The Relationship Between Teacher Retention and Satisfaction/Involvement of Teachers

by

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to examine a relationship between teacher turnover and teacher satisfaction/teacher involvement. The measurement tool was a survey. The study involved participants completing a twenty-six multiple choice question survey and evaluating the results. The questions sought to find information about length in the teaching field, involvement in the school, and satisfaction with the teaching career. The results indicate that teacher turnover was related to teacher involvement and satisfaction. Research in the area of teacher turnover should continue due to the high percentage of teachers leaving the profession nationwide (50%).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teacher turnover and teacher satisfaction are overwhelming problems in our educational system. The researcher has found in her four short years as a teacher that her school has a very rapid turnover of teachers. Fifty percent (50%) of teachers drop out of the profession within the first five years (Thornton, 2004). This becomes a very pervasive problem because it greatly affects the stability of our educational programs. Stability is important because it affects the climate in a particular school. Unstable education systems find this issue to be costly in terms of fiscal and human resources and likely serves as an obstacle to long term school improvement strategies and the development of a sense of community within schools (Hausman, 2001).

The researcher's interest was triggered with this topic because the researcher has found that at Kenwood High School, the teachers that do not return tend to be those that are not involved in any school-related activities, besides of their required duties as teachers. The researcher has observed a large gap between those that love to teach and those that despise it. The teachers in the researchers building who love their job are those that are involved with the students and engaging in outside the classroom activities, such as coaching, mentoring, or service projects.

Teacher satisfaction is important for a variety of reasons. Teacher satisfaction leads to better teacher performance which, in turn, affects student performance. It is evident to students if teachers are satisfied with their career. Students feel more appreciated when their teachers do what they do because they want to, not because they have to. If teachers are satisfied and content

at their school, the school climate tends to be a positive one (Chan, Lau, Nie, Lim, & Hogan, 2008).

Teacher involvement is important to improving teacher performance and student learning (Hausman, 2001). Teachers need to feel as if they are a part of the school. Once this occurs, teachers become more invested in the overall success of the school. Student achievement is intertwined with teachers' commitment to their work, their school, and their students (Nir, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to see if there is a relationship between teacher turnover and teacher satisfaction/teacher involvement.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that there will be a relationship between teacher turnover and involvement and satisfaction with the teaching career.

Operational Definitions

In this study the independent variable was teacher involvement and teacher satisfaction obtained through the use of a satisfaction survey. The dependent variable was teacher turnover measured by the reported level of satisfaction and involvement.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review seeks to explore the impact of teacher involvement and commitment on teacher retention. Section one provides an overview of teacher retention. Section two explores the impact of teacher retention. Section three explores the causes of teacher retention. Section four discusses interventions that seek to improve teacher retention, and in section five, a summary is provided.

Overview of Teacher Retention

This issue of teacher retention or teacher turnover actually refers to two issues: leaving teaching completely (attrition) and moving to a different school (school transfer or teacher migration) (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). Schools and districts struggle to maintain standards for teaching quality while recruiting bright new teachers and seeking to retain their most effective existing teachers (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). "Continuing concern in the education field is centered on the high rate at which teachers leave the profession" (Inman & Marlow, 2002, p. 605). "Nearly 50% of teachers drop out of the profession within the first five years" (Thornton, 2004, p. 605). Most attrition from teaching is voluntary, given the widespread tenure rates and the prevalence of unionized grievance policies regarding termination (Guarino et al., 2006). "The highest turnover and attrition rates seen for teachers occurred in their first years of teaching and after many years of teaching when they were near retirement, thus producing a U-shaped pattern of attrition with respect to age or experience" (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 188).

It is the goal of the elementary and secondary public school system in the United States to provide a high-quality education to every student. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires every student to be successful. For this to occur, schools must have an adequate supply

of competent individuals who are willing and able to serve as teachers (Guarino et al., 2006).

These teachers must be involved with and committed to the students they teach.

Impact of Teacher Retention

At the end of their first year in the occupation, three in ten new teachers move to a different school or leave teaching altogether (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). As teachers leave the schools they teach or the profession as a whole, problems begin to arise. The more widespread the teacher turnover, the more evident these problems become. When the turnover at a school is high, teacher commitment decreases, the school climate decreases, and the students suffer in the classroom. Teacher retention and teacher commitment go hand in hand. Teacher commitment is believed to be central to school effectiveness. Teacher retention not only affects the overall school environment, but individual student performance as well.

