

Teacher Mobility: Looking More Closely at “The Movers” Within a State System

Ana M. Elfers, Margaret L. Plecki, and Michael S. Knapp
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
University of Washington

This article summarizes the results of a 2-part study using both state databases and teacher surveys to examine teacher retention and mobility in Washington’s teacher workforce. The first part of the research examined individual teacher records during a 5-year period. Statewide analyses were conducted, and 20 districts were selected for in-depth examination. Data were examined in relation to student demographics, measures of student learning, and poverty level of the school, with special attention given to novice teachers and teachers of color. The second part of the study surveyed a representative sample of teachers regarding their views on factors that influence their decisions to stay or leave their school or school district. Findings suggest that focusing on the nature of teacher mobility within a district is a useful way to examine a number of equity concerns.

The research presented in this article was supported by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), an independent, nonprofit organization in Washington state that focuses on teaching quality. However, the findings and conclusions contained in this article are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Correspondence should be sent to Ana M. Elfers, University of Washington, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Box 353600, Seattle, WA 98195–3600. E-mail: aelfers@u.washington.edu

As workforce conditions in the United States have changed in recent years, educators have worried about the impact on classroom teachers, particularly with regard to teacher retention. Teaching is a demanding profession with a steep learning curve, especially in the early years. Student populations have grown increasingly diverse and teachers report substantial instructional challenges in serving all students well. The day-to-day implementation of ambitious national and state reform agendas rests squarely on the shoulders of classroom teachers as they endeavor to help students reach learning standards.

These changes have fueled considerable debate regarding the quality and stability of the teacher workforce. Robust and valid measures of teaching quality are difficult to develop, and the issues surrounding teacher mobility and career decisions are no less difficult to disentangle. To develop an understanding of mobility issues, scholars have tended to rely on large national data sources, like the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) database, supplemented by analyses of smaller local or regional samples of the teacher workforce. From these sources comes a useful picture of the dynamics of teacher mobility and its possible consequences for schools and districts. However, missing from this work is insight into the way that teacher mobility occurs within an entire state system, with close attention to mobility at both the school and district level. Such analyses can provide data about state-specific workforce conditions that policymakers should take into account.

In this article, we offer one such state-specific analysis, drawing on several different data sources (a statewide teacher database and a series of surveys to which a representative “standing sample” of the state’s teachers responded). The state in question, Washington, resembles other states in many ways, although retaining some unique characteristics that may be shaping the mobility patterns.

Our analysis seeks to expand the conversation about teacher mobility by paying close attention to a category of teachers that is frequently referred to in the literature as the “movers,” those teachers who move from one school or district to another. We posit that teacher mobility needs to be understood at both the school and district levels, taking into account the unique school factors that teachers indicate influence their decisions to stay or leave. We argue that teacher movement within the district may be a more useful way to consider issues of equity in urban and large district settings.

We have chosen to organize this article around four major questions:

1. Across the state as a whole, what are the overall patterns of teacher mobility and attrition for all teachers, and for those who can be considered novices?
2. What can be learned by looking closely at both inter- and intradistrict retention of teachers within the state?
3. What issues of equity manifest themselves in the movement of teachers at both school and district levels?
4. From the teachers' point of view, what are the most important considerations in their professional decisions to stay at or leave a school?

Before presenting the analyses related to each question, we briefly review the literature that provides a foundation for understanding teacher mobility, along with the methods and data sources we used to carry out the state-specific analysis.

Starting Point for Understanding Teacher Mobility: What Existing Scholarship Tells Us

In recent years questions of teacher retention and turnover have sparked considerable debate in policy circles. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) declared in a report that teacher turnover has become a national crisis. Yet, despite an increasing number of research studies, few have used actual state data to track the movement of teachers at the school and district level. Teacher attrition and turnover have important policy implications and by examining these issues within a single state system we may be able to better understand where mobility is having its greatest impact.

To complicate matters, educators, researchers, and policymakers are not always consistent in the way in which they represent the available teacher workforce or define terms (Macdonald, 1999). Mobility and retention studies vary with regard to the time frames employed, with 1-, 3-, or 5-year intervals often used. A beginning or novice teacher may be defined in terms of as few as 1 or as many as 5 years of teaching experience. Statistics on teacher turnover may also vary depending on whether teachers are reported as transferring from one school to another within the same district, moving to another district or out of state, or exiting the profession. The ways in which these statistics are reported have very different policy implications. For example, a teacher who transfers from

one district to another is not lost from the state's overall workforce. However, there is an impact on the individual district and school regardless of where the departing teacher goes, as that teacher will likely have to be replaced. Identifying teacher shortages is not an easy matter. How districts choose to report vacancies and the various ways in which schools and districts can choose to fill them also influence how the numbers are reported. A significant omission is often the number of educators who temporarily leave the workforce and later return, creating a potential pool of candidates (Heyns, 1988; Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1988).

Only recently has the study of teacher turnover embraced a more comprehensive understanding of mobility. In general, three major categories have defined the migration and attrition of the teaching force: those who stay in the same district or school (known as stayers), those who move to other districts or to private schools (movers), and those who exit the teaching profession altogether (leavers) (Ingersoll, 2001a). Earlier statistics on teacher mobility included only the stayers and leavers. By accounting for the movers, researchers achieve a more detailed understanding of workforce conditions. In this study, we define stayers and movers with even greater specificity, by distinguishing between those who stay in their same school, those who move to another school within the same district, and those who move to other districts within the state.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has tracked characteristics of the teacher workforce since the late 1980s using the SASS and its supplement, the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). Studies of the national workforce have concluded that although the number of teachers has grown with increases in the student population, the overall stability of the workforce has remained about the same. In other words, since the earliest survey was administered in 1987–88 until the most recent in 1999–2000, the annual turnover rate (movers and leavers) has varied only from 13.2% to 15.7% (Ingersoll, 2004; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; NCES, 2005).

None of the studies point to widespread national teacher shortages. However, they have found issues of particular concern related to staffing in schools. For example, Whitener, Gruber, Lynch, Tingos, and Perona (1997) reported relatively low attrition in their study. Between the school years 1993–94 and 1994–95, they found that the rate of attrition from the teaching profession was 6.6% in public schools and varied by teacher's age, with the youngest and oldest teachers leaving at higher rates. The main reasons cited by public school teachers for leaving the workforce included retirement (27.4%) and pregnancy and childrearing (14.3%). Unfortunately, these year-to-year snapshots do not capture the considerable mobility of teachers in a profession that can offer opportunity for exit and reentry at a later date.

Another NCES study, *America's Teachers: Profile of the Profession*, reported that "the vast majority of the nation's teachers are experienced teachers who continue to teach from year to year. In 1993–94, 93 percent of teachers had taught during the previous year and were continuing to teach either in the same school or in a different school" (Henke et al., 1997, p. 95). This study found that "during this period, it was more difficult for schools to find fully qualified teachers in some fields than in others, indicating that teachers in these fields may have been in shorter supply" (p. 99). The authors also noted that schools serving larger proportions of students in poverty had more difficulty finding qualified teachers to fill positions.

Ingersoll (2001a, 2001b) has sought to address issues of building-level turnover by focusing on the specific characteristics of schools. Using SASS and TSF data, Ingersoll examined teacher turnover as a function of the organization and management of schools and concluded that many teachers leave for reasons other than retirement. He did not conclude that teacher shortages are a result of a lack of qualified teachers, but rather the result of teachers moving from one school to another (7.2%) or exiting the profession to pursue other jobs (6%), thereby creating a situation that he called a "revolving door" (Ingersoll, 2001b, p. 24).

