.066)	Student Grades (mean = 2.280)
	Achievement Test Scores (mean = 2.187)
	Student behavior (mean = 2.333)
	Teacher collaboration (mean = 2.347)
	Staff morale (mean = 2.147)
	Teacher morale (mean = 2.147)

Given the results of the ANOVA and multiple comparisons, null hypothesis two also was rejected as the mean ratings of the impact of attrition on the seven areas listed were not all statistically equivalent.

Teacher Perceptions of Reasons for and Deterrents of Attrition

Finally, tallies of the top three reasons teachers leave teaching and the top three factors which might deter them from leaving teaching were calculated based on responses participants gave to the open ended items five and six on the survey. Teachers also were given the opportunity to include reasons and deterrents related to leaving teaching. Results follow in

Tables 13 and 14. Heavy workload was the most common reason listed as a reason to leave and salary increase was the most commonly reported deterrent to attrition.

Table 13

Tally of Reported Top Reasons for Leaving Teaching (Survey Item 5)

Reason for Leaving	Number of Times Cited as Primary Reason	Number of Times Cited as Secondary Reason	Number of Times Cited as Third Reason	Number of Times Cited as OTHER Reason	Total Times Cited
Too Heavy Workload	29	17	17	1	64
Low Salary/No Pay Raises	23	24	9	0	56
Lack of Parent/Administrator Support	9	11	20	6	46
Poor Student Behavior	6	5	8	2	21
No Appreciation	1	6	2	3	12
Lack of Planning Time	1	4	2	2	9
Reach Retirement Age	1	3	4	1	9
Testing Pressure	1	0	2	4	7
No Response	5	6	12	57	80

Table 14

Tally of Reported Top Deterrents to Teachers Leave the Profession (Survey Item 6)

Deterrents to Leaving	Number of Times Cited as Primary Deterrent	Number of Times Cited as Secondary Deterrent	Number of Times Cited as Third Deterrent	Number of Times Cited as OTHER Deterrent	Total Times Cited
Salary/Step Increase	35	14	7	0	56
Increased Parent/Administrator Support	11	16	20	0	47
Reduced Workload	4	15	13	0	32
Increased Planning Time	6	11	6	0	23
Enjoy Helping Students	10	6	3	0	19
Unsure of Other Career Opportunities	1	3	6	1	11
Benefits	2	3	6	0	11
Summers Off	1	2	3	0	6
No Response	6	6	12	75	99

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

A descriptive study was conducted and survey data were analyzed to summarize and compare teachers' perceptions of the causes and implications of teacher attrition. The two main null hypotheses tested posited that teachers would rate nine contributing factors and seven consequences of attrition as equally important using 5-point Likert scales. Null hypothesis one was rejected as the mean ratings of the nine reasons provided for attrition were not all statistically equivalent. Null hypothesis two also was rejected as the mean ratings of the impact of attrition on seven areas listed were not all statistically equivalent either.

Implications of Results

The survey used in this study was administered to assess teacher's perceptions of factors contributing to and consequences of teacher attrition. The researcher summarized the descriptive statistics from the survey and compared mean ratings of items reflecting contributors to and consequences of attrition.

Contributing Factors (Survey Item 3)

The item rated as most highly contributing to teacher attrition was having a heavy workload, with a mean of 4.342. Other items that were rated as contributing to attrition included low salary (mean = 3.895), poor student behavior (mean = 3.855), and a lack of administrator support (mean = 3.829). The items receiving the lowest mean scores, indicating teachers did not perceive them as major contributors to attrition, were teachers' reaching retirement age (mean = 3.710), a lack of experience (mean = 2.605), and a lack of staff development (mean = 2.382). It is interesting to note that teachers participating in this study did not appear to identify a strong connection between teaching experience and teacher attrition. In fact, most teachers rated a lack of experience as definitely or probably not a cause for teachers to leave the profession.

It was noteworthy that the range of responses to each of the survey items was quite large. The ranges for the nine items rating the degree to which they contributed to attrition were all at least four points on the scale which ranged from one to five). This suggests that all participants did not perceive the reasons for attrition the same way.

Consequences of Attrition (Survey Item 4)

The items rated as leading to the most negative consequences of teacher attrition were diminished teacher and staff morale, both with means of 2.147. Other items that were highly rated as being negatively impacted by attrition included achievement test scores (mean = 2.187), student grades (mean = 2.280), and student behavior (mean = 2.333). It was interesting to note that teachers perceive attrition to most affect teachers and staff remaining at the school.

Theoretical Consequences

Teacher attrition is a costly and consequential problem in America. It is draining resources, diminishing teaching quality, and undermining the nation's ability to close the student achievement gap. Until teacher attrition is understood and addressed effectively, American schools will continue to engage in a costly annual recruitment and hiring cycle. A national estimate for replacing public school teachers that leave or transfer schools, including losses in teacher quality and student achievement exceeds four billion dollars annually (AEE, 2005).