Teacher commitment is central to improving teacher performance and student learning, and to reducing teacher turnover (Hausman, 2001). Teachers responded that one of the most important factors affecting school success was teacher involvement in important school decisions. Teachers want to feel a part of the educational process (McElroy, 2005). Teachers need to find ways to feel as if they are a part of the school community so they become more invested in the success of the school.

If the turnover at a particular school is high, the climate tends to turn negative and will continue to be negative, until changes begin to occur. If teachers are satisfied and content at their school, the school climate tends to be a positive one. School climate deals with the learning environment. It includes instruction, evaluation, discipline, test scores, attitudes, and much more. School climate has been found to be a consistent predictor of teacher commitment (Chan et al., 2008). Teacher turnover is costly in terms of fiscal and human resources and likely serves

as an obstacle to long-term school improvement strategies and the development of a sense of community within schools (Hausman, 2001). This sense of community helps to create the positive school culture. Research suggests that frequent turnover has a negative effect even if the teachers being removed or leaving, are not effective teachers. "Turnover may become a source of group disintegration rather than group integration. At such a point, the negative consequences of turnover for organizational stability and coherence would begin to overshadow the positive consequences for the organization resulting from the elimination of dissension" (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 528).

Teachers who are not committed to their job do not put the time, effort, and dedication into their career. This tends to cause lackadaisical performance. Student achievement is intertwined with teachers' commitment to their work, their school and their students (Nir, 2002). Students suffer when they are being taught by a less than adequate teacher. Students of fully prepared and certified teachers outperform students of undercertified teachers on standardized tests. Undercertified teachers are defined as emergency, temporary, or provisional teachers (Thornton, 2004). "The difference between being taught by a highly capable and a less than capable teacher can translate into a full grade level of achievement in a single school year" (Borman & Dowling, 2008, p. 368). Teacher effects can be enduring and cumulative, whether they advance student achievement or leave children behind. With high expectations, all students must continue advancing (Borman & Dowling).

In October 2006, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future invited 40 leaders in education to discuss important issues surrounding the cost of teacher turnover in Math and Science. The leaders developed recommendations for future research and concluded by

stating "we cannot afford the current high rate of math and science teacher turnover. It is costly to students, teachers, school, communities, and our nation!" (Long, 2007, p. 10).

Causes of Turnover and Attrition

Reasons teachers provided for leaving the profession or school were a lack of professionalism, collegiality, and administrative support, rather than salaries, as many might assume (Inman & Marlow, 2002). Four of the most common reasons why teachers leave their schools or the teaching profession are: unrealistic workload, isolation, and lack of time.

Unrealistic Workload/Lack of time

A large stressor for teachers is their daily work load. The work day does not end at the bell (Nir, 2002). The isolated nature of teachers work has been identified as another one of the major stressors and causes of teacher turnover in the profession. Teachers need time to develop their skills but they seldom get the time they require. Between lesson plans, IEP meetings, before and after school duties, and many other teacher responsibilities, this time for development does not fit into their daily schedule. "Most new teachers do not get 100 tries" (Black, 2004, p. 47). Lastly, additional meetings contribute to high rates of teacher turnover. These meetings continue to take away from teacher mastery in the classroom (Theakston & Robinson, 2001).

Inappropriate Evaluation Methods

Teachers are often evaluated on items which are not even relevant to the areas of teaching and learning. When new teachers are evaluated, the following items are often not taken into consideration: adequate resources, other classroom factors, student diversity, and student learning (Black, 2004).

Lack of Professional Guidance

Mentor teachers can serve as a very valuable resource for new teachers. They typically assist with things like school rules/policies, lesson planning, managing student behavior, how to effectively communicate with students and parents, grading, and much more. Susan Kardos discovered in a study of 486 new teachers in California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan that over half of new teachers reported receiving no assistance from mentors or other school personnel in their first year (Black, 2004). These teachers then became discouraged and left to look for different work. "Few schools view beginning teachers as novices who need help to master the art and craft of teaching" (Black, p. 47).

Interventions

Individuals will become or remain teachers if teaching represents the most attractive activity to pursue among all activities available to them. Effective interventions are necessary if this ongoing teacher retention issue in our country is going to change. Possible interventions include teacher training, teacher involvement, positive relationships amongst colleagues, and effective teacher mentors.