Sources of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover can negatively affect the cohesiveness and effectiveness of school communities by disrupting educational programs and professional relationships intended to improve student learning (Bryk, Lee, & Smith, 1990; Ingersoll, 2001a). Most agree that some attrition is normal and that healthy turnover can promote innovation in schools (Macdonald, 1999). Often missing from the research, however, is the school and district context, and where these teachers go, if they choose to stay in the profession.

Often teachers leave for personal reasons—the desire for career change or family pressures—but many organizational conditions are potentially part of the story. According to a series of national studies, lack of collegial and administrative support, student misbehavior and disinterest, insufficient salary, lack of teacher autonomy, unreasonable teaching assignment, lack of professional development opportunities, and inadequate allocation of time all contribute to the departure of teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Kelly, 2004; Luekens et al., 2004; NCES, 2003).

Recent evidence suggests that when teachers move, they often transfer to other schools within their district. Between the school years 1999–2000 and 2000–01, an analysis of SASS and TFS data found that 45% of those

who transferred moved to another school within their district, and 53% moved to a school in another district (NCES, 2005). This considerable intradistrict movement indicates that certain school characteristics (e.g., working conditions of schools, student disciplinary issues and school leadership) may motivate teachers to move or leave their jobs, in addition to the commonly perceived reasons of retirement and childrearing (Ingersoll, 2001a; Luekens et al., 2004). In particular, the composition of a school's student body with regard to race, ethnicity, and poverty has been shown to influence teacher attrition and mobility (Guin, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001b; Kelly, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; NCES, 2005; Shen, 1997). Although these factors may pose particular challenges, a recent study found that the influence of student demographics on reported turnover and hiring problems may be reduced when factoring in certain positive working conditions (Loeb & Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Teacher attrition is higher in the early years of teaching when compared with midcareer teachers (Lortie, 1975; Murnane et al., 1988; Shen, 1997). Whereas Ingersoll and Smith (2003) suggested that between 40% and 50% of all beginning teachers leave the profession after 5 years, others have found the exit rates to be considerably lower. In examining the SASS data from 1999–2000 to 2000–01, Luekens et al. (2004) found that 8.5% of teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience left during that year. In the 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Henke, Zahn, and Carroll (2001) found that 82% of novice teachers were still teaching 3 years later and noted that none of the other occupational categories examined proved more stable than teachers. In a study of novice teacher turnover in four Midwest states, Theobald and Laine (2003) found that the percentage of those who left teaching during the first 5 years varied from 20% to 32%, depending on the state.

Novices also are considerably more likely to move than other teachers (NCES, 2005). Heyns (1988) argued that teachers in their first decade of teaching were far more mobile than one might expect: "Forty percent of the sample had taught in more than one district, and 25 percent had taught in more than one school within the same district" (p. 30). In a longitudinal study of new teachers in Massachusetts, Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found that experiences at the school site were central in influencing new teachers' decisions to stay in their schools and in teaching. They argued that novice teachers' professional success and satisfaction is tied to the particular school site and that working conditions found to support their teaching include collegial interaction, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources, and schoolwide structures to support student learning. These issues may

be particularly acute for new teachers in low-income schools (Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Donaldson, 2004). Others have found that the participation in a combination of mentoring and group induction programs may reduce beginning teacher turnover (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), although the qualitative distinctions among these programs and their relative cost-effectiveness are not always clear (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004).

The main focus of our work is to further understand teacher mobility, particularly inter- and intradistrict differences. In this way, we can determine if state-specific analyses paint a different picture of retention and mobility than what we can currently know from national data sources. We also include teachers' perspectives regarding why they choose to stay or leave their school and examine whether differences exist between teachers in high- and low-poverty schools. To develop a state-based case, Washington state databases are used to track teacher mobility and are supplemented with teacher surveys of a stratified random sample of the state's teachers. Like Ingersoll (2001a), we found that rates of teacher mobility are approximately the same as the rates of teacher attrition. However, our analysis adds to the understanding of what comprises mobility, particularly with regard to teachers moving out of their schools to another district or simply moving to another school within their district. With more fine-grained analyses, we argue that local schools and districts may be in a better position to address issues of teacher retention, as they consider ways to improve the equity of access to quality teaching.

Methodology and Data Sources

This article reports on analysis of teacher mobility and career decisions using Washington state as a case in which to explore these issues. Washington state is useful for consideration because it is similar to many other states along a number of dimensions. For example, it is the middle of the pack in terms of size, enrollment, and measures of student poverty. Washington has held the line with regard to state education reform and has invested heavily in standards-based assessment. In general terms, the state pays its teachers fairly close to the national average. In this study, we do not claim that Washington represents other states, but rather that it can provide an interesting case for examination.

The findings are based on data from Washington state using two primary sources: (a) analyses of a comprehensive longitudinal database, encompassing all of the state's classroom teachers from 1996 to 2002; and (b) six surveys of a representative standing sample of the state's

classroom teachers during two recent school years (2003–04 and 2004–05). A few notes that follow about each data source set the stage for the presentation to follow.

Analyses of a Comprehensive, Longitudinal Database

Although a number of state databases are used in this study, the core data come from the Washington state personnel database spanning the years 1996–97 to 2002–03. The personnel data are based on annual personnel reports submitted by each school district, which primarily support school apportionment and financial services. The database contains all certificated and classified persons employed by public school districts, educational service districts, and private schools in the state.¹

To investigate statewide retention patterns, records for all public school teachers in the state were examined at two points in time.² Additionally, 20 districts were selected for in-depth analysis. These 20 districts represent a range of district size, poverty level, and regions of the state, and include many of the state's largest districts. The 20-district sample represents nearly 30% of the state's teaching force (14,286 classroom teachers) and over a quarter of the state's students (276,641 students). For the 20 districts, a school-by-school analysis was conducted to compare retention and mobility patterns among and within the districts. Retention and mobility patterns were also examined in relation to student demographics, measures of student learning in reading and mathematics, and other school and district characteristics. These analyses pay special attention to issues related to the retention of novice teachers and teachers of color. Analyses indicate whether teaching staff had stayed in their same school after 5 years, moved to another school within the same district, moved to a different district, or exited the Washington state system altogether.

¹Data include demographic information, certification number, academic credits, years of experience, assignment, salary and benefits, and other information. Because the primary purpose of the state's personnel database (S-275) is to track fiscal information, other information is not stored in a manner that is easily accessible, nor is it designed to study issues of teacher retention. However, an advantage of the S-275 is its uniformity, longitudinal nature, and accuracy for a database of this size. The researchers created a new database using the S-275 and other existing state data sources to include student demographic and school-level information and to render the data in a form that would be relational and easier to analyze.

²A two-point-in-time analysis cannot take into account the more fluid nature of teacher movement within the 5-year time span (leaves from teaching and reentrants). In this regard, the study likely overestimates turnover.

Fast Response Surveys of a Standing Sample of Washington Teachers

Washington's existing state database does not provide information on specific reasons why teachers decide to remain at a particular school, move within or outside of a district, or exit the Washington education system. There is currently no way to know if movement within a district is due to the elimination of positions at a school, an increase in vacancies at other schools, or a result of specific teacher assignment and transfer policies unique to individual districts. To understand teachers' work and how to support it in greater depth, one must get information directly from teachers and from the sites of their daily practice. As a means of hearing directly from teachers on various matters, a Fast Response survey system was constructed. Based on a survey system designed by the NCES, the Fast Response surveys are relatively short and administered to a sample of teachers who have agreed in advance to participate in the survey series (and receive a modest honorarium for doing so). Quick turnaround of questionnaires and high response rates (in most instances 90% or better) make this kind of system especially useful for gathering accurate and representative survey data from teachers.

