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Title
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Publication Date
2004-09-01

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Urban Teacher Retention Policy: A Research Brief

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Retention Report Series: A Longitudinal Study of Career Urban Educators

A Research Report

prepared by

UCLA's Institute for

Democracy,

Education, & Access

Karen Hunter Quartz, Kimberly Barazza Lyons, Katherine Masyn, Brad Olsen, Lauren Anderson, Andrew Thomas, Joanna Goode, & Eileen Lai Horng

September 2004

(Document rrs-rr006-0704)

UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access

University of California, Los Angeles

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Retention Report Series: A Longitudinal Study of Career Urban Educators

The papers in this series reflect the on-going work of researchers studying the career pathways of educators who received specialized urban teacher preparation through UCLA's Center X Teacher Education Program (TEP). This longitudinal study extends from 2000-2006, adding a new TEP cohort each year, to track more than a thousand urban educators in their first through tenth year of the profession. Together, the papers that report this longitudinal research seek to inform teacher retention policy by addressing the unique challenge of creating and supporting career pathways in education that serve high poverty schools and students. The papers in this series are available to download from the IDEA web site located at www.ucla-idea.org.

How to cite this document:

Quartz, K.H., Lyons, K.B., Masyn, K., Olsen, Brad., Anderson, L., Thomas, A., Goode, J., & Horng, Eileen. (2004). *Urban Teacher Retention Policy: A Research Brief.* Los Angeles, CA: UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA).

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Urban Teacher Retention Policy:

A Research Brief [1]

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September 2004

The recent *Williams v. California* settlement establishes new standards and accountability that will ensure decent schools for all students and provides nearly $1 billion to fix the terrible conditions that exist currently. One of the key new standards—all students must be taught by "highly qualified" teachers—presents policymakers with a complex charge. As Ingersoll (2001, 2002, 2003a, 2003b) has demonstrated, the struggle to provide all children with a competent teacher will not be solved by focusing on supply-side solutions such as recruitment. Rather, we need retention-oriented policies that draw attention to the profession itself: how can the job of teaching be improved to encourage long-term retention? These policies range from ensuring high-quality preservice education that will prepare teachers for the challenges ahead to ongoing

[1] Support for the research reported in this brief was generously provided through a grant from the Stuart Foundation.
A more extensive analysis of the data reported in this brief is currently under review for publication.

support for professional development and advancement. This research brief summarizes interim results from a longitudinal study designed to inform these career development policies and tailor them to the needs of high-poverty urban schools.

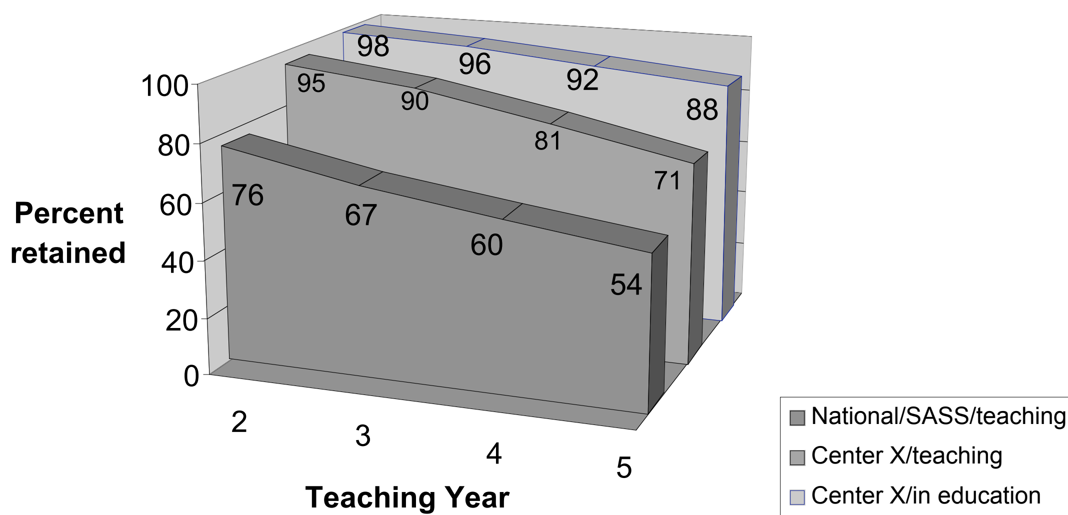
For the past five years, we have followed the career pathways of educators who received specialized urban teacher preparation from UCLA's Center X Teacher Education Program. (For more information on the program, see Quartz *et al*., 2003). By 2006, our longitudinal study will include more than a thousand urban educators in their first through tenth year of the profession. All of these educators begin their careers in "high-priority" schools. These schools, often termed "urban," or "hard-to-staff," are predominately schools located in cities and their immediate surroundings (although many high-poverty rural schools face similar challenges). High-priority schools are under-resourced and under-funded, often situated in low-income communities of color that serve a majority of academically low-performing children whose parents have comparatively low-levels of formal schooling. Each year U.S. public schools fitting this description lose and must replace approximately one-fifth of their teaching faculty (Ingersoll, 2001). In large urban high schools this can translate into 50 or so new hires each fall. Filling 50 positions is indeed a challenge, but the even bigger challenge is to break this "revolving door" cycle by hiring highly qualified and committed teachers who will stay over the long haul to transform these schools. Our research explores the conditions under which these teachers stay connected to this struggle for social change.

