



Keeping Highly Qualified Teachers:

IT'S NOT A MATTER OF MORE PAY!

In a recent article written by Michael Rosenberg of John Hopkins University, and published in the Baltimore Sun (December 22, 2005) he states that when taught by ill-prepared and underperforming teachers, the effect on the "at-risk" child is both "cumulative and life altering." After repeated exposure to low quality teachers, these "at-risk" youth are many times unable to overcome the effects of poor instruction, even in later years when taught by more effective teachers.



With numbers of "at-risk" children growing, it is even more important that highly qualified teachers be recruited and retained. In addition, the **No Child Left Behind Act** requirement to staff all classrooms with "highly qualified teachers" is creating a major challenge for school districts in general, and for schools in inner-city and poor rural areas, in particular.

Unfortunately, the increased demand for highly qualified teachers comes at the same time that many of these sought after teachers are leaving the profession. In fact, teacher attrition is a significant challenge to the nation's hiring systems. As indicated by Linda

Darling-Hammond (May 2003), the number of teachers leaving the profession has surpassed the number of new teachers entering. Furthermore, it is estimated that nearly 1/3 of the new teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching. This situation is exacerbated in high-poverty areas with teacher turnover is almost 50% higher than in low-poverty areas.

Teacher attrition is an enormous cost to school districts. According to a study conducted by the Texas Center for Educational Research (2000), the state's annual teacher turnover rate of 15% translates into an estimated cost of \$329 million, or \$8,000 per new teacher who leaves the profession in the first few years of teaching. Not included in this amount, is the cost associated with supporting ill-prepared and poor performing teachers who create a drain on school districts' financial and human resources. Many research studies have focused on why teachers leave the profession. This article examines factors associated with why teachers remain in the profession. Having a better understanding of what keeps teachers teaching may help school districts retain their highly qualified teachers.

Several good articles are available that address many of the factors associated with reducing teacher attrition (click-on a link: [Teacher Resiliency by Becky Bobek](#); [Keeping Quality Teachers: The Art of Retaining General and Special Education Teachers](#); or [Teacher Retention: Why Do Beginning Teachers Remain in the Profession by Inman and Marlow](#)). In general, the research that has focused on explaining why some highly qualified teachers choose to remain in the profession while others leave, has concluded that *salaries and benefit are considerably less important* to these teachers in comparison to *being empowered to participate in decision-making; having autonomy; job security; and foremost of all is having safe and positive working conditions.*

IOD, Inc. recently conducted a study of a large school district in which perceptions on teacher retention was examined. A total 4,084 teachers from across the entire school district completed a survey containing 11 questions relating to teacher retention. Each of the 11 questions was prefaced with the statement "If I am to remain teaching in this district." The response options available to choose from were "Yes," "No," "Not Sure," "Don't Know" and "Not Applicable." The percentage of teachers responding "Yes" by question has been disaggregated by age category.

In order to improve the response rates to the survey, only demographic data were requested. It was believed that requesting length of service, and new and beginning teacher status in particular, might cause teachers not to respond, instead age categories were used. While not a perfect surrogate for length of service, the age group of 20 to 24 would most likely constitute the majority of the new and beginning teachers in the district. As shown below, the results of this study generally support other research findings.



More specifically, retaining teachers is more of a matter of involving them in the decision-making process and providing a safe environment in which to work. Getting more money or benefits was 6th in importance to these teachers. The disaggregated results by age group reveals some variation in the results that can be expected based on the general characteristics of the age group.

If I am to remain teaching in this district...	Percentage of "Yes" Responses by Age Group				
	20 to 24 years old	25 to 32 years old	33 to 44 years old	45 years & older	All Teachers
1. being involved in decisions regarding student academic standards for my school is very important to me.	96.1	92.5	94.5	94.6	94.2
2. having better classroom resources and materials is very important to me.	93.3	96.3	90.9	93.3	93.3
3. making my school safer by having more effective ways of dealing with student discipline is very important to me.	92.0	93.3	94.1	93.0	93.3
4. reducing my workload, less paperwork and smaller class sizes is very important to me.	84.0	93.0	91.6	91.8	91.6
5. being involved in decision-making for my school is very important to me.	81.7	91.7	91.1	91.5	91.0
6. getting more money or better benefits is very important to me.	92.2	88.9	93.4	90.5	90.9
7. increasing parental involvement in the school is very important to me.	83.3	90.0	85.2	85.7	86.4
8. providing new teacher support is very important to me.	92.0	87.2	86.0	83.3	85.5
9. rewarding me for successful teaching is very important to me.	87.0	84.7	85.8	84.1	84.9
10. increasing staff development opportunities is very important to me.	84.0	82.0	73.6	75.1	76.8
11. implementing team or interdisciplinary teaching is very important to me.	78.0	83.0	77.2	70.5	75.6

As Linda Darling-Hammond (May 2003) points out that while improving teachers' salaries is important, the recruiting and retaining of highly qualified teachers, regardless of new or veteran, has much more to do with non-monetary factors. Teachers need to feel safe, part of decision-making process, and respected for value that they add to our future by educating today's children. When considering the high cost associated with teacher attrition, the investment made to keep good teachers will yield both immediate and long-term benefits. New and beginning teachers prosper when provided sustained and focused mentoring. Paying attention to our schools' physical condition, providing a safe and secure environment in which to teach and learn, and enabling teachers to participate in the decision making process will send a clear message to them that your school district is committed to finding, keeping, and supporting good teachers. The limited financial resources of most school districts can either go toward covering the high costs associated with teacher turnover or toward implementing strategies to retain highly quality teachers.



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