During the 2003–04 school year, we piloted a series of three Fast Response surveys that explored issues of assignment, certification, working conditions, and professional development, among a sample of approximately 400 teachers. In the following school year (2004–05), a similar sized sample (half of whom had participated in the first-year surveys) replied to three more survey questionnaires regarding issues of state education reform, approaches to teaching a diverse student population, and stability and mobility in teachers' careers.

Teachers in the standing sample were selected based on a stratified random selection of all Washington classroom teachers, by region of the state, experience level of the teacher, and poverty level of the school in which they teach.³ Using this kind of randomly generated sample also provided an appropriate representation of teachers at each grade level. Because of the stratified random design of the surveys, is it not possible to link in a meaningful way teachers in the 20-district sample to those who participated in the survey series. Nevertheless, the fact that the characteristics of the survey participants closely approximate actual statewide statistics, and the high response rates in all cells in the sampling grid, offer evidence that the sample is a reasonably accurate representation of the state's teachers.

³Because the finalization of the state's personnel database lags behind by a year, it was not possible to include first-year teachers in the sample.

Teacher Mobility and Attrition in a State System:
All Teachers and Novices

Earlier research by Plecki et al. (2003) yielded a general portrait of the state's teaching force which suggests that the available teacher workforce statewide is sufficient to fill most positions, although the state may experience shortages in certain subject areas and in particular regions of the state. Statewide student enrollment is projected to continue to grow through 2012, but at a much slower rate than the previous decade. Although the number of teachers eligible to retire in the near future is expected to increase, there is also a sizable group of experienced educators to take their place in subsequent years. However, the ethnic profile of the state's workforce is not particularly well matched with the student population. As the student population has grown ever more diverse racially and ethnically, the rate of growth among the ranks of teachers of color has been much slower.

Moving and Leaving in the Teacher Workforce as a Whole

Statewide statistics provide a means for comparing the overall conditions in Washington state with portrayals of conditions nationally and in other states. The statewide data for Washington include 51,996 individuals who served as classroom teachers in 1998–99 and represent 49,573 full-time equivalent staff. Just as studies have shown nationally (Ingersoll, 2001a; NCES, 2005; Whitener et al., 1997), the overall patterns of staying, moving, and leaving in Washington state present an image of relative stability in the aggregate. Considering all classroom teachers in Washington in 1998–99, 5 years later, a majority stay as teachers in the same school, and nearly three quarters are still in the same district in some capacity. The actual figures are summarized in Figure 1.

Several facts about the mobility of the state's teacher workforce become clear from examining the chart. The actual drain on the teacher workforce is considerably less than is often believed. Only a fifth leave the Washington education system altogether in the 5-year period. Generally speaking, districts are not losing many teachers to other districts. On average, only 9% of teachers moved to another district. Among the teachers who moved from their original school, more either left the Washington system (20%) or moved to another assignment within their current district (14%) than left for employment with another school district in the state.

Given current data limitations, it is not possible to track those who leave the Washington education system to their next occupational destination. However, one can reasonably assume that the likely reasons for leaving include retirement, employment in education outside of Washington state,

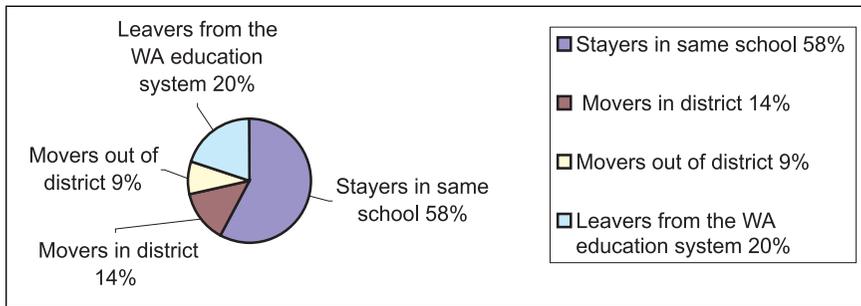


Figure 1. Statewide teacher retention and mobility after 5 years (1998 and 2002).
Note. Totals add to more than 100% due to rounding.

employment outside of education, and departure from the workforce (often temporarily, due to childrearing or other personal reasons).

To explore the relation between attrition and age, teachers were clustered within age-range categories. These analyses provide a way of estimating the proportion of the leavers who are retiring—an essential piece of the teacher attrition story. For these analyses, unduplicated teacher headcounts were used as was teachers' age in 2002. We found that although teachers 56 years of age and older represent only 21% of the state's workforce, they account for 41% of the total workforce that exits the system. Teachers between the ages of 21 and 40 represent 29% of the state's workforce and account for 31% of the total exiters from the system. This finding is significant because it provides strong evidence to suggest that a large percentage of the exiting teachers in Washington state are likely leaving as a result of normal attrition due to retirement and not other causes.

The Case of Novice Teachers

Attrition at the end of a teaching career is normal and inevitable. Attrition in the early years of teaching is more troublesome, as it may represent a premature loss of teaching talent. It is well-known that new teachers leave the profession at higher rates than experienced teachers (Lortie, 1975; Murnane, 1984; Murnane et al., 1988). Attrition is common in the initial stages of most occupations as individuals learn about the workplace and discover whether or not the job is a good fit. However, induction into the teaching profession is particularly critical because teaching requires a significant acquisition of skills in the first few years and a high turnover of beginning teachers can impact the quality of instruction that students receive (Lankford et al., 2002).

Washington's statistics on retention mirror findings by other researchers (Murnane et al., 1988) regarding the classic curve that characterizes teachers' experience and turnover. In other words, both beginning teachers and those nearing retirement show higher rates of attrition from the profession than midcareer teachers.

However, analysis of the Washington data suggests that relatively few early-career teachers leave the state's education system. By examining two cohorts of beginning teachers (less than 1 year of experience) for the school years 1996–97 and 1997–98 (using unduplicated counts), we determined how many were still teaching in 2000 and 2001, and whether they had changed assignments, transferred to another school or district, or exited the Washington education system. The majority (72%) of beginning teachers in 1996 were still in the Washington education system 5 years after entering the profession. Ninety-two percent were in the classroom, and the remainder were employed by public school districts in some other capacity, in private schools or in educational service districts.

The 1996 and 1997 cohorts revealed nearly identical results in the retention of beginning teachers in Washington. Of the 2,189 beginning teachers in 1997, 74% were still educators in Washington in some capacity 5 years later, and 27% had exited the Washington education system. Of those who remained in the system, 94% were still classroom teachers. The remaining 6% included individuals holding other appointments in public schools (5.1%), private schools (0.9%) and educational service districts (0.3%). The percentage of novice teachers who left teaching during the first 5 years is consistent with findings in other states (Theobald & Laine, 2003).

A Closer Look at the Retention of Novice Teachers

The pattern just noted prompts a closer look at the retention and mobility of novice teachers. Our intensive investigation of 20 districts in the state helps to pinpoint where the novice teachers moved, as well as the relative size of novice teacher mobility across districts. For this analysis, we chose to broaden the definition of novice teachers to include those with 4 or fewer years of teaching experience.

Overall, the districts in the sample are not losing a large proportion of their novice teachers. Three quarters are still in the Washington education system in some capacity 5 years later, and nearly two thirds are still in the same districts. Additionally, the largest districts in the state do not have a disproportionate number of inexperienced teachers in their workforce. For example, in Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, Lake Washington, and Evergreen about 20% of the teacher workforce had 4 or fewer years of experience in 1998–99, a figure not far from the state average (see Table 1).