This research brief first summarizes our interim cross-sectional retention data and compares it to national norms as an initial step in assessing the impact of specialized urban teacher preparation on retention. Second, our interim data offer an expanded conception of retention that captures movement or migration away from teaching into other professional roles in education. These patterns of “role migration” help inform retention-oriented policies aimed at professionalizing the education workforce. The third section of this brief reports another form of migration—movement away from high-priority schools to less challenging contexts—and suggests the role improved working conditions might play in stemming the high tide of attrition from schools most in need of qualified teachers.

1. Understanding the Link Between Specialized Teacher Education and Retention

Comparing our sample of urban teachers—a diverse group of educators who earn master’s degrees from a specialized program within an elite institution—to national retention norms is problematic. Nationally, 84% of public school teachers are white, few attend elite universities, and only 42% hold a master’s degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). For this reason, we collect extensive background data on our subjects and are in the process of creating a matched sample from the latest Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data to facilitate a more adequate assessment of the impact of specialized preparation on teacher retention. In the interim, Figure 1 captures our initial attempt to compare the retention of Center X graduates to teachers nationwide.

Figure 1: Comparison of National (SASS) and Center X Retention Rates.



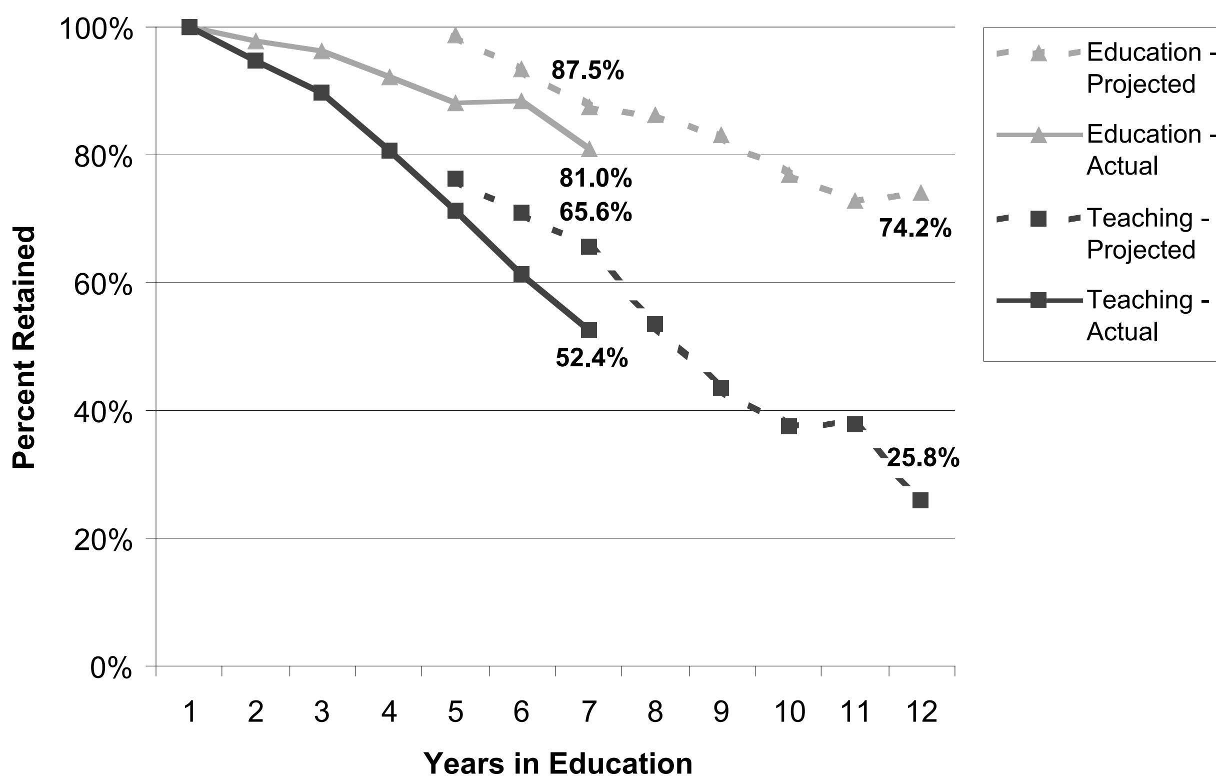
2. Beyond the Classroom: Tracking the Retention of all Educators