Teacher support is necessary if individual schools or school systems plan to keep teachers around. Support systems within the school environment, provided by teacher education programs and the local administration, are an essential element to school success. Teacher training is one method for offering teachers that support. "Induction programs vary but the best ones include training before the school year begins, professional development that is ongoing, study groups in which teachers form collegial friendships and become a part of the learning community, strong administrative leadership, coaching and mentoring, emphasis on effective teaching, and opportunities for new teachers to observe top-notch experienced teachers" (Black,

2004, p. 50). Early professional development that meets teachers' needs may yield greater self-confidence, motivation, and commitment to teaching (Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004). Professional development is also important to yield the isolation and abandonment so many teachers report having experienced in their first years of teaching (Norton, 1999).

It is also very important to make new teachers feel that they are a part of the school community. Teachers need to be involved outside the classroom in activities that build relationships with not only their colleagues, but their students. Some activities that new teachers could become involved in are: coaching a sport, be a part of the school improvement team, be the advisor for a club or organization, or organize the school play. Newcomers need to be integrated into the whole school and community. Veteran teachers should invite the new teachers to meetings and events (Black, 2004).

School leadership teams should consider their efforts in promoting positive interpersonal relationships in their school (Rhodes et al., 2004). These relationships are very important as they offer affiliation and support. Implementing faculty clubs/committees may be very meaningful in terms of teacher success. In a survey study, 368 teachers identified the following factors as being important in terms of their satisfaction: friendliness of staff, working with others to achieve shared goals, good working relationships, and feeling valued (Rhodes et al.). A satisfied teacher is far more likely to find personal self-fulfillment in the role (Norton, 1999).

Mentor teachers should serve as an excellent resource for new teachers. Mentor teachers can serve as a very valuable resource for new teachers. They typically assist with things like school rules/policies, lesson planning, managing student behavior, how to effectively communicate with students and parents, grading, and much more. Mentor teachers should assist with behavior plans, classroom management, school policies and procedures, planning and

implementation of a lesson, etc. Reforms have long urged educators to create collaboration to reinforce collegiality and shared goals (Hausman, 2001).

Summary

Teacher retention is defined on two levels: keeping teachers in the school at which they teach and in the teaching profession. The more teachers that stay at a particular school, the higher the commitment level is, the more positive the school climate is, and the more successful the students are in the classroom. Teacher turnover is a problem in our country due to high levels of stress, insufficient time to complete necessary tasks, unfair evaluations, and lack of assistance from a mentor teacher. To remedy this problem teacher training must be implemented and ongoing, teachers need to become involved outside of the classroom, positive relationships need to be built, effective mentors need to be put in place and accessible, collaborating with colleagues should be encouraged and teachers need to be a part of a supportive community which feels positive about educational system. In the end, if a school does not have individual teacher success, overall school success does not exist (Inman & Marlow, 2002).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The design used to conduct this research was a descriptive study. This study examined the relationship between teacher involvement/satisfaction and teacher turnover at Kenwood High School. In this study, the dependent variable was teacher turnover during the 2008-2009 school year. The independent variable was teachers' level of involvement and satisfaction with the high school.

Participants

Eighty-seven teachers responded to the survey. Twenty-eight of the teachers surveyed had been teaching for 0-5 years. Seventeen had been teaching for 6-10 years. Twenty-six had been teaching for 11-20 years. Sixteen had been teaching for 21 or more years.

Instrument

The instrument used was a survey that was modified from the 2006 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Harris Interactive, 2006) examining teacher expectations and experiences. The survey can be found in the appendix. The survey consisted of 26 questions. The questions in the survey included: grades taught, number of years teaching, future plans, communication within the school, support of the parents of the children in the school, involvement in team building, the curriculum, clubs, mentoring students, and the athletic program, and overall satisfaction this school year as well as with teaching as a career.

The results from any survey are subject to sampling variation. This variation is measureable and is affected by the number of percentages in the results. Sampling error is only one way in which findings may vary from the findings that would result from interviewing every

member of the relevant population. Survey research is susceptible to human and mechanical

errors as well.

Procedure

The surveys were placed in the mailboxes of all the teachers at Kenwood High School.

The cover letter and survey are included in the appendix. The participants were asked to

complete the surveys as soon as possible and return to the main office. Once all surveys were

collected, each answer was tallied by recording in an Excel spreadsheet. All 26 answers were

recorded for each participant.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

A total of 87 teachers completed the survey, out of 127 who were asked, a response rate of 68%. The analysis revealed that 51% of the teachers that completed the survey have been teaching 0-10 years, 29% had been teaching 11-20 years, and 18% had been teaching 21 or more years. The findings revealed that 26% of the participants would be likely to leave the profession in the next five years while 74% would not be likely to leave the teaching profession in the next five years. Overall 60% planned to leave teaching as a career when they were 56 or older. According to the survey, 91% planed to return to Kenwood next year. Forty-five percent (45%) of the teachers surveyed were paired with a mentor teacher in their first year of teaching while 55% were not paired with a mentor teacher.