Table 1

Novice Teacher Retention in 20-District Sample (After 5 Years: 1998–99 and 2002–03)

Districts	Total No. Teachers	Total Novice Teachers	% Novice Teachers	All Stayers (Same School)	Novice Stayers (Same School)	Novice Movers (in District)	Novice Stayers "Plus" Movers (in District)	Novice Movers (Out of District)	Novice Leavers (Out of System)
Urban									
Seattle	2,521	585	23%	48%	37%	22%	60%	7%	34%
Spokane	1,771	301	17%	67%	58%	17%	75%	6%	19%
Tacoma	1,744	331	19%	53%	44%	27%	72%	8%	20%
Suburban									
Lake Washington	1,230	251	20%	54%	38%	24%	61%	8%	31%
Edmonds	1,107	285	26%	53%	50%	14%	64%	11%	26%
Evergreen (Clark)	1,060	223	21%	51%	41%	30%	71%	8%	21%
Bellevue	866	269	31%	38%	32%	15%	48%	12%	41%
Small cities									
Yakima	703	80	11%	63%	61%	15%	76%	8%	16%
South Kitsap	587	125	21%	63%	50%	12%	62%	21%	18%
Bellingham	529	83	16%	54%	33%	25%	58%	5%	37%
Olympia	492	81	17%	65%	63%	14%	77%	4%	20%
Richland	450	66	15%	61%	52%	23%	74%	5%	21%
Walla Walla	357	65	18%	60%	52%	11%	63%	14%	23%
Oak Harbor	301	47	16%	58%	51%	0%	51%	21%	28%
Aberdeen	211	35	17%	60%	37%	26%	63%	20%	17%
Rural									
Ephrata	113	20	18%	56%	45%	20%	65%	25%	10%
Naches Valley	86	25	29%	63%	56%	4%	60%	12%	28%
Hockinson	64	8	13%	73%	88%	0%	88%	0%	13%
Oroville	48	10	21%	67%	40%	0%	40%	50%	10%
Winlock	46	12	26%	78%	75%	0%	75%	17%	8%

That said, novice teachers are clearly less rooted in their schools than their more experienced colleagues. In the 20-district sample, *novice teachers change schools at a higher rate, often to another school within the district*. Among novice teachers in our sample, less than half (44%) were retained in the same school 5 years later. In contrast, teachers in the middle ranges of experience stayed in the same school at higher rates (between 60% and 65%). Many things may cause novice teachers to move more than others. For some, teaching as a whole (or teaching at this school) is not what they thought it would be. However, other forces beyond their personal preferences may come into play. For example, as the staff members with the least seniority, they are more likely to be impacted by a reduction in force, declining enrollments, or school or district organizational changes.

The movement of novice teachers *within* a district is likely to be more pronounced in larger districts. In 5 of the 6 largest districts in the sample, novice teacher retention at the same school is 50% or lower after 5 years (Table 1). However, a sizable portion of novices (about one fifth) who move from their original school are still retained within the district 5 years later. Among the 20-district sample, on average, districts retained 64% of their novice teachers in some capacity after 5 years. Thus, novice teachers are not necessarily lost to the districts.

Generally speaking, novice teachers are not moving to a different district. On average, the percentage of novice teachers in our sample who move to another district is the same as the statewide average for all teachers (9%). However, smaller districts in the sample tended to lose a somewhat larger percentage of their novice teachers to other districts than larger districts. The finding that novice teachers do not move to other districts at higher rates is somewhat unexpected and suggests that further research is warranted regarding the mobility of novice teachers.

Districts also varied considerably in the extent to which the novice teachers they began with 5 years earlier were still in the Washington education system in 2002. The district average for novice teachers in the sample who exited the system was 27%—ranging from 16% to 42% in the 15 largest districts in the sample. It is important to keep in mind that a portion of the novice teachers who exited the Washington system were perhaps only leaving for a temporary period (e.g., for family and childrearing reasons). Even though the retention rates of novice teachers are relatively high compared to some national findings (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), it is still important to consider the factors that impact retention of novice teachers at school and district levels, and where policymakers might effectively focus their efforts.

Retention and Mobility Between and Within Districts

Especially striking in the overall patterns of teacher mobility described earlier is the relatively small percentage of teachers moving from one district to another. This fact belies the common image of stiff competition between districts to retain teachers (e.g., the persistent drain of urban teachers to the suburbs supposedly typical of large cities). Not only is the overall percentage of teachers changing districts after 5 years small (9%), but there is relatively little variation among districts: None of the 20 districts in the sample lost more than 15% of their teachers to other districts in the state.

Most noticeably, the largest urban districts have the lowest rates of movement outside the district. Contrary to common perceptions, the three largest districts in the state (Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane) had among the lowest rates of teacher mobility from one district to another (5%, 4%, and 3%, respectively), as noted in Table 2.

As the data in this table indicate, the movement of teachers both within districts and externally is related to district size. In short, *the larger districts tend to have greater movement of teachers to other schools within the district, yet less movement to other districts within the state.* This finding may not be surprising given that in Washington, the state salary allocation schedule provides less incentive for movement between districts on the basis of compensation alone than in other states with greater district salary differentials. The pattern also may reflect greater potential opportunities for movement between schools in districts with a larger number of schools. Although leaders in larger districts may take comfort from the fact that competition from neighboring districts is unlikely to pose a major issue for them, they may well face a retention problem nonetheless, as teachers shift from one school to another.

The Impact of Teacher Mobility on Individual Schools

As the preceding analysis suggests, problems of teacher retention are likely to reside at the level of individual schools. Here, the data make clear that the differences in retention rates among schools within a district are often far greater than the differences between districts. As Table 3 demonstrates, schools within a given district can range from those that have close to complete turnover of teaching staff after 5 years (the lowest rate of retention is 11% at a school within one district) to those that retain 100% of their staff. Of the 15 largest districts in the sample, for example, urban Seattle and suburban Bellevue show the greatest

Table 2
District Retention (After 5 Years: 1998–99 to 2002–03)

<i>Districts</i>	<i>Stayers</i>		<i>Movers (in District)</i>		<i>Movers (Out of District)</i>		<i>Leavers (Out WA Education System)</i>	
	<i>FTE</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>%</i>
State		58		14		9		20
Urban								
Seattle	1,184	49	428	18	124	5	702	29
Spokane	1,141	69	185	11	50	3	290	17
Tacoma	933	55	329	19	74	4	367	22
Suburban								
Lake Washington	648	57	169	15	80	7	245	22
Edmonds	564	55	112	11	79	8	278	27
Evergreen (Clark)	524	51	270	27	44	4	183	18
Bellevue	322	40	114	14	88	11	291	36
Small cities								
Yakima	437	64	91	13	36	5	122	18
South Kitsap	352	63	48	9	65	12	95	17
Bellingham	274	55	97	20	25	5	102	21
Olympia	305	67	47	10	16	3	91	20
Richland	265	63	61	15	15	4	82	19
Walla Walla	208	62	38	11	15	4	76	23
Oak Harbor	174	60	23	8	21	7	72	25
Aberdeen	126	61	20	10	24	12	38	18
Rural								
Ephrata	66	60	12	11	15	14	17	15
Naches Valley	52	65	2	3	9	11	17	22
Hockinson	45	74	5	8	3	4	8	13
Oroville	32	67	1	2	7	15	8	16
Winlock	36	78	1	2	3	7	6	13

Note. FTE = full-time equivalent.

