

## Reasons for Teacher Attrition: Experience Matters

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### Abstract

Effective teaching contributes to student growth. Quality teaching requires experienced teachers. Yet teachers continue to leave the profession at an increasing rate. This study presents moderate to large differences in 22 reasons for attrition among five levels of teacher experience. Data from the 2011-12 School and Staffing Survey and the 2012-13 Teacher Follow-up Survey were combined. Notable differences for leaving the teaching profession exist among teachers with varying levels of experience. Differences can be used to implement targeted policies to retain teachers at various levels of decision-making.

### Keywords

teacher attrition, retention, quality, experience, Teacher Follow-up Study

**E**ffective teaching influences a school's impact on student achievement gains (Allen, 2005; Guarino et al., 2006). Experience in teaching does matter for effectiveness in the teacher role (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Teachers are leaving the field early or part way through their career causing a “greening” of the teacher profession and decline in the years of experience among teachers (Allen, 2005; Ingersoll et al., 2018).

The average years of experience has consistently declined from 14.2 years in 2003-2004 to 13.8 years in the 2011-12 (Goldring et al., 2013).

The 2012-13 Teacher Follow-up Survey results identified an estimated 99,200, or 38.3%, of former teachers declaring they retired during the time between the SASS and TFS. States encourage early retirements as a cost-saving measure.

Yet, retirements accounted for a small portion of teachers who left (Goldring et al., 2014). Age and experience were noted as stable indicators of the U-shaped curve illustrating attrition of new or young teachers and older or experienced teachers (Guarino et al., 2006).

This brief examines teacher experience and reasons for attrition more closely so policies can be targeted to ensure teachers stay in the field long enough to become proficient and then remain in the profession. Retaining

teachers is the most salient means to promote student achievement (Allen, 2005).

## Purpose

This study examines differences among five levels of experience ( $\leq 5$ , 6 – 15, 16 – 25, 26-35, and  $\geq 36$  years) for 22 factors of teacher attrition rated from 1 (least) to 5 (most).

Data about former public and private school teachers in 50 states and the District of Columbia from the 2011-12 School and Staffing Survey and the 2012-13 Teacher Follow-up Survey were combined. Mann-Whitney *U* procedures calculated mean ranks for two group comparisons. Effect size was calculated as the difference between the mean rank of the group with less and more experience.

Reasons for attrition are ranked by effect size difference in Table 1. The mean and standard deviation for each factor and mean ranks of the two groups are also presented. If ( $MR_L$ ) is larger than ( $MR_M$ ), the effect size is positive. If ( $MR_L$ ) is larger than ( $MR_S$ ), the effect size is negative. Effect sizes are interpreted as small (S) 0–33.333%,  $ES_{range} = 0-2,364$ ; moderate (M) 33.334%–66.667%,  $ES_{range} = 2,365-9,281$ ; and, large (L) 66.668%–99.999%,  $ES_{range} = 9,282-13,835$ .

## Results

Moderate to large differences between groups of teachers with various levels of experience are presented for 22 factors of attrition in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*22 Factors of Teacher Attrition: Means, Standard Deviations, Mean Ranks, and Effect Sizes for Highest Ranked Differences Between Two Years of Experience Groups*

Factor of Teacher Attrition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Years of Experience: Two Groups with Most Difference	<i>MR</i>  Less Experience	<i>MR</i>  More Experience	Effect  Size (L, large; M, moderate)
Retirement	2.59	1.768	6–15 vs. 26–35	24,278	54,645	-30,367 (L)
Non-K 12 Position	2.20	1.608	6–15 vs. 26–35	45,889	25,720	20,169 (L)
Salary	1.66	1.245	6–15 vs. 26–35	43,180	29,345	13,835 (L)
Relocation	1.51	1.187	≤ 5 vs. 26–35	32,962	22,219	10,743 (L)
No Advancement	1.59	1.146	6–15 vs. 26–35	41,301	31,861	9,440 (L)
Classes Within Education	1.53	1.204	6–15 vs. 26–35	41,218	31,971	9,247 (L)
Dissatisfaction With Career	2.07	1.426	6–15 vs. 26–35	40,641	32,744	7,897 (M)
Classes Outside Education	1.34	0.933	≤ 5 vs. 26–35	31,036	23,496	7,540 (M)
Personal Life	2.53	1.735	6–15 vs. ≥ 36	28,892	21,671	7,221 (M)
Benefits	1.36	0.948	≤ 5 vs. 26–35	30,495	23,855	6,640 (M)
Assessments Impact Teaching	2.19	1.469	≤ 5 vs. 6–15	27,910	33,871	-5,961 (M)
Job Description	1.77	1.211	6–15 vs. ≥ 36	28,548	22,896	5,652 (M)
Influence	1.89	1.268	≤ 5 vs. 6–15	28,206	33,724	-5,518 (M)
Discipline	1.89	1.313	6–15 vs. ≥ 36	28,472	23,170	5,302 (M)
Assessments Impact Benefits	1.58	1.146	6–15 vs. 26–35	39,358	34,462	4,896 (M)
Job Security	1.34	0.881	≤ 5 vs. 26–35	29,196	24,716	4,480 (M)
Support for Assessments	1.66	1.179	6–15 vs. 26–35	39,163	34,723	4,440 (M)
Teach Time	2.16	1.435	≤ 5 vs. 16–25	19,801	24,210	-4,409 (M)
Administrator	2.05	1.449	≤ 5 vs. 6–15	29,025	33,319	-4,294 (M)
Conditions	1.60	1.128	16–25 vs. 26–35	29,876	25,729	4,147 (M)