The teachers completed a number of questions dealing with communication. When rating their communication with other teachers in the building, 99% felt they adequately communicated, 91% of the teachers felt they adequately communicated with the principal, and 97% of the teachers felt they adequately communicated with the students. Interestingly, only 67% of the teachers felt they adequately communicated with the parents.

The next set of results dealt specifically with the parents of our students. Sixty-three percent (63%) of teachers felt that parents inadequately supported their work while 92% felt the parents were inadequately involved in their child's education. Eighty-four percent (84%) felt that the parents inadequately supported the school and 82% felt that parents inadequately supported school policies.

The next set of data is in reference to teacher's level of involvement in the school. When looking at team building and cohesiveness amongst the staff, 69% of the teachers felt that they

were adequately involved and 62% of the teachers felt they were adequately involved in shaping

the school's curriculum. In addition, 68% of the teachers felt they were adequately involved in

the school's clubs and organizations and 72% of the teachers felt they adequately mentored

students. The next pieces of data are in reference to teachers' ability to influence different

aspects of the school. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the teachers felt that they adequately

influenced policies that directly affect them while 75% felt they adequately influenced the

training they receive. Sixty-two percent (62%) of the teachers felt that they adequately

influenced student's promotion and retention.

Looking at overall satisfaction for the year, 53% indicated satisfaction levels of excellent

or very good while 21% satisfaction levels were fair or poor. In terms of teaching as a career,

79% were very to somewhat satisfied with teaching as a career.

In examining the impact of overall satisfaction with the school, analysis revealed that

83% of those who were satisfied (excellent, very good, or good) were planning to return to

Kenwood next year, while fifty percent (50%) of those who reported their year as poor were not

planning to return to Kenwood next year (Table 1).

Table 1

Percentages of Teachers Planning to Return, by Level of Satisfaction with School

Overall Satisfaction With This School	Return to Kenwood	
	Yes	No
Excellent	15%	0%
Very good	41%	25%
Good	27%	25%
Fair	14%	0%
Poor	4%	50%

Ten percent (10%) of those teachers that were matched with a mentor in their first year of teaching, rated this past year as excellent. In contrast, 17% of those not matched with a mentor in their first year rated this past year as excellent.

Questions exploring the impact of satisfaction with the school and the likelihood of leaving the profession revealed that 25% of those reporting an excellent year were very likely or fairly likely to leave the profession in the next five years, while 45% of teachers reporting a fair year were very likely or fairly likely to leave. Interestingly, 12% of those that were very satisfied with teaching as a career were very likely or fairly likely to leave the teaching profession in the next five years, while 29% of those that were dissatisfied were very likely to leave.

Forty-three (43%) of those who found parental involvement to be adequate were not too likely to leave in the next five years, while 15% of those that found parental involvement inadequate were very likely to leave in the next five years and 14% of those that found parental involvement inadequate were fairly likely to leave in the next five years (Table 2).

Table 2

Teachers' Ratings of Parental Involvement, by Likelihood of Leaving the Profession

Likelihood of Leaving the Profession	Parental Involvement in Their Child's Education	
	Adequate	Inadequate
Very likely	0%	15%
Fairly likely	0%	14%
Not too likely	43%	35%
Not at all likely	57%	36%

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of those reporting an excellent year felt adequately involved in clubs/organizations at Kenwood High School, while 72% of those who experienced a poor year felt they were adequately involved in clubs/organizations. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of those

who reported an excellent year felt adequately involved in shaping the school's curriculum. Similarly, 57% of those who reported a poor year felt they were adequately involved in shaping the school's curriculum.

Examining the effect of satisfaction with the school and involvement in team building revealed that 74% of those reporting a very good year felt adequately involved in team building and building cohesiveness amongst the staff. Forty-three percent (43%) of those reporting a poor year felt they were inadequately involved in team building and building cohesiveness amongst the staff (Table 3).

Table 3

Teachers' Involvement in Cohesiveness Building , by Level of Satisfaction with Year

Satisfaction with the School Year	Involvement with Staff Cohesiveness Building	
	Adequate	Inadequate
Excellent	67%	33%
Very good	74%	27%
Good	74%	26%
Fair	55%	46%
Poor	57%	43%

Eighty-three percent (83%) of those reporting an excellent year felt adequately involved in mentoring students and 43% of those reporting a poor year felt inadequately involved in mentoring students.