Table 3

Percentage of Teachers Retained at the Same School, by District and School Level (Largest 15 Districts in Sample)

	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Lowest % Retention Rate</i>	<i>Highest % Retention Rate</i>	<i>Mean % Retention Rate</i>	<i>Coefficient of Variation</i>
All schools	429	11	100	57	.26
Urban					
Seattle	92	11	94	49	.31
Spokane	46	44	92	69	.17
Tacoma	50	29	77	56	.22
Suburban					
Lake Washington	38	27	78	57	.19
Edmonds	31	29	80	55	.24
Evergreen (Clark)	24	33	66	52	.19
Bellevue	26	14	65	39	.35
Small cities					
Yakima	20	40	86	64	.18
South Kitsap	14	48	79	65	.17
Bellingham	18	35	72	54	.18
Olympia	18	37	100	67	.19
Richland	10	45	72	59	.12
Walla Walla	9	49	71	59	.15
Oak Harbor	9	51	74	61	.14
Aberdeen	9	36	75	61	.20
Retention by school level					
Elementary	287	11	100	57	.26
Middle	72	27	80	55	.24
High	54	14	84	55	.24

Note. Number of schools in each analysis varies, as smallest districts and combination schools are not included in all analyses.

variation among schools, whereas urban Spokane and the small city of Yakima, among others, show less variation.

The measure of variation in the table, along with the mean percentage of teachers retained in the school, suggests that in some districts, school-level retention rates are consistently higher than those in other districts. For example, Spokane shows the highest average retention rate per school (69%), and Bellevue the lowest (39%).

Differences in retention rates can also be seen when considering all schools in the sample, irrespective of the district in which they are located. The average retention rate at the same school was 57% after 5 years.

Among the 15 largest districts, 8 had average retention rates above 57%. Additionally, retention rates were compared by school level (elementary, middle, and high), but no significant differences were found.

When teachers do move, they more often do so to other schools within the district, thereby retaining the teaching capacity within district boundaries. However, individual districts may face a more significant problem than state figures suggest, and it is clear that in some districts much larger proportions of the teaching force move or exit altogether. This examination of within-district variation, coupled with the variation among schools in poverty rates and student demographics, highlights the importance of understanding the specific context of an individual district and its schools when analyzing retention and mobility of teachers.

Intradistrict Equity Concerns

The intradistrict differences noted in the preceding section prompt questions about equity issues that may be related to these differences. In the following section, we examine school-level factors that are related to within-district differences in the percentage of teachers who are retained at the same school after 5 years, the stayers. Specifically, we begin with an examination of the relations between the percentage of stayers and student race, ethnicity, poverty, and achievement. We examine these factors for the three largest urban districts in the state and for three large suburban districts. We then look at whether differences exist in school-level retention rates of teachers of color and White teachers, with an emphasis on three districts with relatively larger proportions of teachers of color in their workforce.

Retention and Student Characteristics

An examination of individual districts, with emphasis on the larger ones, affords an opportunity to examine the connections among student characteristics, teacher retention, and student performance, without the potentially confounding effects of differing district conditions. Six large districts in the sample were chosen for further analysis. Three of the six are the three largest urban districts in the state (Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane) and three are large suburban districts (Bellevue, Edmonds, and Evergreen). Data about teacher retention and mobility were merged

with school-level data regarding student characteristics and student achievement. Only data collected systematically for all schools in our sample were included. With regard to student performance measures, school-level reading and mathematics passage rates on the 2002 Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) were used. Table 4 shows the first step in that analysis, by displaying the simple correlation between rates of stayers with characteristics of the schools' student population and performance.

There is correlational evidence that, within the district, the percentage of stayers at a school is negatively associated with the composition of the school's student body—in particular, the poverty level of the school's student population. Additionally, in five of six districts, schools with a greater percentage of White students have higher teacher retention rates. In both Seattle and Tacoma, the percentage of stayers is negatively associated with the percentage of African American students in a school.

Even though the overall pattern is generally similar in most of the six districts, the strength of the relation between teacher retention and student characteristics varies across the districts. Seattle, for example, shows a more pronounced relation between teacher retention and these student characteristics. The data also indicate that the link among poverty, teacher retention, and student performance is not largely or uniquely an urban phenomenon. We also found evidence of this relation in two of the large suburban districts (Edmonds and Evergreen).⁴

The correlational analysis just described does not provide a complete picture, as these six districts differ in the number of schools in each district and the variance that exists among the student variables. Thus, we provide another method for examining intradistrict differences by grouping schools within a district into categories, depending on the percentage of stayers after 5 years. Schools within each district were grouped into categories from those with the highest school retention rates to those with the lowest (the actual cut points and number of categories varied by district, depending on the overall number of schools and the range in the retention figures). The average percentages for poverty, achievement, and selected student characteristics for the schools in each retention category were calculated. Also included were the average rates at which novice teachers (those with 0–4 years of experience) were retained in each group of schools. Table 5 shows results for the three

⁴When correlations are run with all 429 schools in the sample, irrespective of the district in which they are located, no systematic relations emerge between retention, poverty, and student achievement. This also holds true when examining separate correlations for all elementary schools, all middle schools, and all high schools.

Table 4
Correlations With Teacher Retention by District (School and Student Characteristics in 2002)

	Urban			Suburban		
	Seattle	Tacoma	Spokane	Belleve	Edmonds	Evergreen
No. of schools	92	51	46	26	31	24
Teachers retained by %						
Poverty	-.49	-.17	-.20	-.23	-.18	-.11
White students	.41	.29	.10	.24	.11	-.30
African American students	-.43	-.34	-.02	NA	NA	NA
Hispanic students	-.21	-.08	-.23	-.31	-.21	NA
Native American students	-.06	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Asian students	.03	-.09	NA	.01	.04	.24
Bilingual students	-.17	.00	-.04	-.27	-.23	-.21
WASL reading	.43	.04	.04	-.04	.40	.55
WASL math	.44	.06	.04	.00	.33	.39

Note. NA = correlations that were not calculated due to extremely low sample size; WASL = Washington Assessment of Student Learning.

Table 5
Factors Associated With Differences in Teacher Retention: Results for Three Largest Districts

<i>% All Teachers Retained</i>	<i>% Novice Retained</i>	<i>No. Schools</i>	<i>% Poverty</i>	<i>02 Reading</i>	<i>02 Math</i>	<i>% White Students</i>	<i>% African American</i>
Seattle							
13–29%	27	9	65	47	34	22	40
30–39%	36	15	57	56	39	33	34
40–49%	47	20	57	48	36	26	28
50–59%	40	26	38	61	49	44	20
60–69%	57	10	30	74	60	53	14
70%+	59	11	26	76	66	56	13
Tacoma							
27–49%	37	13	65	54	39	45	29
50–55%	42	15	54	55	41	56	18
56–60%	46	10	57	52	36	55	21
61%+	56	12	56	60	50	58	19
Spokane							
41–60%	28	12	57	66	58	84	NA
61–65%	62	9	47	69	62	86	NA
66–75%	57	11	45	64	59	87	NA
76%+	81	14	45	68	62	86	NA

Note. NA = not reported due to extremely low sample size.

Table 6

Factors Associated With Differences in Teacher Retention: Results for Three Suburban Districts

<i>% All Teachers Retained</i>	<i>% Novice Retained</i>	<i>No. Schools</i>	<i>% Poverty</i>	<i>02 Reading</i>	<i>02 Math</i>	<i>% White Students</i>
<i>Bellevue</i>						
15–35%	19	10	25	78	68	65
36–47%	28	9	18	72	60	68
48%+	54	7	13	81	74	72
<i>Edmonds</i>						
25–49%	33	12	30	66	51	70
50–59%	57	9	24	70	52	73
60%+	65	10	24	73	56	72
<i>Evergreen</i>						
32–49%	28	8	41	52	42	83
50–56%	52	8	36	59	44	83
57%+	53	8	36	71	58	80

largest urban districts in the state—Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane—followed by Table 6, which presents results for the three large suburban districts.