According to the teacher respondents to this survey, the areas most negatively affected by attrition were staff morale, teacher morale, and achievement test scores. Teachers leaving the classroom largely affect staff and teacher morale. Teacher morale refers to the mental and emotional condition of regular classroom teachers. Staff morale is similar to teacher morale, but refers to other school personnel who collaborate with teachers, including encore teachers, reading or math specialists, intervention teachers, and special education teachers.

The problems of attrition and declines in teachers' satisfaction with their jobs have theoretical and practical implications. "Teacher satisfaction has decreased by 15 points since the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* measured job satisfaction two years ago, now reaching the lowest levels of job satisfaction seen in the survey series in more than two decades" (MetLife, 2011, p. 5). This decline in teacher satisfaction likely is related to the factors teachers listed in the survey (item five), which they believe could make teachers consider leaving teaching for another occupation. These factors included a too heavy workload, low salary or no pay raises, and a lack of parent or administrator support. Understanding and addressing those factors might help stem attrition rates. Studies such as those reported by NCTAF (1996) indicate that teacher expertise is a leading factor in student achievement. The quality of a child's teacher is the most important school-based factor determining how much a student learns. Research such as that reported by the New Teacher Center (2007) provides evidence that students taught by effective and highly qualified teachers perform better than those assigned to ineffective teachers. Retaining those teachers has consequences for every level of educational systems, from their human resources and staff to their taxpayers to their students.

Threats to Validity

There were several threats to the validity of the results of this study of perceptions related to attrition. These threats include the use of a convenience sample, the sample size, and possible misinterpretation of the survey items by the teacher respondents.

One threat to validity was the sample itself, which was a convenience sample. The sample was chosen to simplify data collection and included four schools that had teachers on staff with whom the researcher was familiar. The sample also was fairly small and included only

77 teachers from those four schools. This is a threat to the validity of the study, as the sample may not reflect the population of teachers in general or the demographics of other areas or schools to which the results might be applied. Additionally, all teachers at the four schools did not participate. Those individuals who opted to participate in the study may be different in some systematic but unknown way from those who chose not to participate.

Another threat to the study's validity is that the teacher respondents may have misinterpreted some of the survey questions. Issues listed in items number three and four both received a wide variety of responses, which could indicate variation in perceptions or variation in how respondents interpreted the items. Item four on the survey asked teachers to rate the impact that teachers' leaving the profession has on several items including student grades, achievement test scores, student behavior, teacher collaboration, staff morale, teacher morale, and school budget. Teachers were asked to rank these items from 1 (the item has a significant negative impact) to 5 (the item has a significant positive impact). The range of responses was quite large, suggesting the seven items were not all perceived the same way by all participants in terms of how they are impacted by attrition. One possibility for the teachers' misinterpretations could be related to the type of rating scale on the item. Survey items often have ratings from 1 to 5, with a rating of 3 relating to a medium impact. For this item, a rating of 3 was defined as no impact in order to assess positive and negative impact, as it was not certain respondents would view all items as being negatively affected by attrition.

Connections to Previous Studies and Existing Literature

As a result of high turnover, many schools frequently are staffed with high concentrations of under-prepared, inexperienced teachers who likely feel overwhelmed by the challenges they face. According to teachers surveyed, too heavy a workload was the top-rated reason for teacher

attrition. Low salary, poor student behavior, and lack of administrator support were rated as the next highest contributors to attrition. Many teachers leave after several years of working with a frustrating perception of lack of support. In many cases, they abandon teaching altogether and leave a host of problems behind with which their school systems and the eager young teachers who take their place must contend (NCTAF, 2003).

Teacher attrition necessitates costly recruitment efforts and often results in hiring less experienced teachers. While newly trained teachers may cost districts less in terms of salary, this savings may come at a cost in terms of student achievement. According to NCTAF (1996), “A recent study of more than 1,000 school districts concluded that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater improvements in student achievement than did any other use of school resources” (p. 6). School funds spent on training and retaining existing teachers, would reap greater rewards by reducing the need for costly recruitment and averting losses in student achievement. This is supported by research summaries such as that reported by Riney et al., (2006) who state, “The high attrition rate of beginning teachers is especially problematic, because it negatively affects student achievement levels in that teachers typically become more effective in increasing academic achievement as they gain more knowledge and expertise in planning and implementing efficacious lessons” (p. 4).

Implications for Future Research

It is important that school districts recognize that recruiting more teachers will not reduce the high cost of teacher turnover. “The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Inability to support high quality teaching in many schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it...” (NCTAF, 2003, p. 6). School districts

must develop comprehensive human resource strategies to reduce teacher turnover. An obvious and critical step towards successful retention of good teachers is understanding what factors motivate them to stay in or leave the teaching profession. Future studies should build on the evidence collected in this study with the aim to understand as well as prevent the phenomenon of teacher attrition.