The findings revealed that 75% of those reporting an excellent year felt adequately involved in policies that affect them. Fifty-two percent (52%) of those reporting a good year felt inadequately involved in policies that affect them and 55% of those reporting a fair year felt inadequately involved in policies that affect them. In addition, 86% of those reporting a poor year felt inadequately involved in policies that affect them.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of those reporting an excellent year and 43% of those reporting a poor year felt adequately involved in the training they receive. Eight-three percent (83%) of those reporting an excellent year and 14% of those reporting a poor year felt adequately involved in student promotion or retention.

The analysis revealed that 92% of those reporting an excellent year and 71% of those reporting a poor year felt adequately involved in the subjects/grades they teach.

A final set of analyses were conducted to determine the impact of the likelihood of leaving teaching and perception of adequacy on some items. Only 9% of those that felt adequately involved in student retention/promotion were likely to leave teaching in the next five years, while 21% of those that felt inadequately involved in student retention/promotion were very likely to leave the teaching profession.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The researcher's hypothesis was that there would be a relationship between teacher turnover/involvement and satisfaction with the teaching career. The original hypothesis was supported in that turnover appeared to be related to teacher involvement and satisfaction, although the size of the sample was too small to establish a quantitative relationship.

Implications of the Results

Based on the findings, the researcher has found that teachers that were involved in their school community and satisfied with teaching as a career tended to return to the teaching profession. This indicates that teacher turnover would be less for those teachers that were involved and satisfied. When looking at overall satisfaction with Kenwood High School, 83% of those that were satisfied (excellent, very good, or good) were planning to return to the school next year. Fifty percent (50%) of those who reported their year as poor were not planning to return next year. Teacher satisfaction is a large predictor of teacher turnover. Parental involvement seemed to be another important factor when looking at teacher turnover. Teachers that found parental involvement to be adequate were not too likely to leave the profession in the next five years, while those that found parental involvement inadequate were very likely to leave in the next five years. Satisfaction with the school and involvement in team building seem to be correlated, although the number of participants was too low to determine a correlation quantitatively. Those reporting a very good year felt adequately involved in team building and building cohesiveness amongst the staff.

Theoretical Consequences

Based on these findings, schools should be certain that they are doing everything in their power to keep their teachers satisfied. Schools should also encourage teachers to get involved in school activities, create or build upon an already existing "parental involvement committee," build camaraderie amongst their staff, and encourage their teachers to build relationships with students in which they would feel comfortable seeking mentorship. Teacher training needs to be incorporated into induction programs to build collegial friendships and to become a part of the learning community (Black, 2004). School leadership teams should promote positive interpersonal relationships in their school (Rhodes et al., 2004). These relationships are very important as teachers feel they are a part of something and have a support system.

Threats to Validity

There were threats to validity present in this study. Those teachers that were happy, or satisfied, may have been more likely to complete the survey and submit it to the researcher. Those teachers that were dissatisfied may not have taken the time to complete the survey and return to the researcher. Based on the data received, Kenwood High School has a younger staff. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the teachers at this school have been teaching for 20 years or less. Younger teachers may tend to be more satisfied with their career. Younger teachers may be more satisfied with the career because it is their first career or a new career for them. They do not know a lot about the school system so they do not have anything to which to compare their experiences. Younger, newer teachers, do not have a lot to complain about; therefore, they tend to be more satisfied.

Comparison With Other Research

This study was conducted at a single high school without the use of random sampling or a control group, so it cannot be generalized to other schools or districts. Many other similar studies examined teacher satisfaction in a school district; however, the results are similar to the findings from the MetLife survey which found that over 56% of teachers are very satisfied with their careers (Harris Interactive, 2006). The MetLife study also found that 27% of teachers say they are likely to leave teaching in the next five years (Harris Interactive). The MetLife study concluded that retaining high quality teachers is as much of an issue today as it was two decades ago (Harris Interactive). The MetLife researcher also found that elementary and secondary teachers have similar levels of satisfaction (Harris Interactive).

Implications for Future Research

After reviewing the data collected from this study at Kenwood High School, it would be interesting to follow up at other educational institutions to see what the results may be. Other institutions should include schools in different areas and having different grade levels (elementary, middle, high). More participation would be essential to examine impact across schools. Future research might also include a more lengthy survey seeking questions about teacher preparedness, induction programs, additional support services, daily work load, working conditions, and evaluation methods.

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