In Seattle, the pattern is consistent and easy to spot: Teacher retention is negatively associated with poverty rates, WASL reading and math scores, and the percentage of African American students in the school (see Table 5). In Tacoma, there is a difference between the lowest and highest rates of stayers and poverty, WASL reading and math scores, the percentage of White students, and the percentage of African American students. In Spokane, a less racially and ethnically diverse district than either Seattle or Tacoma, the only notable difference is in poverty rates between the lowest and the highest categories of teacher retention.

Table 6 provides analyses for the three suburban districts. In these districts, there is a negative relation between teacher retention and school poverty. Additionally, teacher retention is positively associated with WASL reading and math performance in both Edmonds and Evergreen, but no clear pattern emerges in Bellevue (where WASL scores are generally higher and less variable across schools).

Thus, for all the urban and suburban districts in this six-district sample, teacher retention is related to student poverty. Additionally, for one urban and two suburban districts, teacher retention is related both to poverty and measures of student learning. Although this analysis alone cannot establish a causal relation among poverty, retention, and student learning, there is a plausible case to be made that greater instability in a school's

teaching force is likely to contribute, on average, to lower performance, and that this might be especially so in schools serving high concentrations of students from low-income families.

Retention of Teachers of Color

The fact that schools vary by poverty in the retention of teachers raises questions about which teachers are being retained. The enduring mismatch between teachers of color and the increasingly diverse student population is a case in point. Statewide, approximately 7% of Washington's teachers are non-White, whereas more than a quarter of the state's students are from racial and ethnic minorities (Plecki et al., 2003). Among the nearly 14,300 teachers represented in our 20-district sample, 90.3% were White, 3.4% were African American, 3.4% were Asian, 2% were Hispanic, and 0.8% were Native American. Although teachers of color are sometimes clustered at schools within the larger districts, a more common pattern is for one or two teachers of color to be dispersed across schools within a district.

We explored whether teachers of color were more or less likely to move from school to school by calculating retention and mobility rates for teachers of color as compared to White teachers. The analysis shows that there is no disproportionate movement of teachers of color. Overall, teachers of color were retained in the same school at approximately the same rates as White teachers, with the exception of African American teachers. Approximately 55% of White teachers were retained in the same school 5 years later, compared to 47% of African American teachers. Among the other three racial and ethnic groups, all were retained at similar rates to White teachers, with Hispanics at 56%, Asians at 54%, and Native Americans at 51%. In three districts, nearly 15% or more of the workforce were teachers from racial or ethnic minorities (Seattle, Tacoma, and Yakima). As Table 7 shows, the pattern of retention for particular racial or ethnic groups differs across these districts. Tacoma had higher rates of retention for teachers of color than Whites in all groups except Native Americans. Yakima, on the other hand, had higher rates of retention for teachers of color in all groups except African Americans, and Seattle had lower rates of retention than Whites for all groups except Asians (see Table 7).

Taken together, these findings suggest that, for the most part, there are not sizable differences in the percentage of stayers between teachers of color and White teachers.

Table 7
Teacher Retention by Ethnicity in Selected Districts (After 5 Years: 1998–99 and 2002–03)

<i>District</i>	<i>Total No. Teachers 98–99</i>	<i>White Teachers</i>			<i>African American Teachers</i>			<i>Hispanic Teachers</i>			<i>Native American Teachers</i>			<i>Asian Teachers</i>		
		<i>No. 98–99</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>No. 98–99</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>No. 98–99</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>No. 98–99</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>No. 98–99</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>	<i>% Retained Same School</i>
Seattle	2,521	1,970	48.9	40.5	237	64	42.2	28	28.7	222	53.2	222	28.7	222	53.2	
Tacoma	1,744	1,494	52.5	54.3	151	24	70.8	12	33.3	62	61.9	62	33.3	62	61.9	
Yakima	703	596	62.2	47.4	19	68	63.2	12	91.7	8	87.5	8	91.7	8	87.5	

Conditions Impacting Teacher Mobility, From the Teachers' Perspective

Patterns of mobility, attrition, and retention derived from database statistics beg many questions about *why* teachers stay or move. To answer these questions, we surveyed a standing sample of teachers in the state across a 2-year period. Their responses (with response rates approximating 90% for each of the six surveys) provide a basis for probing into teachers' decisions to consider moving from one school to another. The survey work also uncovers differences in factors influencing mobility decisions between teachers working in high- and low-poverty schools.

Our survey asked teachers to indicate whether or not particular factors or conditions were reasons to stay or leave the current school in which they were teaching. When looking at the entire sample of teachers, particular conditions stand out as strong reasons for teachers to remain in their current schools. These are related to the type or stability of teaching assignment, the nature of their colleagues and collegial community, school location, personal or family considerations, school climate, and support in dealing with parents and students. Table 8 provides details about teachers' responses.

As can be seen in Table 8, two of the three most frequent factors cited by teachers as a reason to stay in their school concern the nature and stability of their teaching assignment. This finding regarding the importance of teaching assignment is consistent with results from the TFS from the NCES (Luekens et al., 2004). Forty percent of TFS respondents indicated that an opportunity for a better teaching assignment was a reason to move to a new school. Additionally, our survey results indicate that a majority of teachers consider the presence of staff with whom they feel comfortable working, collegial community with other teachers, presence of staff who share their values about teaching and schooling, and staff willingness to "go the extra mile" to be strong reasons to stay in their school. The geographic location of their school, the school's proximity to home, and personal and family considerations all comprise other reasons that teachers identify as influences on their decision to stay in a particular school.

Teachers' reasons for wanting to stay in their schools vary somewhat by region of the state. The largest regional difference concerns the cost of living. More than three times as many teachers in eastern Washington (58%) noted cost of living as a strong reason to stay at their schools than teachers in the central Puget Sound region of western Washington (21%). Only one third (33%) of teachers located in western Washington but outside of the central Puget Sound indicate that cost of living is a strong reason to stay.

Table 8

Reasons Teachers Give for Staying in Their Current School (or Moving to Another School)

	<i>Strong Reason to Stay</i>	<i>Moderate Reason to Stay</i>	<i>Moderate or Strong Reason to Leave</i>	<i>Not a Factor</i>
My teaching assignment	75%	17%	5%	3%
Presence of staff with whom I feel comfortable working	68%	22%	7%	1%
Stability in assignment	65%	23%	6%	6%
Collegial community with other teachers	63%	27%	8%	2%
Geographic region or school location	60%	24%	11%	5%
Personal or family considerations	56%	20%	12%	11%
Presence of staff who share my values about teaching and schooling	52%	38%	7%	1%
Overall school climate	51%	35%	12%	1%
Staff willingness to go the extra mile	51%	34%	11%	3%
Respectful and orderly learning environment	49%	31%	17%	2%
Support in dealing with parents and students	48%	29%	17%	4%

Note. Sample (Year 2), N = 313.