Class Size	1.70	1.200	6–15 vs. $\geq 36$	28,120	24,423	3,697 (M)
Autonomy	1.67	1.208	16–25 vs. $\geq 36$	18,706	15,223	3,483 (M)

Source: Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School District Data File (2011–12);" Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), "Former Teacher Data File (2012–13)."

Note: Weighted  $N = 130,680$ . Weighted sample sizes by experience categories: 5 or fewer years,  $n = 21,134$ ; 6–15 years,  $n = 42,657$ ; 16–25 years,  $n = 23,069$ ; 26–35 years,  $n = 31,870$ ; 36 or more years,  $n = 11,963$ .

<sup>a</sup>Mean Rank is calculated by ranking teachers' responses from lowest to highest for both groups and then calculating the mean for each group

The two groups with the greatest number of differences in reasons for leaving the profession (12 of 22 factors) are teachers with 6 - 15 and 26 + years of experience. Large differences are noted between these two groups for the following reasons: retirement, a non-K-12 position, salary, no advancement, and classes within education. Moderate differences are noted between seasoned and veteran teachers: dissatisfaction with career, personal life, job description, discipline, assessment impacts benefits, support for assessment, and class size.

Teachers with the fewest number of years in the profession ( $\leq 5$  years) differ from teachers with 25+ years of experience largely for relocation and moderately for classes outside education, and job security. Moderate differences are noted between teachers with  $\leq 5$  years and 6—15 years of experience. The impact of assessments on teaching, influence, and an administrator are factors which teachers with 6 – 15 years of experience rank more highly than teachers with  $\leq 5$  years of experience.

## Discussion

The large differences between teachers with 6-15 years of experience and 25+ year of

experience are most noteworthy. Teachers with six years of experience have enough experience to influence successful student outcomes yet are mobile professionally. Beyond differences due to retirement, leaving for a non-K-12 position because of salary, no advancement, or to take classes within education are telling and support observations of labor market dynamics observed by Guarino et al. (2006).

New teachers relocate, are preparing for jobs outside of education, and leave because they do not feel their jobs are secure, confirming Guarino et al.'s (2006) reporting of the U-shaped curve which illustrates teacher attrition across age and experience.

Relocation is at its highest between ages 20 and 29 according to U.S. Census Bureau (Frey, 2019). That new teachers leave to take classes outside of education indicates their desire to prepare for jobs besides teaching and begs the question if teachers were oriented to the realities of teaching prior to entering the profession.

The common practice of districts signing 3-year probationary contracts with new teachers likely contributes to new teachers feeling insecure.

Differences in reasons for leaving between teachers with  $\leq 5$  years and 6—15 years of experience are worth further investigation. New teachers are more likely to leave because of the impact of assessments than teachers with 6—15 years of experience. The impact of assessments is a factor of attrition influenced by state and national policy.

State assessments are a greater focus than ever in teaching. The focus on state assessments might contribute to new teachers feeling they do not have influence in their jobs which is another difference between teachers with  $< 5$  years and 6—15 years of experience. Teachers with 6—15 years of experience leave more than new teachers because of dynamics between teachers and administrators, a factor which can be mitigated at the local level.

Perhaps new teachers reach a tipping point of disenchantment as they spend time in the profession.

### **Conclusion**

Notable differences for leaving the teaching profession exist among teachers with varying levels of experience. Differences reveal that new teachers might stay in the profession if they felt more job security, had more influence, and were not attracted to jobs outside of education. Seasoned teachers might stay in the profession if dynamics between them and administrators were better, salaries were higher, and advancement was available by furthering their coursework in the field of education. Differences can be used to implement policies to retain education's greatest asset, its teachers.

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