

# **Recruiting, Preparing and Retaining High Quality Teachers: An Empirical Synthesis**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background: Teacher Supply and Demand**

Quality education rests largely on finding and keeping good teachers. Yet, many teachers leave the profession, whether because of frustration with the system or planned retirements. There is reason to believe that a teaching shortage will exist during the next six years as the teachers' pool ages and K-12 enrollments increase.

In addition to retirements, staffing difficulties are associated with inadequate salaries, student discipline, student motivation, and in high poverty urban schools, lack of opportunities for advancement and environments perceived as unsafe.

Further complicating the matter of teacher supply and demand are factors such as the reduction in class sizes, a federal requirement for "highly qualified" teachers, the trend toward reduced teacher autonomy, and the pressures associated with high-stakes testing.

### **High Quality Teachers**

Arguments persist over how to define the characteristics of a good teacher. For example, it is not clear that a person's content knowledge, verbal skills, or enthusiasm for learning, necessarily mark a person as likely to be a "successful" teacher.

Moreover, the appropriate indicators of quality might well depend on the circumstances and the context of the teaching.

Methods used to measure quality are similarly controversial. The most frequently used indicators of teacher quality are imprecise. There are, for example, many ways of defining “content knowledge.” Compounding the problem is that some of the indicators used to signify complex phenomena, such as “student achievement,” are inadequate. Student achievement may be defined in a variety of ways and many forces that affect student achievement lie outside the control of the school.

The complexity of teaching and the long list of possible indicators of quality suggest that there should be no single model of teacher preparation.

### **Recruiting, Preparing and Retaining High Quality Teachers**

Among the approaches currently used to recruit teachers are improved salaries, community college programs, and outreach to students in high school to encourage them to pursue teaching as a career.

It has also been suggested that fewer state-specific certification laws would facilitate teacher transfers and the reentry of those returning after an absence from the profession. Offering sign-up bonuses and forgivable loans, as well as portable seniority guarantees can increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Wider collaboration between community colleges and Colleges of Education would facilitate the entrance of minority students into the profession.

Arguments continue about matters such as whether certified teachers do better than “under-certified” teachers; the importance of verbal skills; the role of salary levels in

attracting and retaining teachers; the assignment of higher priority to retention of teachers, and the use of mentoring as a means of encouraging new teachers, especially in urban schools.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Teacher Recruitment***

- Salaries matter—Colleges of Education should be strong and consistent advocates for adequate teacher salaries.
- Colleges of Education at four-year institutions of higher education should seek to establish collaborative programs with community colleges to recruit new teachers. Community colleges are preparing an increasing proportion of teachers and they enroll a large number of minority students. Four-year institutions, on the other hand, have expertise and connections not found in the community college environment. Partnerships would prove mutually beneficial.
- Colleges of Education should establish programs to encourage high school students to consider careers as teachers.

### ***Teacher Preparation***

- Colleges of Education should seek to develop training programs that reflect complex models of teacher quality. Research clearly shows that teaching cannot be reduced to a few indicators of quality that transcend all situational variations.
- Colleges of Education should seek to develop programs that will ease the transition from the lecture hall to the classroom. Such programs might well

include beginning teacher induction programs that match new teachers with experienced ones.

### ***Teacher Retention***

- Colleges of Education should, in collaboration with school districts, develop programs to improve the retention of existing teachers. Reducing turnover of existing teachers would greatly reduce the difficulties in finding new teachers. In the short term, this may be the single most effective strategy for reducing the need for new teachers.