Years of teaching experience—and the more settled relationship with an employing organization that accompanies longevity in a career—can also affect a teacher’s reasons for wanting to stay in a school. Although a majority of teachers consider the geographic region or location of their school as a strong reason to stay, 70% of the veteran teachers (15 or more years of teaching experience) hold this view, compared to only half (51%) of novice teachers (4 or fewer years of experience). Also, veteran teachers view some district policies and conditions as somewhat more important in influencing their decision to stay in their school. Specifically, personnel policies, such as hiring, transfer, and assignment, are a strong reason to stay for 30% of veterans compared with 15% of novices. Nearly a third of veterans (32%) consider the academic performance of the district a strong reason to stay, compared with 14% of novices.

Influences on Teachers’ Decisions to Leave a School

The reasons that might influence a teacher to move from his or her current school are more varied and less strongly held than the reasons teachers give for remaining in their schools. Table 9 provides the most commonly cited reasons teachers indicate if they consider leaving their school (in this table we combine strong and moderate reasons to leave).

As Table 9 reveals, no single reason dominates. The amount of support at home for students’ learning (e.g., lack of homework help or positive attitudes toward schooling) is viewed by approximately a third of teachers (35%) as a strong or moderate reason to consider leaving their school. A third of teachers also indicate that the degree to which time is built into the school schedule to enable professional learning and the resources or financial incentives provided to support professional learning form moderate or strong reasons to leave their schools.

Table 9 identifies factors that were cited as reasons influencing teachers’ decisions to leave the school, but other influences were characterized by teachers as not a factor in their decision. Notable percentages of teachers identified the following conditions as “not a factor”: the percentage of students from historically underrepresented racial or ethnic groups (41%), salary (30%), the amount of pressure parents or community members exert on the school to boost student achievement (24%), how the school mentors or supports inexperienced teachers (21%), the value placed on diversity (22%), and school size (20%).

One regional difference emerged with respect to the influence of salary on teachers’ decisions to stay or leave a school. More teachers (22%) in western Washington consider salary (i.e., low salary) to be a moderate or strong reason to leave their current school, compared with only 9% of

Table 9
Reasons Teachers Give for Moving to Another School

	Moderate or Strong Reason to Leave	Not a Factor
The amount of support at home for students' learning (e.g., homework help, positive attitudes toward schooling)	35%	8%
Degree to which time is built into the school day, week, or year to enable professional learning	34%	9%
Resources or financial incentives to support professional learning	33%	11%
Nature of support services to meet students' needs	30%	8%
Level of disciplinary issues in teaching students at this school	29%	6%
Fairness in how staff are treated	25%	3%

Note. Sample (Year 2), $N = 313$.

teachers in eastern Washington. This result is consistent with the finding regarding cost of living as a strong reason to stay at a school for the majority of teachers in eastern Washington, where cost of living is lower. Interestingly, there were no notable differences between teachers in high-poverty schools compared to those in low-poverty schools with respect to the influence of salary in their decisions to stay or move.

Teachers were also asked to indicate the extent to which particular conditions in their school district might influence their decision to stay or leave their district. The district factor mentioned most frequently as a moderate or strong reason to leave (45% of all teachers) was too much emphasis placed by the district on testing.

Teachers' Reasons for Staying or Leaving in Low- and High-Poverty Schools

The relation between teacher retention and the poverty level of the school raises important questions about how teachers' reasons to stay or change schools might differ in low- and high-poverty school settings. Understanding teachers' perspectives on this matter is critically important, given that high-poverty schools are often targets of both state and district policy action. Thus, we compared survey responses of those teachers working in schools with greater than 50% of students in poverty (as measured by the free or reduced price lunch count) with teachers

working in schools with poverty rates of 20% or less. These two groupings represented a total of 210 teachers.

The items that emerged as having the greatest differences between teachers in high- and low-poverty schools are presented in Table 10.

As can be seen in Table 10, certain conditions are likely to make a big difference in teachers' desire to stay at a school. For example, teachers' views on the amount of support at home for students' learning (62% compared to 16%) and the level of disciplinary issues in teaching students (53% compared to 10%) vary considerably depending on the poverty level of the school. Additionally, the ease of communication with parents about their children's learning, the degree to which parents and community actively participate in school, and the responsiveness of students to teaching and school are additional influences that distinguish the views of teachers in high- and low-poverty schools. These findings may help explain the negative correlation between teacher retention and school poverty, and have implications for what policymakers, school leaders, and school communities might consider when tackling the problem of increasing teacher retention in high-poverty schools.

From national survey data we know that teachers who move from a school are more critical of school leaders on a variety of leadership measures (Luekens et al., 2004). Our survey work reveals that teachers view leadership and leadership support differently when they are situated in high- and low-poverty schools. Consider, for example, the percentages of teachers in low-poverty schools identifying aspects of school leadership as a strong reason for staying at their current school, given in Table 11.

First, the data signal that leaders can affect the school's working environment in ways that matter to teachers: Leaders' actions and values affect, among others, the treatment of staff, the orderliness of the school environment, the focus on student learning, the organization of time, and interactions with parents. Second, the generally low responses of teachers in high-poverty schools on measures of school leadership suggest that most teachers in these settings may not see their school leaders as particularly effective in these aspects. To be fair, there are often major leadership challenges in schools serving an economically disadvantaged student population. Third, teachers in low-poverty schools are more likely to see leadership support as a compelling reason to stay.

What State and District Leaders Can Learn From a State-Specific Mobility Analysis

These analyses rest on the premise that it is crucial to understand how well schools within a particular state context, as elsewhere in the nation, are

Table 10

Reasons Teachers Give for Leaving High Versus Low-Poverty Schools

<i>Reason to Leave</i>	<i>Low-Poverty Schools</i>	<i>High-Poverty Schools</i>
The amount of support at home for students' learning (e.g., homework help, positive attitudes toward schooling)	16%	62%
Level of disciplinary issues in teaching students at this school	10%	53%
Nature of support services to meet students' needs	18%	44%
Resources or incentives to support professional learning	23%	43%
Ease of communication with parents about their children's learning	4%	40%
Degree to which parents or community members actively participate in school	5%	35%
Responsiveness of students to teaching and school	7%	35%
Level of student performance at the school	6%	33%

Note. Sample (Year 2), $N = 210$. Percentages represent teachers' indications that this was a moderate or strong reason to leave.

Table 11

Aspects of School Leadership or Leadership Support That Might Influence a Teacher to Stay at His or Her Current School, Varying by Poverty Level

<i>Reason to Stay</i>	<i>Low-Poverty Schools</i>	<i>High-Poverty Schools</i>
Degree to which a respectful and orderly learning environment has been established	59%	38%
Support in dealing with parents and students	58%	35%
Fairness in how staff are treated	52%	38%
Degree of focus on student performance in the classroom	48%	29%
Organization of time in the school day	32%	21%

Note. Sample (Year 2), $N = 210$. Percentages represent teachers' indication this was a strong reason to stay.

able to retain their teachers and factors that may account for teacher retention. Until now there has been no way to know the extent, distribution, or consequences of the retention problem in many states. National survey data provide some clues regarding overall rates of teacher turnover and hints at where the variations in turnover may lie. Despite its analytic power, SASS data cannot answer questions about within-district teacher mobility.⁵ As a national sample, these data cannot tell us with any certainty about the situation in any given state and whether it might differ from other states or from overall national trends. This is not only important for districts and schools, but also for state policymakers who are designing strategies for improving teaching quality.

Accordingly, there is a need for state-specific analyses at both school and district levels that are based on actual numbers of teachers who move from one district or school to another over a period of time. This analysis of retention and mobility among Washington state's teacher workforce seeks to demonstrate what can be learned from analyses situated within a single state system.