Retention research typically captures attrition from teaching, yet an interesting pattern emerges when the definition of retention expands to include other roles within education that extend beyond full-time classroom teaching. Looking at the "retained in education" trend in Figure 1, 88% of Center X graduates remain in education in some capacity after five years in the profession.

We asked our sample to anticipate what they would be doing in five years and the trend to stay in education but leave teaching continued, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. Based on the three years of overlapping actual and projection data, respondents overestimated their retention in both categories. If these projections hold true, Center X teacher retention will drastically fall after 12 years, in contrast to the vast majority of graduates who will still be in the education profession in some capacity.

[2] This and all other reports of data in this paper make the assumption that missing data is missing at random. We are currently in the process of testing this assumption and anticipate that some of the findings reported here will vary slightly in the final analysis.

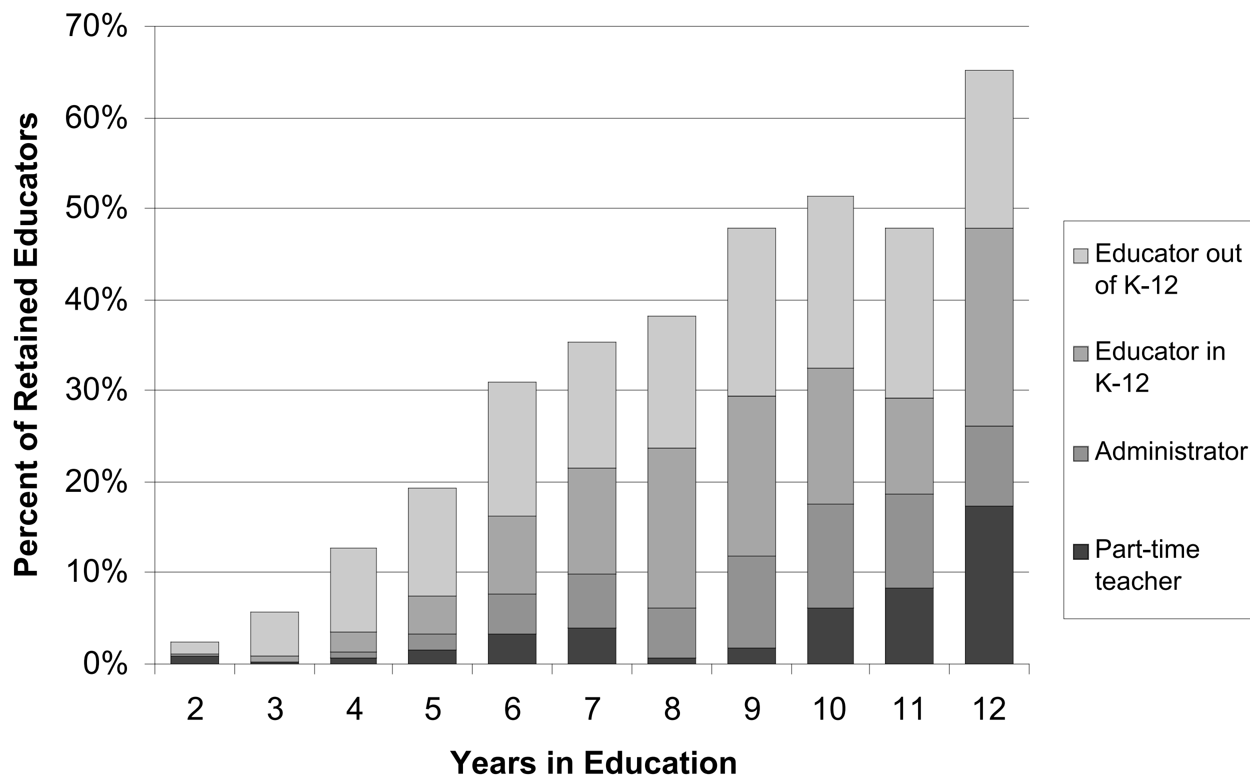
Figure 2: Projected and Actual Teacher and Educator Retention Rates



In order to track career movement across primary roles, we asked all Center X graduates who were "still in schools or an education-related field" to identify their primary role as one of the following: a full-time classroom teacher, a part-time teacher, an administrator, an educator working in another role within the K-12 system (e.g., bilingual coordinator, curriculum specialist, mentor), or an educator working in another role outside the K-12 system (e.g., educational consultant or entrepreneur, graduate student in education, Peace Corps teacher.) We also asked them to anticipate what their primary role would be in five years. Figure 3 below

illustrates these actual and projected career alternatives, revealing a steady trend away from classroom teaching.[3]

Figure 3: Actual (Years 1-7) and Projected (Years 8-12) Role Migration Patterns

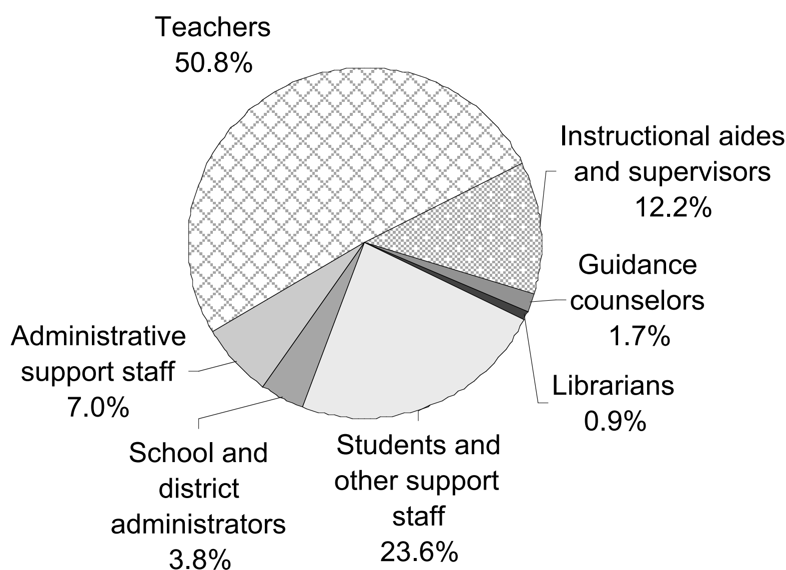


Our survey and qualitative data provide an initial window into this movement away from teaching and into others roles. Clearly, workplace conditions explain a great deal. Compared to their colleagues who have migrated to other roles, teachers report that they are less pleased with

[3] The remaining distance between the top of each bar and 100% includes the percent of retained educators that are or project to be full-time teachers, substitute teachers and teachers on temporary leave.

their opportunities for professional development and advancement. Sadly, classroom teachers also report lower levels of professional respect from society than all other career pathways. As countless studies document, the educational workforce is a hierarchical bureaucracy that is structured to encourage and reward role migration away from children and teaching. Nationwide, as illustrated in the figure below, teachers make up only half of the education workforce.

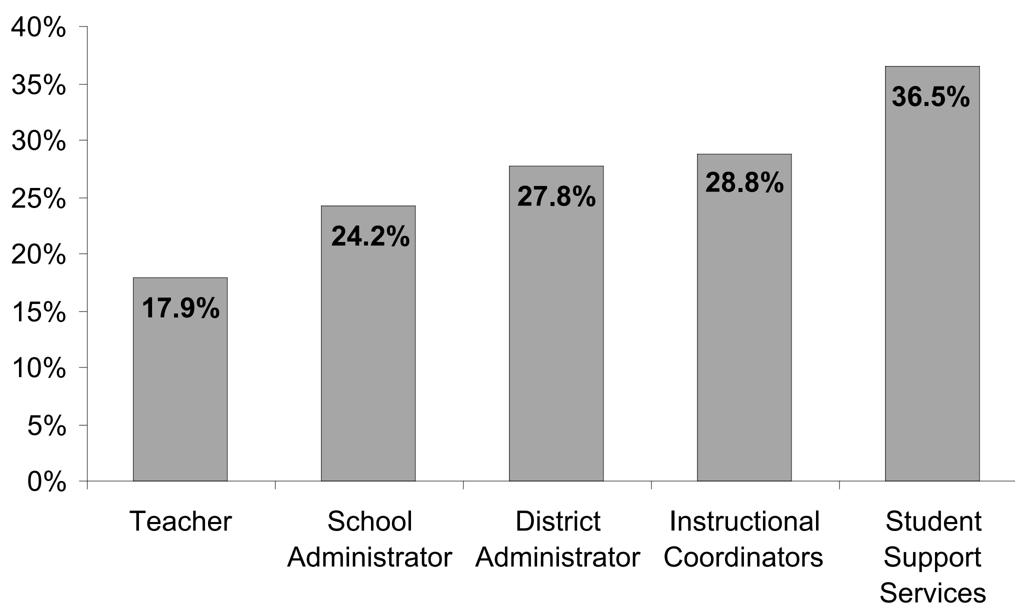
Figure 4: Public Elementary and Secondary Staff, by Type



