

RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding and Reducing Teacher Resignations

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Introduction

The survey of 1,799 teachers equally divided between those that had resigned (leavers) and those that remained (stayers) identified six factors that influence teachers' decisions to leave teaching. The importance teachers ascribed to each factor was analyzed for differences by demographic characteristic, and within each such characteristic for differences between stayers and leavers. Understanding of the quantitative results was augmented by individual comments from 637 leavers and 436 stayers. Family responsibility was the most important factor for all teachers. It was followed in decreasing order of significance by assessment/paperwork, administrative support, time with family, and financial benefits. Job satisfaction, i.e. the perception that teaching was a joy, was least important. "Time with family" was the second most important factor for leavers; they attached significantly more importance to this factor than stayers. Detailed results are presented elsewhere (Meisels, Lewis, Kersaint, Potter, Lauria-Davis & Swartzel, 2005).

We do not make recommendations on broader, long-term matters subject to legislative or other state-wide action beyond the control of district and school administrators. Regarding compensation (part of financial benefits), there is a large body of literature citing low pay as a major source of teacher dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2000; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Macdonald, 1999; Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1989; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991; Stinebrickner, 1998; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Our findings are consistent with other reports that compensation issues come into play primarily when other working conditions become unsatisfactory (Liu & Meyer, 2005).

Where appropriate, our recommendations include references to research that demonstrates the efficacy of proposed strategies.

Recommendations

We recommend that district superintendents include special sessions on teacher retention in their periodic meetings with school principals.

We recommend that district and school leaders give priority to developing retention programs that address the factors teachers consider most important: the ability to spend more time with

their families, meeting responsibilities towards their families, and reducing the burden and stress of paperwork and punitive approaches to managing the implications of high stakes assessment.

We recommend that administrators at all levels develop and implement strategies that allow teachers to devote more time and effort to their families. While any new approach carries the risk of unintended consequences, careful planning and execution of such programs can minimize that risk. Examples of possible strategies are:

- Increased and better publicized opportunities for job sharing
- Greater use of part time teachers with flexible programs that explicitly address partial support for participation in fringe benefit packages, especially health insurance.
- Contract teaching for specific courses

We recommend that administrators, especially at the school level, ameliorate teachers' anxieties arising from high stakes assessment (FCAT) by

- Displaying a positive attitude to assessment
- Explaining to teachers the constructive use and formative value of such assessment
- Emphasizing their own roles as cheerleaders and supporters
- Minimizing punitive aspects
- Using detailed results formatively to help teachers increase their effectiveness.

(Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003)

We recommend that school principals encourage teachers to remain in the profession by dedicating themselves to pursuing all means available to improve working conditions such as

- Reducing discipline problems by adopting and enforcing disciplinary rules that are consistent within a school and among district schools
- Providing structured programs to increase parental involvement
- Assigning as few different preparations as possible, especially to new teachers
- Avoiding assignment of new teachers to "low-end" classes with probable discipline problems
- Building on district induction programs
- Providing mentors for new teachers and those with special needs, for at least 3 years
- Encouraging, supporting, and if necessary providing ongoing professional development opportunities
- Providing adequate classroom supplies and working equipment
- Eliminating or minimizing unnecessary daily annoyances

(Lui & Meyer, 2005; Madsen & Hancock, 2002; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Ingersoll, 2000; Macdonald, 1999; Kelley 2004; Cochran-Smith 2004; Buckley, Schneider, & Shang 2005)

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