A primary focus of this study is teacher mobility at the school level, where teacher departures often have the greatest potential for disrupting the learning opportunities for students, and where there may be some possibility for reducing this disruption. From a policy perspective, schools and districts are not simply at the mercy of a regional job market or demographic trends. Other matters, like school characteristics and conditions, may also contribute to teacher dissatisfaction and departure, as can differences in regional cost of living and teacher salary.

The patterns that emerge from state-specific analyses are likely to bear the stamp of the particular conditions in that state. For example, Washington state has a relatively equalized teacher compensation system. Many districts follow the state salary schedule, thereby reducing the differences among districts in amounts that teachers may earn. This may partially explain why there is relatively little mobility between districts in the Washington context. Digging deeper into a particular state context

⁵Although national studies using SASS data are instructive, they are not wholly comparable to the work presented in this article for several reasons. First, they are based on survey data from a representative sample of schools across the United States during four collection cycles (years 1987–88, 1990–91, 1993–94, and 1999–2000). Teacher turnover in the various studies is defined in specific ways. For example, Ingersoll (2001a) defined teacher turnover as “not teaching in the same school as last year” (p. 510), although the teacher could be teaching in the same district. However, Luekens et al. (2004) were able to differentiate whether movers stayed in a school in the same district, or moved to a school in another district.

may also provide clues as to why there may be a tendency for the largest districts to retain more of their teachers within district boundaries.

To get at retention and mobility matters in a satisfactory way requires more than one kind of data source, and the analyses presented here have modeled one possible solution. By combining analyses of teacher workforce statistics drawn from statewide databases with survey responses from a statistically representative sample of the state's teachers, we have been able to address a number of questions about retention and mobility, thereby documenting actual movement or stability, and suggesting reasons for the movement from the teachers' vantage point.

Analyses such as these raise possibilities for state and local leaders who wish not only to understand retention and mobility, but to maximize the potential for a stable, committed teacher force in the state's schools. The following are prompts for closer attention by district and state leaders:

- *Look within district boundaries at differences in retention rates across schools, rather than worrying about possible competition with neighboring districts for good teachers. In districts with an overall stable workforce, policies and investments in supporting existing teachers are likely to have a lasting impact.*

- *Note that novice teachers are moving among schools at higher rates than teachers with more experience. Although to some extent, this may be natural demography of new teachers who are less settled in their careers and personal lives, the pattern of high mobility (mostly within districts) prompts questions about local policies related to seniority, transfer, assignment, and incentives for teaching in particular schools or subject areas. This implies that district human resource management strategies, including personnel policies and agreements with local unions, may exert influence on teacher mobility rates within an individual district.*

- *Examine the reasons why some schools have consistently high mobility rates. Those schools with high rates of mobility are likely to be serving disproportionate numbers of students in poverty or students of color. In some cases, there may be relations between high mobility and student achievement. It is possible that these linkages exist in both urban and suburban contexts.*

- *Examine school-level working conditions as possible factors contributing to teacher mobility. Issues such as stability of teacher assignment, collegial community, and extent to which support services are provided to students are worthy of investigation.*

- *Be mindful of differences that may exist between high- and low-poverty schools. In high-poverty schools, the amount of support for students' learning, and*

the resources and incentives to support teacher professional learning, are crucial for retaining staff in schools.

- *Take extra steps to strengthen the quality of leadership in high-poverty schools.* Although teachers' survey responses about reasons to stay or leave their current school are not solely attributable to leaders' actions, it is likely that their approach to questions of discipline, communication with parents, focus on student performance, or maintenance of a respectful and orderly environment will make a difference in whether teachers choose to stay.

Although these do not exhaust the implications of these analyses for state or district action, they represent a range of important matters that leaders at multiple levels will want to address. Given data that demonstrate how teachers' retention and mobility play out in specific districts and within a state context, leaders are in a better position to see what is actually happening and to determine appropriate solutions.

References

- Bryk, A. S., Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1990). High school organization and its effect on teachers and students: An interpretive summary of the research. In W. J. Clune & J. F. Witte (Eds.), *Choice and control in American education: Vol. 1. The theory of choice and control in American education* (pp. 135–226). Philadelphia: Falmer.
- Guin, K. (2004). Chronic teacher turnover in urban elementary schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(24). Retrieved February 13, 2005, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n42/>
- Hanushek, E. A., Kain, J. F., & Rivkin, S. G. (2001). *Why public schools lose teachers*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Henke, R. R., Choy, S. P., Chen, X., Geis, S., Alt, M. N., & Broughman, S. P. (1997). *America's teachers: Profile of a profession*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Henke, R. R., Zahn, L., & Carroll, C. D. (2001). *Attrition of new teachers among recent college graduates: Comparing occupational stability among 1992–93 graduates who taught and those who worked in other occupations* (Statistical Analysis Rep. No. NCES 2001-189). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Heyns, B. (1988). Educational defectors: A first look at teacher attrition in the NLS-72. *Educational Researcher*, 17(3), 24–32.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001b). *Teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and the organization of schools*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001a). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 499–534.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Who controls teachers' work?: Power and accountability in America's schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). *Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers?* [Report prepared for Renewing our Schools, Securing our Future]. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress and Institute for America's Future.

- Ingersoll, R., & Kralik, J. M. (2004). The impact of mentoring on teacher retention: What the research says. *Research Review, Education Commission of the States*, 1–23. Retrieved February 13, 2005, from www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/50/36/5036.htm
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30–33.
- Johnson, S., & Birkeland, S. (2003). Pursuing a “sense of success”: New teachers explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40, 581–617.
- Johnson, S. M., Kardos, S. M., Kauffman, D., Liu, E., & Donaldson, M. L. (2004). The support gap: New teachers’ early experiences in high-income and low-income schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(61). Retrieved October 28, 2004, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n61/>
- Kelly, S. (2004). An event history analysis of teacher attrition: Salary, teacher tracking, and socially disadvantaged schools. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 72(3), 195–220.
- Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2002). Teacher sorting and the plight of urban schools: A descriptive analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24, 37–62.
- Loeb, S., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2005). How teaching conditions predict teacher turnover in California schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80, 44–70.
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Luekens, M. T., Lyter, D. M., & Fox, E. E. (2004). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000–01* (NCES Rep. No. 2004-301). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics.
- Macdonald, D. (1999). Teacher attrition: A review of literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15, 835–848.
- Murnane, R. (1984). Selection and survival in the teacher labor market. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 66, 513–518.
- Murnane, R., Singer, J. D., & Willett, J. B. (1988). The career paths of teachers: Implications for teacher supply and methodological lessons for research. *Educational Researcher*, 17(6), 22–30.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000–01*. Jessup, MD: U.S. Department of Education.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *The condition of education 2005* (NCES Rep. No. 2005-094). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. (2003). *No dream denied: A pledge to America’s children*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Plecki, M. L., Elfers, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Loeb, H., Perkins, C., & Boatright, B. (2003). *Who’s teaching Washington’s children? What we know—and need to know—about teachers and the quality of teaching in the state*. Seattle: University of Washington.
- Shen, J. (1997). Teacher retention and attrition in public schools: Evidence from SASS91. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 91, 81–88.
- Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41, 681–714.
- Theobald, N. D., & Laine, S. W. M. (2003). The impact of teacher turnover on teacher quality: Findings from four states. In M. L. Plecki & D. H. Monk (Eds.), *School finance and teacher quality: Exploring the connections* (pp. 33–54). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Whitener, S. D., Gruber, K. J., Lynch, H., Tingos, K., & Perona, M. (1997). *Characteristics of stayers, movers, and leavers: Results from the teacher follow-up survey: 1994–95*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Copyright of PJE. Peabody Journal of Education is the property of Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.