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, *Common Core of Data*, 2001-02 school year

Moreover, during the past decade, different roles within the education profession have grown at different rates, with teaching at the bottom.

Figure 5: Growth of Educational Roles from 1992-2001.



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, *Common Core of Data*
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Policies aimed at curbing attrition from teaching frame the education profession as a staged career with multiple levels of accomplishment depending upon individual interest, energy, and ambition, all while keeping teachers in the classroom. Writing about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Harmon (2001) envisions creating new leadership

responsibilities such as teaching university classes, mentoring preservice teachers, and leading professional development programs. Harmon also advocates the creation of flexible administrative structures that allow teachers to take on new roles without leaving the classroom, such as pairing two teachers to teach a single class thereby providing time for each to pursue professional activities. Darling-Hammond (1997) echoes this recommendation:

> A new vision of the teaching career is needed that rewards the knowledge and expertise of those who work closest to children as highly as the skills of those who work furthest away and that makes those skills more widely available, thus enabling teachers to take on complementary hyphenated roles as school and program leaders, curriculum developers, mentors, staff developers, teacher educators, and researchers while they remain teachers. (p. 327)

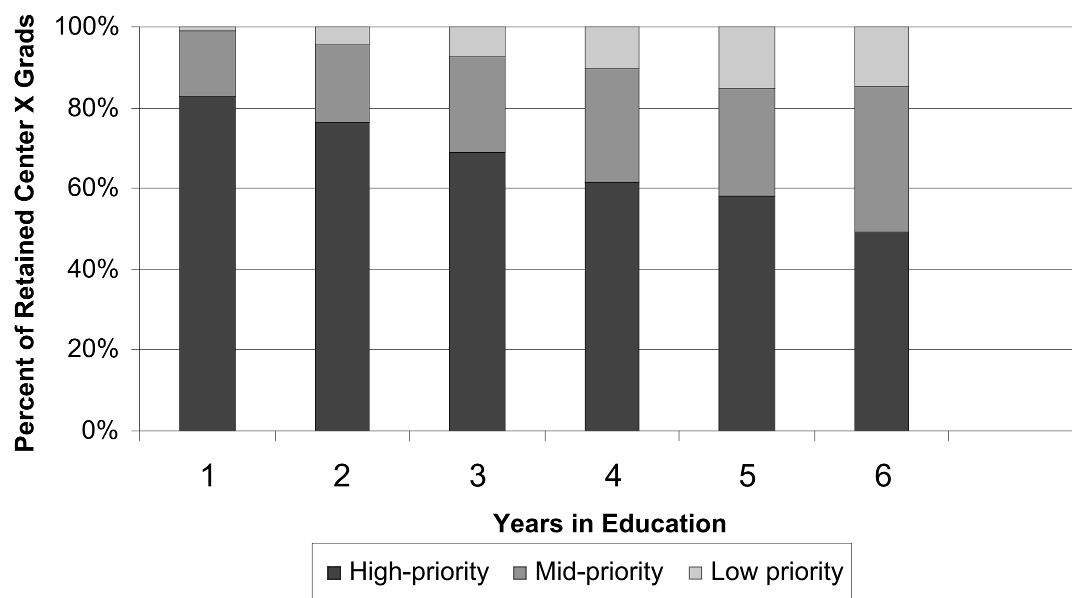
On one hand, this move to heighten teacher professionalism is a hopeful and far-reaching solution to the retention crisis. It seeks to elevate the status of teachers by setting up structures and regulations that ensure high quality work supported by continual learning. With these structures and regulations come new roles for educators, both within and outside the K-12 system. Yet policymakers must be mindful of the risk that such roles, with their structures and regulations, will become bureaucratized and feed into the educational system's long-standing hierarchical norms of power and authority.

3. What Explains Movement Away From High-Poverty Schools?

The challenge of retaining teachers in high-poverty schools includes two related problems: teacher migration or movement from school to school as well as attrition from teaching and the profession. Each year in the United States, more teachers leave the profession than enter. In 1999, for instance, 230,000 people entered teaching, yet nearly 290,000 left. And 250,000 more teachers moved or migrated from one school to another—usually away from "hard to staff" high-poverty schools (Ingersoll 2003b). Both problems carry serious financial, organizational, and academic implications. Recruiting, hiring and training teachers is a time-consuming and expensive process that requires schools and districts to shift financial and human resources away from other programs in order to find new teachers. The financial costs of teacher turnover in one U.S. state have been estimated at between 329 million and 2.1 billion dollars annually (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2003). High-poverty schools' higher turnover rates make the associated costs especially damaging, adding to the long list of challenges already facing these schools.

We designed our research on school migration to be particularly sensitive to differences across schools so we could track the contexts of career decisions. In order to study migration away from high-poverty schools, we first categorized schools as low, medium, and high priority. Masyn (2004) applied multiple group latent class cluster analysis to aggregate student measures drawn from the California State Department of Education's schools database. Looking at the cross-sectional data, preliminary migration trends appear. Despite an initial commitment to teaching in high-priority schools, these data show that Center X graduates have steadily moved to less challenging contexts, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Distribution of Retained Educators by Priority School Status.



A number of studies have found that teachers systematically move away from schools with low levels of achievement and high concentrations of poor children of color (see Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino, & Mejia, 2000; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 2003; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Stinebrickner, n.d.). However, student demographics may be serving as proxies for school working conditions when teachers move from one school to another. Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (forthcoming) find that student characteristics become insignificant predictors of teacher turnover when district salary levels and teachers' ratings of working conditions—including large class sizes, facilities and space problems, multi-track schools, and lack of textbooks—are added to the model. Horng (forthcoming) similarly finds that when teachers are asked to make trade offs among school and student characteristics, the former are

often considered more important than the latter. Horng surveyed teachers in the second year of the Center X teacher education program as well as teachers in a large, elementary school district in Southern California and found that quality of facilities, class size, salary, and administrative support rate more important than student ethnicity, SES, or performance when teachers choose among different schools.

Qualitative studies have also found school working conditions to be more important to teachers than student demographics. However, because student and school characteristics are so highly correlated, the former often serves as a proxy for the latter when teachers consider transferring to different schools. For example, Johnson and Birkeland (2003a), in their qualitative study of teacher retention, found that many teachers move around voluntarily in search of "schools that make good teaching possible" (p. 21). This is often a search for supportive principals and colleagues, reasonable teaching assignments and workloads, and sufficient resources. Given the scarcity of these conditions in high-poverty schools, teacher migration patterns typically flow from less to more affluent school contexts.

Across all years in our own data, educators who moved to low-priority schools expressed higher levels of agreement on the following measures: they felt safe at their school, resources and materials were sufficiently available, and their school facility was not in need of significant repair. In addition to changing residences, movers cited poor working conditions and lack of administrative support as the top reasons for their career decisions. Policies aimed at improving

resources and working conditions in high-poverty schools hold the most promise for stemming the high tide of attrition from schools most in need of highly-qualified teachers.

Conclusion

The migration of Center X graduates away from teaching and high-priority schools into other roles and schools where they find better working conditions, more learning opportunities, and a heightened sense of respect signifies the uphill battle facing retention-oriented policies. As our interim findings demonstrate, even graduates from elite colleges who receive specialized training to buck the high attrition trend fall prey—following what seems like a logical career progression away from the classroom and high-priority schools. We continue our longitudinal research to understand the factors that explain the slower rate of attrition for Center X graduates, compared to national norms, and the patterns of role and school migration. This research is based on a range of complementary methodologies, including survival analysis to track retention, logistical regression to study the effect of specialized teacher preparation, qualitative analysis to understand the contours of career development, network analysis to study the construction of professional learning communities, and adaptive conjoint analysis to probe the relative importance of working conditions and student characteristics on retention. We hope that this program of research will shed further light on the conditions required to retain urban school professionals in high-poverty schools.

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