School leaders can reduce teacher turnover and control their costs by developing and implementing human resource policies that reflect understanding of teachers' perceptions of their jobs, reasons for turnover, and understanding the costs and consequences of attrition. To do this, education leaders and administrators need accurate data regarding teacher turnover and its consequences. Studies should collect data in formats that make it possible to analyze, manage, and control those factors leading to attrition. Understanding what causes and is impacted by teacher attrition is an initial step toward reducing turnover and making sound investments in retaining qualified teachers. With this knowledge, school leaders might be more successful in hiring well-prepared teachers, providing them helpful orientation to their jobs and supporting their endeavors. These steps consequently should increase teachers' retention as their expertise develops over the years.

Because comprehensive induction, or new teacher support, programs reduce teacher turnover and increase teacher effectiveness, they are more cost effective. Well-prepared teachers possess strong content knowledge, they understand how students learn and demonstrate the teaching skills necessary to help all students meet high standards, they can use a variety of assessment strategies to diagnose student-learning needs, and they can reflect on their practices to improve instruction in collaboration with their colleagues. Teachers need to acquire the

knowledge and skills to be effective, and adequate preparation can help them develop these skills and, hopefully, the desire to persist in the profession (NCTAF, 1996).

This study indicated that among teachers surveyed, heavy workload, low salaries, and a perceived lack of support are seen as primary causes of attrition. Items rated as the best deterrents for attrition were salary increases, increased parent and administrator support, and reduced workload. Another possible solution to the problems of teacher quality and teacher turnover may be to offer better pay for better performance. Research reported by Croasmun et al. (1999) indicates that when faced with other challenges, salary can be a significant factor in a teacher's decision to move to another profession. Merit-based pay may provide an opportunity for teachers to earn higher salaries based on dedication. There is little research currently on what constitutes a successful merit-pay system, but several factors that seem critical to address include a careful effort to earn teacher buy-in to the plan, clarity about how it works, multiple ways of measuring teacher merit, and rewards for individual and school-wide success. Future studies could investigate how merit-based pay might impact teacher retention by investigating teachers' feelings about their earnings and earning potential, and how they feel about various remuneration systems that could be used in schools.

Conclusions

“The ability to create and maintain a quality teaching and learning environment in a school is limited not by teacher supply, but by high turnover among the teachers who are already there” (NCTAF, 2003, p. 6). It takes several years of experience to master the basics of classroom management and to become a fully proficient teacher. Unfortunately, a large percentage of public-school teachers leave the profession before they reach full proficiency. Results of this teacher survey suggest that one of the major reasons teachers leave the profession

is what they consider to be inadequate pay for the job. However, salary limitations are not the only cause for teacher attrition. In this study, heavy workloads and lack of support from parents and administrators also were cited as reasons teachers leave the profession. Teachers also reported that a salary increase, more support from parents and school staff, and a reduced workload would help deter them from leaving teaching. More research to determine how these perceptions can best inform policy is warranted. Such policy should aim to improve retention rates, but it also should focus on hiring and retaining those teachers who have or might develop the most expertise that will benefit students and communities.

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Teacher Perceptions Survey

1. Current Position: Classroom Teacher _____ Other (specify) _____

2. Current Grade Level: _____

Total Number of Years Teaching Experience: _____

Number of Years Teaching at Current School: _____

3. Please rate how likely you think each reason below is to cause teachers to leave the profession. You may fill in and rate other reasons at the bottom.

REASONS	Definitely Not (1)	Probably Not (2)	Maybe/ Not sure (3)	Probably (4)	Definitely (5)
Low Salary	1	2	3	4	5
Heavy Workload	1	2	3	4	5
Poor Student Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
Large Class Sizes	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of Parent Support	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of Administrator Support	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of Experience	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of Staff Development	1	2	3	4	5
Reach Retirement Age/Eligibility	1	2	3	4	5
_____ (Specify Other)	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

4. Please rate the impact you think teachers leaving the profession has on each of the following items below. Please fill in and rate other areas you think are impacted at the bottom.

AREA POSSIBLY IMPACTED BY ATTRITION	Significant Negative Impact (1)	Slight Negative Impact (2)	No Impact/ Not sure (3)	Slight Positive Impact (4)	Significant Positive Impact (5)
Student Grades	1	2	3	4	5
Achievement Test Scores (ex. MSA)	1	2	3	4	5
Student Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher Collaboration	1	2	3	4	5
Staff Morale	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher Morale	1	2	3	4	5
School Budget	1	2	3	4	5
_____ (Specify Other)	1	2	3	4	5
_____ (Specify Other)	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

5. Please list in order the top 3 factors that you think cause teachers to leave the teaching profession. Feel free to elaborate on any of your answers below.

a. Primary reason teachers consider leaving teaching:

b. Second main reason teachers consider leaving teaching:

c. Third main reason teachers consider leaving teaching:

d. Other:

6. Please list in order the top 3 factors that you think would deter teachers from leaving the teaching profession. Feel free to elaborate on any of your answers below.

a. Primary incentive to deter teachers from leaving teaching:

b. Second biggest incentive to deter teachers from leaving teaching:

c. Third biggest incentive to deter teachers from leaving teaching:

d. Other:
