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# A Possible Dream

## Retaining California Teachers

So All Students Learn

**Ken Futernick, Ph.D.**
Director of K-12 Studies
Center for Teacher Quality

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2007

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The Center for Teacher Quality
Office of the Chancellor, California State University

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One of the critical lessons learned from this study is that strong professional relationships among teachers is a key contributor to teacher retention. In a team-oriented school environment, teachers are more effective and they find the work more satisfying. The same has been true for me in my work as an educator and a researcher. This report benefited enormously from the numerous and rich exchanges I had with dozens of people who generously provided encouragement, intellectual support, and helpful criticism. These collaborations also made the project deeply rewarding—far more so than it would have been had I attempted to complete it alone. The reader will notice that I use the pronoun “we,” rather than “I,” throughout the report. I do so to acknowledge the contributions of the many people who assisted with it.

First I want to thank my sister-in-law, Jennifer Futernick, an accomplished editor who devoted countless hours responding to draft manuscripts, providing detailed feedback, and suggesting more lucid and compelling ways to present my findings and recommendations. Often acting as thought-partner, she challenged me to dig more deeply into the meaning of the responses I received from teachers and to develop sound, thoughtful recommendations that would move people to act. Throughout the project she raised important questions that were often difficult to answer: What’s the so-what here? What really matters to teachers and their students? What can you say that your readers do not already know? If I have succeeded in constructing reasonable answers to these questions, much of the credit goes to Jennifer for raising them and for assisting with my responses.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Student achievement in California has ranked near the bottom among all states in the country in recent years (Carroll *et al.*, 2005), in part because of a teacher shortage that worsened in 1998 when class size reductions instituted that year dramatically increased the demand for qualified teachers. Without fully qualified teachers—and adequate numbers of them—there is no way for student achievement, statewide, to improve.

Today, California's public K-12 schools continue to face a persistent shortage of well-prepared teachers. In 2005, in schools with high concentrations of minority students, 21% of teachers lacked a teaching credential. Statewide close to 15% of high school math and English teachers were teaching out-of-field. In special education, 14% did not have an appropriate teaching credential. If the state does not take action to reduce the qualified teacher shortage, experts have shown that it will only worsen. This is because while student enrollments are on the rise, an unusually high number of teachers will retire in the next few years, and the number of new teachers entering the field is expected to decline. According to researchers at SRI International, unless policies are implemented to alter the present course, the shortfall of fully prepared teachers will increase from 20,000, its level in 2004-05, to 33,000 in 2015 (Esch *et al.*, 2005).

Attrition of teachers *before they retire* is also a principle cause of California's teacher shortage. In fact, 22% of teachers in California leave after their first four years in the classroom (Reed *et al.*, 2006). According to national statistics, each year 6% of all public school teachers leave the profession before they have reached retirement age (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). The large numbers of teachers moving in and out of schools make matters worse, especially in schools with high numbers of poor students. Each year, 10% of the teachers working in high-poverty schools—the ones whose students pose the greatest educational challenges—transfer away to other schools. Often the only replacement teachers these schools can find are ones with minimal training and classroom experience.

Researchers estimate that California spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually to recruit, screen, and prepare individuals who replace pre-retirement teachers who leave the profession and teachers who transfer to other schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). The less tangible costs of teacher turnover are nearly incalculable in terms of the negative impact that the churning of teachers and the loss of teacher experience has on the instructional continuity of a school. The very fact that so many teachers flee certain types of schools should serve as an unambiguous signal that something about these schools' work environment is wrong and needs to be fixed.

If California hopes to close the achievement gap between poor students and those from more resource-rich schools and families, it will need to solve its teacher shortage and reduce the high rates of teacher turnover, especially in high-poverty schools. The state will need to increase its production of new teachers, but it will also have to retain more of the teachers in which it has already invested. Solving the retention problem is possible only if policy makers and education leaders fully appreciate the reasons why so many of California's teachers leave well before reaching retirement age.

As part of our analysis of teacher retention in California, we at the Center for Teacher Quality at the California State University conducted a study to better understand the factors that contribute to teacher attrition and turnover. Close to 2,000 current and former California public school teachers participated in an online survey. Data from that survey allowed us to examine the professional and personal reasons offered by

those who leave teaching and those who remain in the classroom—"leavers" and "stayers" in the language of this study—through several different educational lenses: low-poverty and high-poverty schools, elementary and high schools, and general education classrooms and special education classrooms. Our analysis provides a detailed description of the different strategies that will be required to retain teachers in these different types of schools.

The most basic findings from our study tell us that teachers are less concerned with compensation (though they are not unconcerned with it) than they are with a whole range of particulars about their work environment. Work environment, or perhaps more specifically described, the *teaching and learning environment,* refers not just to leaks in the ceilings or toilets that do not flush, though poorly maintained classrooms and school facilities are as dispiriting to teachers as they are to students. Teaching and learning environment refers to a whole range of instructional, collegial, and systemic conditions which, for many, make teaching a highly satisfying profession. A profession that reminds those who have chosen it that they are making a positive impact on students and society.

When leavers described the features of their working environment that were most problematic, they pointed to a broad spectrum of problems we call **inadequate system supports:** over half of the teachers who have left the classroom said they lacked such things as adequate time for planning and professional development, textbooks for their students, and reliable assistance from the district office. But the factor cited most frequently as a reason for leaving was **bureaucratic impediments**. Whether teachers spoke about excessive paperwork, too many unnecessary classroom interruptions, or too many restrictions on teaching itself, these impediments actually prevented teachers from doing their job. These problematic "facts of school life," assumed by many to be unavoidable, do not just drive teachers crazy; they drive many of them right out of the classroom.

In addition to inadequate system supports and bureaucratic impediments, leavers also pointed frequently to the lack of collegial supports. They lacked a strong sense of team at their school—i.e., a sense that all or nearly all individuals working at the school are focused on creating an environment that fosters student learning; trusting, respectful professional relationships among teachers and other staff; and a collaborative, mutually supportive approach to leadership between teachers and principal.

Not surprising, when we asked "stayers" why they chose to remain in the classroom, they frequently cited the flipside of inadequate system supports and pointed to the presence of *effective* system supports such as adequate resources, adequate time for planning, and effective support from the district office. What did surprise us was that collegial supports—the quality of relationships among staff—mattered even more. And the one factor that mattered the most to stayers was the opportunity they had to participate in decision-making at the school.

So important is the quality of the teaching and learning environment that it colors the way many teachers view their compensation, another key variable thought by many to affect teachers' "stay or leave" decisions. When teaching and learning conditions are poor, we discovered that many teachers see their compensation as inadequate. When these teaching and learning conditions are good, not only do teachers tend to stay, they actually view their compensation as a reason for staying.

## CENTRAL FINDINGS

Unless California understands and addresses the problem of teacher attrition and turnover, thousands of additional students in the coming years will continue to enter classrooms without qualified and experienced teachers to instruct them. If this happens, the state will continue failing to meet its obligation to provide high-quality education to all of its public school students. We hope the central findings from this study will help policy makers and educators understand what it will take for the state to retain more of the teachers it needs so that all students receive the quality of education they deserve.

**The central findings were:**

- 81% of teachers who participated in our survey said they entered the profession because they wanted to make a difference for children and society. This overwhelming number indicates that teachers want above all to be effective teachers.
- Many teachers leave schools long before retirement because of inadequate system supports such as too little time for planning, too few textbooks, and unreliable assistance from the district office.
- Bureaucratic impediments (e.g., excessive paperwork, too many unnecessary meetings) were cited frequently by leavers. The data also showed that teachers were not asking to be left alone but instead wanted efficient and responsive bureaucracy that *supported* their teaching.
- Better compensation matters to teachers, but unless their classroom and school environment is conducive to good teaching, better compensation is not likely to improve teacher retention rates.
- Teachers willingly stay because of strong collegial supports and because they have an important say in the operation of the school; they also seek strong input in what and how they are allowed to teach.
- Special education teachers are most likely to leave special education because of inadequate system supports as well as an all-too-often hostile teaching environment created by parents and student advocates. In addition, they leave because of too little time for the complex and constantly changing IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) they are required to write. Many leave because of dysfunctional professional relationships with their colleagues in general education.
- Many teachers (28%) who have left teaching before retirement would come back if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions. Monetary incentives alone would be less effective in luring them back.

## MISGUIDED SOLUTIONS TO THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

Some policy makers and educators believe the teacher shortage can be solved primarily by increasing the supply of new teachers coming into the field. Yes, we must do all we can to encourage the entry of talented new teachers into the classroom; new teachers are a pipeline of vitality and up-to-date knowledge about academic content and teaching practices. And the teacher shortage cannot be solved solely through increased retention. But there are limitations to an approach that depends largely on new teachers. When experienced teachers leave the profession, they take with them invaluable expertise they have acquired through classroom experience and often advanced professional training.

Those who recognize the added value of veteran teachers have suggested that monetary incentives such as "combat pay" or the more palatable term, "recognition pay," be used to lure veteran teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Implicit in these broad-brush solutions is a downbeat assumption that certain schools will always be unattractive places to work, and that the only way to get teachers to accept unpleasant assignments is to pay them more. But the data from our survey show clearly that monetary incentives alone would do little to create staffing stability in these schools. We found considerable evidence—particularly the responses from many stayers who enjoy their work in high-poverty settings—that even schools with the most challenging students are not hopelessly bad places to work.

In our view, the state's efforts to better staff its schools should not be driven by the question: How do we coax veteran teachers to go to hard-to-staff schools? Rather the state's efforts should be driven by the more fundamental question: How do we make hard-to-staff schools easier to staff? In other words, beyond the quick fix, how must we change the teaching and learning environment of hard-to-staff schools so they can attract and retain the teachers needed to effectively teach the students who attend these schools? The final chapter of our report offers six practical recommendations for state and local decision makers so they can begin to address this crucial issue as well as the teacher shortage in general. If these recommendations are followed, we believe that *all* of California's public schools can be transformed into places that will attract and keep well-qualified teachers. What's more, not only will teachers come and stay, the changes made to get them there will greatly boost the chances that their students will learn well and with enthusiasm, and that our teachers' classroom experiences will be more effective, rewarding, and sustainable.

### Tangible Benefits of Implementing Effective Teacher Retention Strategies

Why should policy makers, taxpayers, educators, parents, and even the students themselves really care about improving teacher retention rates in California? What would higher rates of teacher retention translate to in the next several years? In implementing the six recommendations for improved teacher retention that this Executive Summary highlights, the State of California:

- would reduce the attrition rate among its qualified and experienced teachers. If the teacher attrition rate were cut by 30%, California would prevent 5,400 teachers from leaving the profession each year.
- would increase the number of teachers reentering the profession. Twenty-eight percent of the dissatisfied leavers in our survey said they would consider returning

to the classroom if teaching and learning conditions were improved, even without increases in salary. If the current rate at which teachers return to the profession could be increased by 30%, this would increase the overall supply of returning teachers by approximately 530 teachers each year.

- would reduce the overall shortage of credentialed teachers. By reducing the rate of attrition by 30% and increasing the number of teachers reentering the profession by 30%, **California could reduce its projected annual teacher shortage by nearly one-third**.

- would reduce the number of teachers transferring away from high-poverty schools and would increase the number of teachers transferring into high-poverty schools. If current transfer rates out of high-poverty schools were cut from 10% to 7.5%, 2,000 fewer teachers would transfer away each year from high-poverty schools.

  Twenty percent of the stayers in our survey expressed interest in transferring to a high-poverty school if teaching and learning conditions were improved and if additional compensation were offered. Given the large number of stayers working in low-poverty schools statewide, these investments in improved teaching and learning conditions, as well as in compensation, would lead to a significant increase in the number of qualified and experienced teachers willing to work in high-poverty schools.

- would reduce the number of special education teachers migrating into general education and would encourage many of these teachers to return to special education. Thirty-five percent of the special education credential holders in our survey were working in general education. Improvements in teaching and learning conditions, especially the ones specifically cited by special education teachers, would prevent many from leaving special education.

  Twenty-two percent of the "inactive" special education credential holders in our survey expressed interest in returning to special education if teaching and learning conditions in the special education environment were improved. Given the large number of special education teachers working in general education, investments in improved teaching and learning conditions could lead to a significant increase in the supply of teachers working in special education.

- would improve teaching and student learning. Increased teacher retention has two important benefits for students. Not only will more students have greater access to well-prepared teachers, these teachers will be more effective in the classroom. That is because improvements to the work environment that are required to retain teachers are positively associated with improved student learning (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The second half of our report describes six recommendations for improved teacher retention in California. Practical, actionable, and occasionally counterintuitive, these recommendations are, in brief:

### RECOMMENDATION 1:
### Assess teaching conditions locally and continuously

**To fully understand the problems teachers face in particular schools, the teachers themselves must be asked and must be asked often. Surveys and/or focus groups should be conducted regularly and continuously with all staff, including principals, to assess the quality of the teaching conditions in the school and district.**

Amazingly, despite the high turnover rate among teachers, human resource departments in most school districts do not conduct exit interviews to find out why teachers are leaving. Neither do many district administrators or school principals ask teachers to express their opinions about the teaching conditions *before* they decide to leave. The opposite is true in most corporate environments where exit interviews and staff surveys are routinely conducted. That's because successful business owners understand the high costs associated with employee turnover, and because most businesses want to be "learning organizations" open to improving elements that are dysfunctional or simply not working as well as they should be.

If teachers have an opportunity, before they decide to leave the classroom or the profession, to construct and implement solutions in collaboration with their school and district administrators, our study indicates that more leavers will become stayers. Of equal importance, after strategies have been implemented to address deficiencies, these assessments must be repeated to evaluate the effectiveness of these remedial actions and to make adjustments and updates when necessary.

There is an added benefit to this approach. The very process of asking teachers about their schools and soliciting their help in making these schools better places to work is not just a step toward solving a problem—it is an important part of the solution. Even before a single bureaucratic impediment is eliminated or an extra hour is found for teachers to plan, teachers will have already experienced two things they want dearly: an opportunity to exercise control over their work environment so they can teach more effectively, and the sense that their leaders take seriously their individual as well as collective concerns about the supports required to teach students more effectively. The clear message we got from our survey data and follow-up interviews is that teachers want to be treated as respected professionals.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:
### Elevate California's student funding to (at least) adequate levels

**California currently ranks 43rd in the nation in per-pupil expenditures and some schools are not getting a fair share of even these reduced state resources. Future state budgets should increase the per-pupil expenditure—and make sure it is spent—with improved student performance and teacher retention in mind.**

In a promising development, a bi-partisan group of education and policy leaders in California recently called for an in-depth study to answer the question: How much would it cost to provide a

quality education to all children in California? We urge the experts who have undertaken this analysis to give strong consideration to school conditions that are positively associated with high teacher retention. In order to calculate how much it costs to educate a child, one must be able to calculate how much it costs (and saves!) to retain our best teachers.

The question that ultimately matters most is whether policy makers and the governor will agree to *spend* the money deemed necessary for all children in California to have an opportunity to succeed in school. Higher per-pupil spending, allocated annually in the state budget, will be needed to create the school conditions that are needed to retain teachers. In parallel, our study shows unambiguously that students will have a greater chance of succeeding as learners if the state can retain many more of its teachers, especially the good ones.

## RECOMMENDATION 3: Resolve the bureaucratic conundrum (not all bureaucracies are bad)

**Bureaucratic impediments can make teachers leave, but our analysis also indicates that eliminating all bureaucratic structures is not the solution teachers are seeking. They want policies and procedures they can count on—ones that support rather than impede their teaching.**

Teachers want to be given appropriate authority over decisions affecting their school and at the same time want sensible policies and procedures to maintain a level of order, efficiency, and fairness. Teachers do not want to be left entirely alone in a structureless environment.

To retain teachers, both new and experienced, and to help them become more effective in the classroom, teachers and administrators should be allowed to examine the bureaucratic structures of their schools. The goal should not simply be to reduce or eliminate bureaucracy—that is a fairly tired call to action—but to create fluid, rational bureaucracies: policies, procedures, and paperwork that support effective leadership and quality teaching, all the while making sure that these guiding structures remain relevant and useful.

That said, with increased accountability pressures and high-stakes testing, many district offices are taking a dramatically more active role in setting district-wide instructional and curricular policies. These policies often dictate the instructional methods teachers are expected to use, how much time they will spend teaching particular subjects, and what learning materials they will use. Rigid bureaucracies all-too-quickly insinuate themselves and well-prepared, experienced teachers flee when overly prescriptive bureaucracies deprive them of the decision-making authority they say they need.

Still, this presents a catch-22 for district administrators who are faced with schools that are weakly staffed. These administrators are understandably reluctant to offer more authority to teachers when they suspect teachers will not use it well. But if they don't offer them more authority, they cannot get or retain the teachers who could handle the authority or grow and develop into that authority.

A promising way out of this catch-22 is for districts to construct and implement comprehensive re-design plans for persistently low-performing schools. This approach would offer teachers in these schools a coherent system of supports all at once, rather than incrementally adding one or two fixes at a time and waiting to see what difference is made. We believe a *comprehensive* turnaround strategy in schools with high teacher turnover and poor academic performance would trigger a positive "tipping point" leading to dramatic improvements in student academic performance and teacher retention (Futernick, 2005).

## RECOMMENDATION 4:
## Refocus school leadership on instructional quality and high-quality teaching and learning conditions

**School leaders will be most effective at improving student learning by focusing their attention equally on the quality of instruction and the quality of the school's teaching and learning conditions. Managing the work environment is no less essential to the success of the school than the functions provided by an effective instructional leader. Nor are they less demanding or complex or even separate from the instructional role. The two roles are positively reinforcing, with one leading directly to the other and back.**

School principals, like teachers, are acutely aware of the pressures of state and federal policies that hold them accountable for student performance. But administrators will not be effective instructional leaders, no matter how knowledgeable they are about instructional quality, if poor school work environments drive teachers, especially good teachers, away from their schools. School administrators need to create a positive work environment and strong relationships among staff so they can avoid the harmful consequences that teacher turnover has on student learning. (Much of this report describes that positive collegial environment and how to create and sustain it.)

In order for principals to create satisfying and productive work environments for their teachers, school boards and superintendents must ensure that the same positive work environment that teachers yearn for is also available for principals. If principals lack the support they need, or if they are overly burdened by unresponsive and intrusive district or state bureaucratic structures, then they too will leave.

State education officials and district administrators must make certain that principals are not impeded by the demoralizing aspects of district and state bureaucracies, and that principals receive the support *they* need to perform their job well. Otherwise, districts will be unable to attract and retain capable school leaders. If that happens, there is no chance the district will be able to attract and retain good teachers.

## RECOMMENDATION 5:
## Establish statewide standards for school teaching and learning conditions

**California now has some of the most rigorous academic content standards for its K-12 public schools. But merely expecting a lot from students does not, by itself, guarantee they will succeed academically, especially if the schools they attend are run-down, ill-equipped, and staffed with teachers who leave soon after they are hired. Policy makers must have equally high expectations for the quality of schools that students attend. This is possible if the state establishes clear statewide standards for the teaching and learning conditions that all schools are expected to meet.**

California currently has only the most rudimentary standards for school teaching and learning conditions. And there is strong evidence that teaching and learning conditions tend to be the most problematic in schools

with the highest concentrations of poor and minority students.

If California wants to create school environments that will attract and retain sufficient numbers of well-prepared teachers, we must create standards for the conditions that address the full spectrum of system and collegial supports required for teaching effectiveness. In 2001, policy makers in North Carolina did this by establishing 30 "working condition" standards for their public schools. In order to determine how well schools are meeting these standards, teachers in North Carolina regularly participate in a survey to assess the level of compliance with these standards. Armed with research demonstrating that improved working conditions are strong predictors of teacher retention and student achievement, policy makers in North Carolina have invested in several initiatives to ensure that all of their schools meet the state's working conditions standards (Emerick & Hirsch, n.d.).

Policy makers in California should follow North Carolina's lead in adopting a comprehensive set of "working condition" standards (in this report we prefer the less-ambiguous term, "teaching and learning condition standards") for its public schools. These standards would identify specific features of school environments that promote teacher retention *and* student learning. When linked to an efficient data gathering process, these standards would enable policy makers and district administrators to take corrective measures, as North Carolina has been doing, when the standards are not being met. California's students are more likely to achieve the state's rigorous academic standards if the state establishes a parallel set of teaching and learning condition standards, and the means to ensure that schools will meet them.

## Recommendation 6: Assess and address specific challenges in retention of special education teachers

**Many factors responsible for special education teachers leaving or staying are the same for teachers working in general education classrooms. But there are school conditions that are uniquely problematic for special education teachers that must be addressed.**

Our study revealed several areas of significant concern to special education teachers. If these areas are addressed successfully, many more special education teachers will continue teaching special education students. These measures could also encourage inactive special education teachers—i.e., those with special education credentials who are working in general education classrooms—to return to special education. In terms of teacher retention, our special education recommendations are:

**Specifically collect data on special education teachers and incorporate this data into retention strategies.**

As discussed in the first of our six recommendations, the most effective retention strategies will be based on locally gathered data. Many special education teachers face a unique set of difficulties that include overly burdensome IEPs and related paperwork, challenging relationships with general education colleagues, and sometimes difficult interactions with parents of special education students. In order to determine the specific factors that cause excessive turnover among special education teachers, those who set out to collect data about school conditions from their teachers will want to incorporate questions that allow teachers with

special education credentials to offer feedback on these unique challenges.

**Reduce the unnecessary burdens imposed by IEPs and related paperwork**

Teachers called for greater standardization, even a "universal IEP," to reduce the questions that arise when teachers encounter confusing elements of new versions of IEPs. Given the vast amounts of IEP-related paperwork teachers report having to complete by hand, the availability of teacher-tested information technology would appear to be an excellent solution. Assistance with IEPs by local special education experts would also help many teachers cope with the legal and educational complexities of this task. In particular, this assistance would enable special education teachers to learn about the full range of instructional resources that could be incorporated into an effective IEP.

**Cultivate better collegial supports for special educators**

Great progress has been made in integrating special education *students* into general education programs. The findings from our retention survey suggest that far less progress has been made to fully integrate special education *teachers* with their general education colleagues. Special educators often feel isolated and ignored, and many find themselves at odds with school principals and their general education colleagues when advocating for their special education students. This aspect of special education is a significant contributor to the high turnover rate among special educators.

There are several ways to strengthen the professional relationships between special and general education teachers. The most effective and immediate approach would come through school leadership that recognizes the significance of this collaboration but is also keenly aware of the deeply engrained attitudes and practices that can conspire to keep special and general education teachers apart from one another (Cox, 2001; Smith & Leonard, 2005).

Institutions that prepare students to become special and general educators should provide numerous opportunities for these respective students to work collaboratively with each other from the outset of their preparation programs. By participating in non-segregated teacher education programs, there is a good chance that beginning general and special education teachers will approach their first job ready and eager to cultivate positive working relationships with all of their colleagues.

**Expand programs that support novice special educators**

Compared to the general education teacher workforce, a significant percentage of special education teachers (14% in 2004-05) are not credentialed and, therefore, are not immediately eligible for BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment). Special education novice teachers who lack access to established support programs commonly receive inadequate support and assistance in those critical first few years in the profession. This, combined with the unique challenges they encounter in the workplace, puts special education teachers at high risk for early burnout and attrition. The state should consider expanding BTSA to support all novice teachers, and should give the highest priority to novice special educators.

The state should also consider increasing the resources available for structured, well-supervised intern programs. This would allow thousands of special education teachers currently working with emergency permits, pre-intern certificates, or waivers to obtain critical professional support, especially in terms of professional training and classroom supervision, from their district and university credential programs.

## REFRAMING A QUESTION

In seeking sustainable solutions to the teacher shortage, those concerned with teaching quality as well as teacher retention understandably wonder—or pointedly ask: *How do we retain effective teachers* and not the ones who are disappointing or, really, failing our students? That important question is beyond the purview of our study though our findings point to a problem with that line of inquiry. In schools where there is poor leadership, low morale, high staff turnover, no parent involvement, no sense of team; where teachers lack the basic supports that allow them to be successful, one would be hard-pressed to distinguish the good teachers from the bad. The good news from our study is that if teachers get what they want and what they need to be truly effective in the classroom, and if these satisfied teachers stay, then we will discover that California has far more good teachers than we thought.

California's teacher shortage can be reduced significantly if policy makers and educators take the bold and promising steps outlined in this report to retain teachers. If that dream is realized, if every child gains access to a well-prepared, knowledgeable, and caring teacher—one of the most valuable assets a student has—then California's schools may once again rank among the best in the nation. This is a very possible dream.

# INTRODUCTION

The most valuable asset a student has is a well-prepared, knowledgeable, and caring teacher. In the absence of good teachers, students struggle to learn. In fact, student achievement in California has ranked near the bottom among all states in the country in recent years (Carroll *et al.*, 2005), in large part because of a teacher shortage that worsened in 1998, when class-size reductions instituted that year created a heightened demand for qualified teachers. Ever since then, the state has been unable to produce enough qualified new teachers to keep pace with the number of experienced teachers who leave the profession each year. In high-poverty schools—where teacher turnover is especially high, where often the only replacements the school can find are substitute teachers, teachers with emergency permits, novice teachers, and those who are driven away just as quickly as the ones they've replaced—students pay dearly. If the state does not take action to reduce the teacher shortage, experts have shown that it will only worsen. This is because while student enrollments are on the rise, an unusually high number of teachers will retire in the next few years, and the number of new teachers entering the field is expected to decline (Esch *et al.*, 2005).

Attrition of teachers *before they retire* is also a principal cause of California's teacher shortage. In fact, 22% of teachers in California leave after their first four years in the classroom (Reed *et al.*, 2006). According to national statistics, each year 6% of all public school teachers leave the profession before they have reached retirement age (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). The large numbers of teachers moving in and out of schools makes matters worse, especially in schools with high numbers of poor students. Each year, 10% of the teachers working in high-poverty schools—the ones whose students pose the greatest educational challenges—transfer away to other schools. Often the only replacement teachers these schools can find are ones with minimal training and classroom experience.

If California hopes to close the achievement gap between poor students and those from more resource-rich schools and families, it will need to solve its teacher shortage and reduce the high rates of teacher turnover, especially in high-poverty schools. Some policy makers and educators have suggested we work harder to bring new teachers into the field, and we should, but there are limitations to this approach. When experienced teachers leave the profession, they take with them invaluable expertise they have acquired through classroom experience and professional training. And the financial cost to the state to recruit and prepare replacement teachers can be staggering.

Researchers estimate that California spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually to recruit, screen, and prepare individuals who replace pre-retirement teachers who leave the profession and teachers who transfer to other schools.[1] Beyond dollars and cents, costs are

[1] Estimates of the cost of teacher turnover range from 25% of the annual salary of the leaver to double the salary and benefits of a leaver (Benner, 2000). Using a figure of 30% of the leaver's annual salary, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) estimated "conservatively" that California spent $455 million in 2000 on pre-retirement teacher turnover. Complicating the estimates of teacher turnover costs, however, is the fact that leavers often have more experience (and, therefore, earn more money) than those who replace them. Replacing a 15-year veteran teacher earning $65,000 per year with a first-year teacher making $40,000 generates costs, but in calculating a *net turnover cost*, one must take into account the difference in salaries between leavers and their replacements—in this case, a savings of $25,000 per year. Since many pre-retirement leavers leave early in their careers, the typical differences in salary are likely to be smaller than the figures used in this example. Also, a significant portion of the estimates in turnover cost models are for movers (i.e., those transferring to other schools) rather than for leavers. In these cases, teacher salaries have no effect on the turnover costs incurred by the state.

nearly incalculable in terms of the negative impact that the churning of teachers and loss of teacher experience has on the instructional continuity of a school. The very fact that so many teachers flee certain types of schools should serve as an unambiguous signal that something about these schools' work environment is wrong and needs to be fixed. The state will always require a sufficient quantity of new teachers, but a strategy that merely replaces experienced leavers with novices is not only hugely expensive, it diminishes the collective wisdom and expertise of the teaching force. This generates an intangible cost far greater than the millions of dollars spent annually to replace teachers, and it is way too costly in terms of its impact on student learning.

In order for policy makers and educators to solve the teacher shortage problem and to protect the state's investment in quality education, they must find a way to ensure that good teachers want to remain in the classroom. Retaining teachers is possible only if we can fully appreciate the reasons so many teachers in California leave before they retire. The recent study of teacher retention in California conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) examined the attrition rates of new teachers and the extent to which these rates were affected by two state policy initiatives: compensation and a structured support program called BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assistance) (Reed *et al.*, 2006). But few studies, including the one from PPIC, shed light on a multiplicity of other factors—the work environment, in particular—that reflect what it is that teachers really want from teaching.

If we understand what really matters to teachers, then we can construct effective teacher retention strategies, especially for the schools in California that have been particularly difficult to staff. As part of our analysis of teacher retention in California, we at the Center for Teacher Quality at the California State University conducted a study to better understand the factors that contribute to teacher attrition and turnover. Our study examined the professional and personal reasons offered by those who leave teaching and those who remain in the classroom—"leavers" and "stayers" in the language of this study—through several different educational lenses: low-poverty and high-poverty schools, elementary and high schools, and general education classrooms and special education classrooms. Our analysis provides a detailed description of the different strategies that will be required to retain teachers in these different types of schools.

The most basic findings from our study tell us that teachers are less concerned with compensation (though they are not unconcerned with it) than they are with a whole range of particulars about their work environment. Work environment, or perhaps more specifically described, the *teaching and learning environment* refers not just to leaks in the ceilings or toilets that do not flush, though poorly maintained classrooms and school facilities are as dispiriting to teachers as they are to students. Teaching and learning environment refers to a whole range of instructional, collegial, and systemic conditions which, for many, make teaching a highly satisfying profession. A profession that reminds those who have chosen it that they are making a positive impact on students and society.

When leavers described the features of their working environment that were most problematic, they pointed to a broad spectrum of problems that we call **inadequate system supports**: Over half of the teachers who have left the classroom said they lacked such things as adequate time for planning and professional development, textbooks for their students, and reliable assistance from the district office. But the factor cited most frequently as a reason for leaving was **bureaucratic impediments**. Whether teachers spoke about excessive paperwork, too many unnecessary classroom interruptions, or too many restrictions on teaching itself, these impediments actually prevented teachers from doing their job. These problematic "facts of school life," assumed by many to be unavoidable, do not just drive

teachers crazy; they drive many of them right out of the classroom.

In addition to inadequate system supports and bureaucratic impediments, leavers also pointed frequently to the **lack of collegial supports**. They lacked a strong sense of team at their school—i.e., a sense that all or nearly all individuals working at the school are focused on creating an environment that fosters student learning; trusting, respectful professional relationships among teachers and other staff; and a collaborative, mutually supportive leadership approach between teachers and principal.

Not surprising, when we asked "stayers" why they chose to remain in the classroom, they frequently cited the flipside of inadequate system supports and pointed to the presence of *effective* system supports such as adequate resources, adequate time for planning, and effective support from the district office. What did surprise us was that **collegial supports**—the quality of relationships among staff—mattered even more. And the one factor that mattered the most to stayers was the opportunity they had to participate in decision-making at the school.

So important is the quality of the teaching and learning environment that it colors the way many teachers view their compensation, another key variable thought to affect teachers "stay or leave" decisions. When these teaching and learning conditions are poor, we discovered that many teachers see their compensation as inadequate. When teaching and learning conditions are good, not only do teachers tend to stay, they actually view their compensation as a reason for staying.

## CENTRAL FINDINGS

Unless California understands and addresses the problem of teacher attrition and turnover, thousands of additional students in the coming years will continue to enter classrooms without qualified and experienced teachers to instruct them. If this happens, the state will continue failing to meet its obligation to provide high-quality education to all of its public school students. We hope the central findings from this study will help policy makers and educators understand what it will take for the state to retain more of the teachers it needs so that all students receive the quality of education they deserve.

### The central findings were:

- 81% of teachers who participated in our survey said they entered the profession because they wanted to make a difference for children and society. This overwhelming number indicates that teachers want above all to be effective teachers.

- Many teachers leave schools long before retirement because of inadequate system supports such as too little time for planning, too few textbooks, and unreliable assistance from the district office.

- Bureaucratic impediments (e.g., excessive paperwork, too many unnecessary meetings) were cited frequently by leavers. The data also showed that teachers were not asking to be left alone but instead wanted efficient and responsive bureaucracy that supported their teaching.

- Better compensation matters to teachers, but unless their classroom and school environment is conducive to good teaching, better compensation is not likely to improve teacher retention rates.

- Teachers willingly stay because of strong collegial supports and because they have an important say in the operation of the school; they also seek strong input in what and how they are allowed to teach.

- Special education teachers are most likely to leave special education because of inadequate system supports as well as an all-too-often hostile teaching environment created by parents and student advocates. In addition, they leave because of too little time for the complex and constantly changing IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) they

are required to write. Many leave because of dysfunctional professional relationships with their colleagues in general education.

- Many teachers (28%) who have left teaching before retirement would come back if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions. Monetary incentives alone would be less effective in luring them back.

On first reading, these findings may seem unremarkable, revealing nothing that has not been found in organizational effectiveness research, in general, but especially from studies of teacher satisfaction and retention, in particular. Quite the contrary. The findings and recommendations from our study provide a fresh and optimistic perspective on how we can mitigate the exodus of fully prepared teachers from California's public schools. One of the most encouraging findings from this survey of nearly 2,000 K-12 public teachers in California is that much of what teachers call for—what they really want in order to teach most effectively—can be provided by their districts and the state without costing much. Certainly without costing as much as what the state would need to spend if it relied exclusively on the recruitment and preparation of new teachers in order to solve California's teacher shortage problem.

For instance, **bureaucratic impediments**, the factor cited most frequently by teachers who left, can be dramatically reduced (and money might actually be saved) if teachers and school officials work more effectively together and take advantage of the proven methods undertaken by others who have addressed and solved this thorny problem. Whether teachers described bureaucratic impediments as too much paperwork, too many classroom interruptions, or too many restrictions on teaching itself, these impediments, which we might assume are a relatively benign and unalterable fact of life for those in this profession, actually prevented teachers from doing their job—teaching students, and teaching them well. Fixing this problem often costs nothing more than a willingness to entertain the thought that school systems *can* be different, and then committing to a plan to develop bureaucratic structures that support rather than hinder good teaching.

**Strong collegial supports** that emerge from collaborative teamwork and trusting professional relationships—the element that was central to teachers' choosing to stay in the classroom—require school and district-wide leadership that recognizes its importance. The cost to strengthen collegial supports is often negligible, sometimes little more than a changed mindset (a more collaborative and hopeful attitude) and a commitment to management practices that ensure that strong collegial support systems are present at the school.

Unfortunately, the very factors that are most likely to contribute to strong collegial support systems are frequently overlooked by policy-makers, many of whom prefer working in the tangible world of achievement scores and fiscal matters rather than in the more imprecise world of human relationships. This blind spot probably occurs because inadequacies in collegial supports are tough to quantify, hard to address through state policy, and highly dependent upon decisions made at the school level. Yet teachers report that collegial supports are critical to keeping them in the classroom, second only to having adequate decision-making authority (unattainable when teachers are constrained by the bureaucratic impediments listed above). Fortunately, there are numerous ways policy makers and educators at the local level can strengthen collegial supports, and there is little doubt that these efforts, when combined with stronger system supports for our teachers, will lead many more of our prized teachers to become stayers rather than leavers.

Still, while much can be done without great expense to retain teachers, there is no skirting the fact that more money will be required for essential supports that are currently absent in some schools. When teachers leave because they lack textbooks, basic learning materials, and access to current

technology; when they leave because their schools are unclean, rundown, or overcrowded, resources must be found to address these problems. Money will also be needed to carve out more time for teachers to plan with their colleagues, evaluate their students' work, get help with their own teaching, and meet with parents. In recent years, per-pupil spending in California, about $7,500 annually, has ranked near the bottom among all states.[2] The lack of supports in California's schools results in part from the state's unwillingness to provide adequate funding for education, but policy makers and voters may be more inclined to support new investments if they believe that a targeted strategy to retain our teachers, based on sound data, will result in improved student learning.

Up until now, state (and even most local) teacher retention policies typically have not addressed teachers' decision-making authority or the personal dynamics among the people who work at the school. Yet these are critical factors for getting teachers to stay. As the policy emphasis in recent years has shifted toward standards-based curriculum and high-stakes accountability, policy-makers' focus has been aimed primarily on outcomes. While this approach has an appealing logic to it, it is short-sighted because it has looked past the factors affecting the one input that has the greatest impact on student outcomes: teachers.

## MISGUIDED SOLUTIONS TO THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

Some policy makers and educators believe the teacher shortage can be solved by increasing the supply of new teachers coming into the field. Yes, we must do all we can to encourage the entry of talented new teachers into the classroom; new teachers are a pipeline of vitality and up-to-date knowledge about academic content and teaching practices. And the teacher shortage cannot be solved solely through increased retention. But there are limitations to an approach that depends largely on new teachers. When experienced teachers leave the profession, they take with them invaluable expertise they have acquired through classroom experience and often advanced professional training.

Those who recognize the added value of veteran teachers have suggested that monetary incentives such as "combat pay" or the more palatable term, "recognition pay," be used to lure veteran teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Implicit in these broad-brush solutions is a downbeat assumption that certain schools will always be unattractive places to work, and that the only way to get teachers to accept unpleasant assignments is to pay them more. But the data from our survey show clearly that monetary incentives alone would do little to create staffing stability in these schools. We found considerable evidence—particularly the responses from many stayers who enjoy their work in high-poverty settings—that even schools with the most challenging students are not hopelessly bad places to work.

In our view, the state's efforts to better staff its schools should not be driven by the question: How do we coax veteran teachers to go to hard-to-staff schools? Rather the state's efforts should be driven by the more fundamental question: *How do we make hard-to-staff schools easier to staff?* In other words, beyond the quick fix, how must we change the teaching and learning environment of hard-to-staff schools so they can attract and retain the teachers needed to effectively teach the students who attend these schools? The final chapter of our report offers six practical recommendations for state and local decision makers so they can begin to address this crucial issue as well as teacher retention, in general. If these recommendations are followed, we believe that *all* of California's public schools can be transformed into places that will attract and keep well-qualified teachers. What's more, not only will teachers come and stay, the changes made to get them there will greatly boost the chances that their students will learn well and with enthusiasm, and that

[2] According to Education Week (2006), California's per-pupil spending ranked 43rd among all 50 states in 2003.

our teachers' classroom experiences will be more effective, rewarding, and sustainable.

## STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS (IN BRIEF)

Chapter 5 (pp. 51 – 73) focuses on teacher retention recommendations and strategies that come out of our analysis of survey data and follow-up interviews. As a preview, these six recommendations are:

1) Assess teaching conditions *locally* and *continuously*
2) Elevate California's student funding to (at least) adequate levels
3) Resolve the bureaucratic conundrum (not all bureaucracies are bad)
4) Refocus school leadership on instructional quality *and* high-quality teaching and learning conditions
5) Establish statewide standards for school teaching and learning conditions
6) Assess and address specific challenges in retention of special education teachers

## TANGIBLE BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING TEACHER RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

So why should policy makers, taxpayers, educators, parents, and even the students themselves really care about improving teacher retention rates in California? The answer is that there are tangible benefits to the profession of teaching and to its corollary, classroom learning. If the six recommendations are implemented in the next several years, the State of California:

- would reduce the attrition rate among its qualified and experienced teachers. If the teacher attrition rate was cut by 30%, California would prevent 5,400 teachers from leaving the profession each year. [3]
- would increase the number of teachers reentering the profession. Twenty-eight percent of the dissatisfied leavers in our survey said they would consider returning to the classroom if teaching and learning conditions were improved, even without increases in salary. If the current rate at which teachers return to the profession could be increased by 30%, this would increase the overall supply of returning teachers by approximately 530 teachers each year.[4]
- would reduce the overall shortage of credentialed teachers. By reducing the rate of attrition by 30% and increasing the number of teachers reentering the profession by 30%, **California could reduce its projected annual teacher shortage by nearly one-third**.[5]
- would reduce the number of teachers transferring away from high-poverty schools and would increase the number of teachers transferring into high-poverty schools. If current transfer rates out of high-poverty schools were cut from 10% to 7.5%, 2,000 fewer teachers would transfer away each year from high-poverty schools.[6]

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[3] According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 6% of the nation's teaching force leaves the profession annually before reaching retirement age (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). In California, which employs approximately 300,000 public school teachers, this translates to approximately 18,000 teachers.

[4] SRI International estimates that the percentage of teachers reentering the profession each year in California is 0.6% of the overall teaching workforce. This figure was derived by subtracting the number of new individuals taking teaching jobs from the total number of new hires (Esch *et al.*, 2005).

[5] SRI International estimates that the annual shortage of teachers in California's public schools will average 18,300 between 2008-09 and 2014-15 (Esch *et al.*, 2005). This number would be cut by 32% if an average of 5,830 additional teachers were to stay in or come back to the profession each year.

[6] According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, each year 10% of the teachers working in

Twenty percent of the stayers in our survey expressed interest in transferring to a high-poverty school if teaching and learning conditions were improved and if additional compensation were offered. Given the large number of stayers working in low-poverty schools statewide, these investments in improved teaching and learning conditions, as well as in compensation, would lead to a significant increase in the number of qualified and experienced teachers willing to work in high-poverty schools. [7]

- would reduce the number of special education teachers transferring into general education and would encourage many of these teachers to return to special education. Thirty-five percent of the special education credential holders in our survey were working in general education. Improvements in teaching and learning conditions, especially the ones specifically cited by special education teachers, would prevent many from leaving special education.

  Twenty-two percent of the “inactive” special education credential holders in our survey expressed interest in returning to special education if teaching and learning conditions were improved in the special education environment. Given the large number of special education teachers working in general education, investments in improved teaching and learning conditions could lead to a significant increase in the supply of teachers working in special education.

- would improve teaching and student learning. Increased teacher retention has two important benefits for students. Not only will more students have access to well-prepared teachers, these teachers will be more effective in the classroom. That is because improvements to the work environment that are required to retain teachers are positively associated with improved student learning (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004).

high-poverty schools transfer to another school. (In low-poverty schools, the percentage is 5%.) Using this figure we estimate that in 2003-04 there were 81,288 teachers working in California’s high-poverty schools and that 8,129 transferred to another school.

[7] While the survey results point to the improvements that would be needed to working conditions, we do not know how much additional compensation would be needed to attract stayers to high-poverty schools.

## REFRAMING A QUESTION

In seeking sustainable solutions to the teacher shortage, those concerned with teaching quality as well as teacher retention understandably wonder—or pointedly ask: *How do we retain effective teachers* and not the ones who are disappointing or, really, failing our students? That important question is beyond the purview of our study though our findings point to a problem with that line of inquiry. In schools where there is poor leadership, low morale, high staff turnover, no parent involvement, no sense of team; where teachers lack the basic supports that allow them to be successful, one would be hard-pressed to distinguish the good teachers from the bad. The good news from our study is that if teachers get what they want and what they need to be truly effective in the classroom, and if these satisfied teachers stay, then we will discover that California has far more good teachers than we thought.

California’s teacher shortage can be reduced significantly if policy makers and educators take the bold and promising steps outlined in this report to retain teachers. If that dream is realized, if every child gains access to a well-prepared, knowledgeable, and caring teacher—one of the most valuable assets a student has—then California’s schools may once again rank among the best in the nation. In the process, all students, even those in high-poverty schools, stand the chance to become better learners and to do so in a more stable environment. This is a very possible dream.

# **CHAPTER 1** | TEACHER RETENTION IN A CALIFORNIA CONTEXT

Thirty years ago, California's public K-12 schools were thought to be among the best in the nation. Today, while many schools and their students continue to thrive, the overall academic performance of public school students in California ranks among the lowest in the United States (Carroll *et al.*, 2005).

Policy makers have adopted a number of reform strategies in recent years to reverse this trend. In the late 1990s, they reduced class size in grades K-3 to 20 students per teacher; adopted a rigorous set of academic standards; and instituted an accountability system that would reward high-performing schools and impose sanctions on those that were failing. The state invested millions of dollars in programs to assist low-performing schools, and when it became apparent that class-size reductions had led unexpectedly to a shortage of qualified teachers, it launched a series of teacher recruitment initiatives to fill the gap. These investments have produced achievement gains in some instances, but there are few signs they will enable California's schools, particularly those that serve poor students and those learning to speak English, to rise to an achievement level comparable to most other states.

Many researchers believe California's K-12 academic challenges are aggravated by the persistent shortage of qualified teachers that worsened in 1998 when class size reductions instituted that year dramatically increased the demand for qualified teachers. As a result, in 2000, 13% of California's teacher workforce lacked an appropriate teaching credential. Since then, efforts to recruit credentialed new teachers have reduced the shortage of these underprepared teachers, but in 2005, 7% of all teachers were still teaching without a credential. In schools with high concentrations of minority students, three times that many teachers were underprepared (21%) and in special education 14% did not have an appropriate teaching credential. Statewide, 12% of high school math teachers and 15% of English teachers are teaching "out of field"—that is, they do not have the required subject matter background to teach these subject areas even though they have a credential to teach. The shortage of qualified teachers in these subjects is considerably higher in high-minority schools. This is particularly problematic since high school students must now pass California's High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to graduate and the two subjects that are tested on this exam are math and English.[8]

Unless these shortages of fully prepared teachers are addressed, they may increase dramatically in the coming years as a result of an expected increase in student enrollment and a wave of new teacher retirements. According to researchers at SRI International, unless policies are implemented to alter the present course, the shortfall of fully prepared teachers will increase from 20,000, its level in 2004-05, to 33,000 in 2015 (Esch *et al.*, 2005).[9]

## UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

In order for state and local decision-makers to reduce the teacher shortage, they must first understand its causes. The fundamental problem can be framed this way: If the state is not producing enough new teachers to keep

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[8] Students in schools with low pass rates on CAHSEE were 11 times more likely to attend schools with critical shortages of fully credentialed teachers (Rogers *et al.*, 2005)

[9] Included in these numbers of underprepared teachers are teachers working with intern credentials. Despite the fact that interns have not received a preliminary teaching credential, they are considered "highly-qualified" by the No Child Left Behind Act.

pace with the number who are retiring, then it has a teacher *supply* problem. If, on the other hand, large numbers of teachers are leaving the profession before they retire, or are moving away from certain types of schools, then the state has a teacher *turnover* problem. We should point out here that while "movers" do not reduce the overall supply of teachers, they create vacancies that are just as costly (financially and educationally) from the school's perspective.

Data from other studies shed light on the nature of California's teacher shortage. With respect to teacher supply, in 2003-04, over twice as many new teachers in California entered the profession than retired from it.[10] In fact, since 1998 the production of teachers grew steadily in California. Now, however, a decline in the supply of new teachers is projected because teacher preparation programs have experienced declining enrollments since 2002 (Esch *et al.*, 2005).

Teacher turnover in California is difficult to calculate with precision because California does not maintain a data system that tracks teachers as they move from school to school, but statistics from recent national investigations provide important clues about the number of teachers that are leaving the profession or moving to other schools.[11] According to the Center for Education Statistics, 6% of the nation's public school teachers left teaching before reaching retirement age at the end of the 1999-2000 school year (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). An additional 2% of the workforce (or one-fourth of all leavers) left because of retirement. An additional 8% of the nation's public school teachers transferred to another school. Researchers also found that a much higher percentage of teachers transferred away from high-poverty schools than from low-poverty schools (10% vs. 5%). In a recent study of teacher retention in California, researchers found that during the 1990s, 13% of beginning teachers left the profession in their first two years of employment. By the end of the fourth year 22% had left (Reed *et al.*, 2006).

These national turnover statistics, combined with the data cited above on California's teacher supply, indicate that California's current and projected teacher shortage is a consequence of both a declining supply of new teachers and of high levels of attrition, including teacher retirements. A seemingly simple remedy for the teacher shortage would address both causes: maintaining an adequate supply of new teachers and minimizing the number of pre-retirement leavers. Since 1998, however, when class-size reductions caused California's teacher shortage to worsen, the state began to invest in teacher *recruitment* programs such as the Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program (TRIP), CalTeach, Teaching as a Profession (TAP), and the Governor's Teaching Fellowship program to increase the supply of new teachers entering the profession. The state also established the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program to increase the retention rates of beginning teachers. By 2004-05, the percentage of non-credentialed teachers had fallen from a high of 42,000 in 2000-01 to 20,000, suggesting that the state's efforts to reduce the teacher shortage were paying off. Unfortunately the shortage is expected to increase in the coming years in part because of two factors over which the state has no control: an increase in student enrollment in K-

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[10] According to California's State Teachers Retirement System, 12,301 teachers retired in 2003-04. The California Commission for Teacher Credentialing issued 27,150 new teaching credentials in 2003-04. SRI International calculates that approximately 84% of teachers receiving credentials in 2001 had taken full-time teaching positions in a California K-12 public school within two years (Esch *et al.*, 2005). Assuming this percentage of newly credentialed teachers taking jobs remained constant, the number of new teachers actually working in the classroom (22,806) is 1.9 times the number that retired in 2003-04.

[11] Further complicating the problem of calculating attrition rates are two additional factors: 1) Some teachers leave and then re-enter the profession at a later time, and 2) some teachers leave the classroom for non-teaching positions elsewhere in the education system. The number of teachers in our survey who fell into both of these categories was relatively small.

12 public schools and an expected wave of teacher retirements (Esch *et al.*, 2005).

The coming teacher shortage is also a result of factors over which the state also does have control. Because the number of people enrolling in teacher preparation programs has begun to decline, there will be fewer new teachers entering the field. There is good reason to believe the drop in enrollment is a result, at least in part, of cuts made in the state's teacher recruitment programs.[12] While BTSA continues to receive state funding and continues to boost retention rates among new teachers, turnover rates among *all* teachers continues to be problematic.

Some might argue that the shortage could be reduced more affordably or efficiently by re-investing in the recruitment of new teachers rather than in the retention of existing teachers. An exclusively supply-side solution to the teacher shortage could, at least in theory, eliminate the teacher shortage, but it has three flaws. First, replacing experienced, pre-retirement leavers with novices reduces the collective experience and expertise of the teaching force. As noted above, there is evidence that this eroding of experience is currently occurring where high-poverty schools are increasingly being staffed with novices. While many novices make great teachers and are the future of the profession, many leave the classroom when they are not paired with experienced and effective mentors. Second, this approach does not address the conditions that are causing teachers to leave—factors that are symptomatic of an environment that is not working for teachers or their students. Third, this solution is extremely expensive not only at the local level but also for the state, which must invest heavily in teacher recruitment and teacher preparation in order to maintain an adequate supply of new teachers. In order to reduce the teacher shortage, the state must re-invest in teacher recruitment programs but it must also invest in strategies to reduce teacher attrition and turnover. The state has demonstrated that teacher recruitment programs can work to increase the supply of new teachers. We believe the teacher retention strategies offered in Chapter 5 of this report could, if implemented, prevent many well-prepared and experienced teachers from leaving the classroom.

[12] A description of California's defunct teacher recruitment programs can be found in *The Status of the Teaching Profession* (Esch *et al.*, 2005, p. 7.).

## THE COSTS OF TEACHER TURNOVER

When teachers leave a school, students are frequently forced to attend classes with inexperienced, underprepared teachers until qualified replacements can be found. In hard-to-staff schools, some students attend classes for months, sometimes an entire school year, without instruction from a fully prepared teacher. And for the most unfortunate students, there is no guarantee this experience will not be repeated the following year or the year after that. Authors of a report on California's school staffing challenges observed:

> *In some schools, the shortages are so severe that classes are staffed by a revolving door of long-term substitutes. For example, one middle school math teacher in a year-round school reported serving as a substitute during off-track time because the school was unable to fill a position. By the time this teacher offered to fill in for the month, the class had been staffed by 17 different teachers* (Shields et al., 1999, p. 48).

Recent research has shown a strong link between the presence of certified teachers and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2005; Fetler, 1999; Goe, 2002; Hawk *et al.*, 1985; Wenglinsky, 2000; Wilson *et al.,* 2001). For this reason, California's achievement problems will persist as long as there is a shortage of well-prepared teachers. But even when schools are able to find qualified replacements, sudden and frequent staffing changes create their own problems. The academic and social environment suffers from a lack of consistency and coherence because new

arrivals are unfamiliar with the school's policies, its curriculum and instructional practices, even its students. And when staff members are unfamiliar with one another, it becomes much harder to establish the kind of collaborative, mutually supportive professional environment that exists in most successful schools. Teacher turnover can become particularly disruptive when schools hire novice teachers as replacements. In a study that examined the effects of teacher turnover on urban elementary schools, one teacher reported:

> *Every time we lost a teacher, nine times out of ten it was a first-year teacher we had brought in. Well, the first year is always sheer chaos and you feel like you are not doing anything appropriately. So we would constantly be getting a set of new teachers. Having perpetual chaos* (Guin, 2004, p. 6).

According to the author of the study, Kacey Guin (2004), "[s]he went on to say that the constant stream of new teachers impaired her ability to do her job effectively. Time normally spent with her students was spent helping new colleagues acclimate to their new school environment" (p. 10). Turnover also places a heavy burden on school principals. Diverted from their critical role as the school's educational leader, they are forced to spend inordinate amounts of time hiring replacements and helping them adjust to their new environments.

There are also hard costs associated with teacher turnover. Researchers who have investigated the monetary effects of turnover have found that there are significant additional costs associated with the recruitment, hiring, and professional development of replacement teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Benner, 2000; Colgan, 2004).

## WHAT TEACHER TURNOVER SIGNALS

High turnover in a school or district is a sign that something in the school environment is not right—for teachers or their students. Teacher turnover is a *cause* of academic problems for students, but it is also a *symptom* of other problems in the school environment that have their own direct and often debilitating effect on students. As noted in a recent report from North Carolina, the conditions that attract and keep teachers are often the same conditions that, independent of their impact on teachers, are positively associated with student learning (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004). The good news here is that the payoff for improving the teaching and learning conditions in our schools, provided that we know what these conditions are, has a double benefit for students. These schools will have access to teachers who want to stay, and their environment will be more conducive to learning.

## PRIOR RESEARCH ON TEACHER TURNOVER AND RETENTION

Before reporting the findings from our survey of leavers and stayers in California, it is useful to look at the findings from prior research on teacher retention. Differences in findings suggest that the current context for retention in California may be different than what it was for other researchers (both in California and nationally), or that the methodology employed in our study has revealed something new about the forces that affect teachers' employment decisions.

In 2003, the researcher Richard Ingersoll (2003) conducted a study of teacher retention using a large data set from a national staffing survey of teachers. He found that one-third of the teachers who left the profession or transferred to another school did so because they were dissatisfied with some aspect of their work. (The remaining two-thirds either retired or left for personal reasons.) Among those who were dissatisfied, poor compensation was cited by 54%, poor administrative support by 43%, student discipline problems by 23%, and lack of faculty influence and autonomy by 17%. Ingersoll found it notable that large class sizes, classroom interruptions, and lack of planning time were not significant factors.

In another study of teacher turnover in Texas, researchers found that differences in student characteristics such as race and achievement are more significant predictors of turnover than salary (Hanushek *et al.*, 2004). The authors speculate that teachers may be more likely to leave lower performing, high-minority schools not because of the students themselves, but because of the teaching and learning conditions encountered in the schools these students attend. In their conclusion they suggest that "…if schools with high minority concentrations have more disciplinary problems, rigid bureaucracies, poor leadership, high student turnover, and general safety concerns, improvement in such directions may reduce teacher turnover."

A 2002 study of teachers in California found that pressures associated with increased accountability were cited most frequently by teachers who had quit teaching. Salary considerations for this group ranked well below other conditions such as increased paperwork, student attitudes, and lack of parent support. Interestingly though, among teachers they surveyed who said they are thinking about quitting, salary considerations ranked highest among all factors (Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

In a more recent study of teachers in California, researchers examined the relationship between student, teacher, and school characteristics and problems associated with teacher turnover (Loeb *et al.*, 2005). Similar to the findings from the Texas study described above, student characteristics such as race, class, and classroom performance were found to be strong predictors of teacher turnover. Loeb and her colleagues also were able to identify several specific features of the school working environment (e.g., class size and physical conditions of the school) and levels of compensation that serve as strong predictors of whether teachers will stay or leave a school. They conclude that improvements in both salary and teaching and learning conditions are necessary to increase teacher retention rates.

In a qualitative analysis of comments from current and former teachers throughout the country, researchers in 2003 identified barriers to retention that included low pay, lack of administrative support, unsupportive colleagues, and lack of resources. Factors that contributed to retention included support for professional development, supportive colleagues, and opportunities for advancements (AARP Knowledge Management *et al.*, 2003). Although this study did not identify which factors mattered most, it provides further empirical support for the not-so-surprising theory that compensation and teaching and learning conditions play a role in teachers' decisions about the schools they work in and whether they decide to leave the profession altogether.

As already noted in the introduction to this report, a recent study of teacher retention in California conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California examined the attrition rates of new teachers and the extent to which these rates were affected by two state policy initiatives: compensation and a structured support program called BTSA (Reed *et al.*, 2006). But the study does not tell us anything about experienced teachers and the factors that might be causing them to leave.

## WHAT PRIOR RESEARCH DOES, AND DOES NOT, TELL US

In short, there is much that policy makers and education officials in California can learn from the existing research on teacher supply and demand, and from the research on teacher turnover. We know that teacher shortages are a significant contributor to poor student achievement and that the shortages are due in large part to high teacher turnover rates. Based on findings from national studies, there is good reason to believe that actions designed to increase teacher retention rates in California's schools will have to focus on both better compensation and improved teaching and learning conditions. The findings point in helpful and often intuitive directions, but they do not say what, precisely,

needs to be done in order to solve the problem of teacher retention. They suggest that pay and benefits are part of the equation, but they do not indicate how much pay is necessary or the conditions under which it should be paid. Prior research tells us that teaching conditions such as administrative support, time for planning, and adequate resources make a difference to many teachers, but we learn little from this literature about which ones matter most or in what sequence, or how teachers' opinions on these particular requirements vary between those working in different types of schools.

The findings from our study provide a more granular view of the dynamics affecting teacher retention in California. They also point to some surprising and important conclusions that vary somewhat from those reached by other researchers. These conclusions, we hope, combine common sense and knowledge from prior research with the possibilities that emerge from considering the counterintuitive and the new. As such, our findings have enabled us to construct a sound and detailed set of retention strategies that will be especially useful to state and local decision-makers as they wrestle with the teacher shortage in California's public schools. Most important, we believe our teacher retention strategies will, if implemented, have a profound and positive effect on student performance in all types of school settings in California: high-poverty as well as low-poverty, high schools as well as middle and elementary schools, special education as well as general education. That is the possible dream.

# CHAPTER 2 | ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were obtained from current and former California public school teachers who participated in an online, web-based survey that we created. Additional qualitative data were collected through follow-up telephone interviews and email correspondence.

An initial set of survey invitations was mailed to a group we refer to in this study as Sample A: 6,000 K-12 public school teachers from California who were randomly selected from a database maintained by the State Teachers Retirement System. Half of the teachers in this sample had left the classroom within the last 5 years. The other half was employed in a public school. Eight-hundred and seventy-five teachers from Sample A responded to the online survey.[13]

In order to obtain data from a sufficient number of special education teachers, a second set of invitations was mailed to 8,000 randomly selected K-12 public school teachers who, when the survey was administered, held a credential authorizing them to teach special education students. One-thousand and fifty-two teachers from this sample, which we refer to as Sample B, responded to the online survey.[14]

Because the survey responses from Samples A and B came from two distinct populations, they were tabulated and analyzed separately. Unless noted otherwise, the discussion of findings that follows is based on data from Sample A, the sample most closely representing a cross-section of teachers of California's public school teachers.

Appendix A contains a more detailed description of the study methodology, including an explanation of how the survey instrument was designed and how the follow-up interviews and email correspondence were conducted.

Demographic data about the respondents from each sample can be found in Appendix D.

## DEFINITIONS

**Dissatisfied Leavers:** Survey participants who met the following criteria:

- They were no longer teaching in a California K-12 public school, OR
- They planned to leave teaching altogether within the next two years, OR
- They planned to transfer away from their current school within the next two years, AND
- Their reasons for leaving or transferring were related, at least in part, to dissatisfaction with school conditions or compensation and not just to personal circumstances (such as retirement, health problems, or maternity leave).

**Stayers:** Survey participants who were working full time or part-time in a California K-12 public classroom and who had no plans to leave their current school within the next two years. Substitute teachers and those who were not working in a classroom environment (e.g., administrators) were not included in this group.

**High-poverty schools:** Schools in which 80% or more of the students qualify for the federal free- or reduced-lunch program.

**Low-poverty schools:** Schools in which fewer than 80% of the students qualify for the federal free- or reduced-lunch program.

[13] Of the 6,000 letters that were mailed to this group of teachers, 1,447 were returned as undeliverable. Eight-hundred and seventy-five responses to the survey represents a response rate of 19%.

[14] Of the 8,000 letters that were mailed to this group of teachers, 248 were returned as undeliverable. One-thousand and fifty-two responses to the survey represents a response rate of 13.6%.

**Sample A respondents:** Survey respondents from a random sample of K-12 public school teachers in California who either were currently teaching or who had left teaching within the past 5 years.

**Sample B respondents:** Survey respondents from a random sample of K-12 public school teachers in California who, at the time the survey was administered, held a valid teaching credential authorizing them to teach special education in California.

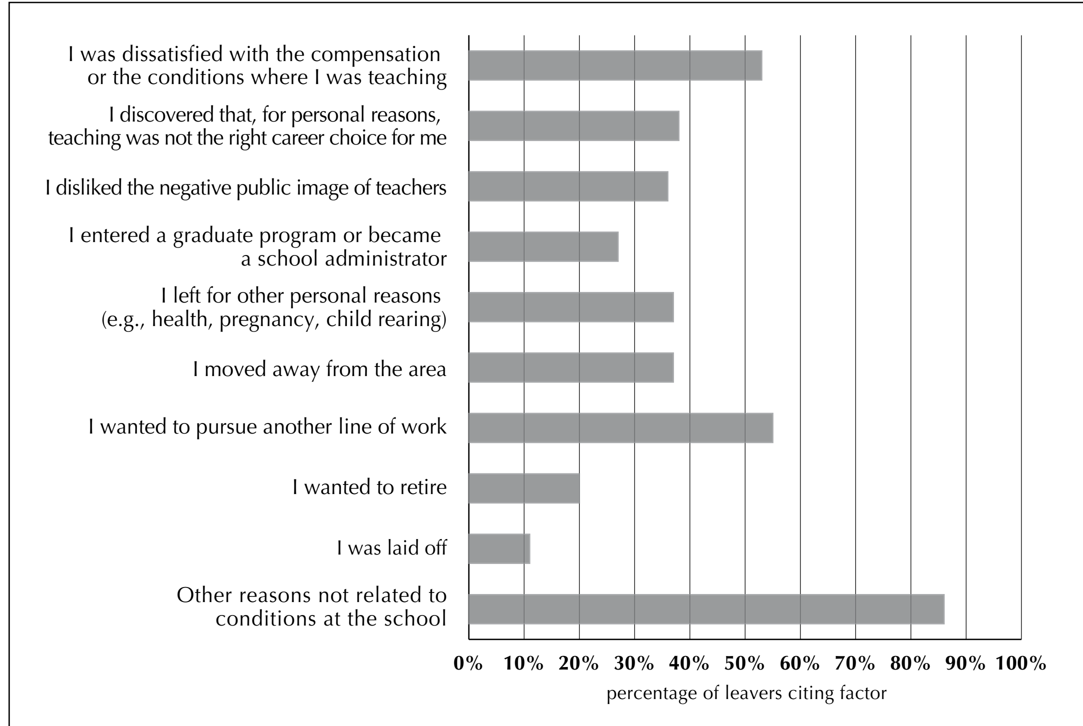
**Active special education teachers:** Survey participants who, at the time the survey was administered, held a valid teaching credential authorizing them to teach special education in California and who were teaching in a setting that required the use of this credential.

**Inactive special education teachers:** Survey participants who, at the time the survey was administered, held a valid teaching credential authorizing them to teach special education in California and who were teaching in a general education setting that did *not* require the use of this credential.

## WHY TEACHERS LEAVE THE PROFESSION OR LEAVE THEIR SCHOOL

Not everyone who leaves teaching or moves to another school does so because he or she is unhappy with work in education. Some retire, some become administrators, and some leave for a variety of other personal reasons. As shown in Exhibit 1 below, about half (53%) of those who left or plan to leave indicated that dissatisfaction with compensation or school conditions contributed "somewhat" or "a lot" to their decision to leave. For the remaining portion (47%), their reasons for leaving were not tied to dissatisfaction with money or the school environment.

**Exhibit 1: General reasons cited by those who have left or plan to leave the profession (or current school)**




Notes:

- These respondents indicated that the condition affected their decision to leave either "a lot" or "somewhat" (as opposed to "not at all").
- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C.

In a national study of teachers working 10 years ago, Richard Ingersoll found that dissatisfaction played a role in only 29% of the cases where teachers either left teaching or moved to another school (2003). The considerably higher percentage of dissatisfied leavers (53%) found in this study may suggest that dissatisfaction among public school teachers has risen in the past 10 years or perhaps that dissatisfaction among California's teachers is higher than it is among teachers elsewhere in the United States.[15] In any case, the comparably high percentage of dissatisfied leavers found in our study is cause for concern for California's policy makers and educators.

The good news among these troubling findings is that at least half of teachers are leaving because of problems that are correctable. If it were the case that 90% of the leavers cited retirement or other personal factors as reasons for leaving, then little could be done to reduce teacher turnover rates. But if policy makers and educators take corrective actions that address the specific causes of dissatisfaction (which we have outlined in Chapter 5), then it may be possible to make significant reductions in California's teacher turnover rate.

## UNPACKING THE MAIN SOURCES OF TEACHER DISSATISFACTION

When survey participants identified themselves as dissatisfied leavers, we presented them with 34 different conditions and asked them to indicate how much each one contributed to their decision to leave. Exhibit 2 on the next page lists each of the 34 conditions and the percentage of dissatisfied leavers who cited each of them. (Later in this chapter we include graphs to show how leavers' responses to these conditions varied depending on the types of schools in which they worked.)

[15] The difference between Ingersoll's and this study's findings related to dissatisfaction could be due to differences in the way items were presented to respondents in the respective survey instruments.

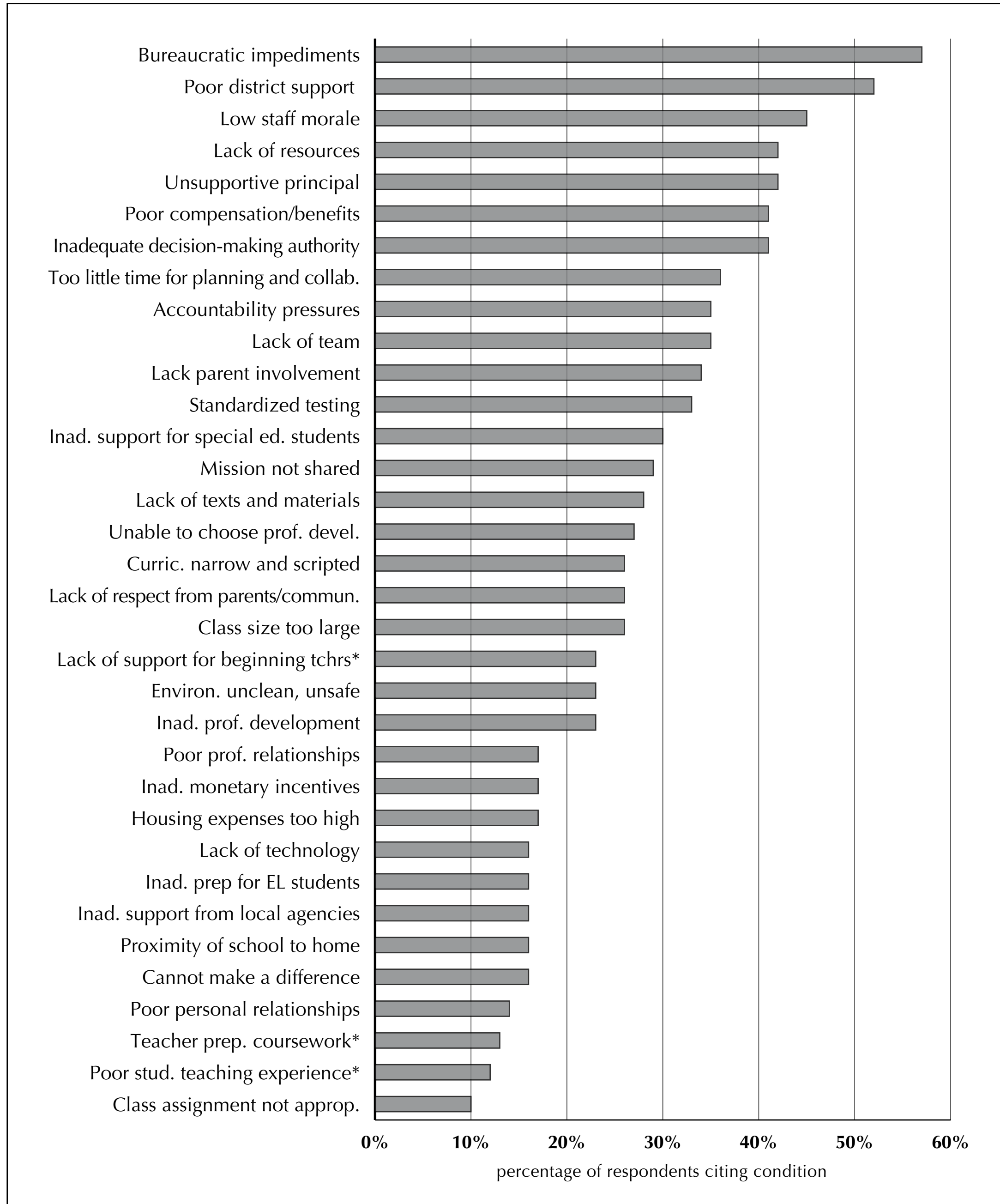
A primary finding of this retention study is that when dissatisfied leavers were asked about the specific reasons for leaving, many of their responses point to **inadequate system supports** at the school or district level. In other words, many teachers who leave the profession do so because their most basic needs for doing their job are unmet. In fact, five of the ten most frequently identified reasons for leaving fall under this *range* of problems: bureaucratic impediments (57%), poor district support (52%), lack of resources (42%), unsupportive principal (42%), and too little time for planning (36%) (see Exhibit 2).

### Bureaucratic impediments and a whole range of inadequate support systems

In follow-up interviews,[16] dissatisfied leavers offered more in-depth descriptions of the ways that basic support systems failed them. The factor cited most frequently by leavers, **bureaucratic impediments**, reflects a host of difficulties that are symptomatic of increasingly centralized, top-down authority structures and a heightened, and burdensome, call for accountability. Among those citing bureaucratic impediments as a reason for leaving (57%), several common themes emerged including the problems of excessive paperwork, an abundance of unnecessary meetings, frequent classroom interruptions, and the sense that standardized testing had become counter-productive. One teacher who left teaching after eight years reported that she was frustrated by her school's *"many silly procedures,"* including a lengthy request process for routine maintenance such as repairing an overhead light in a classroom. This teacher summed up her frustration by saying, *"There is no rhyme or reason for many things we are asked to do. There was a lot of wasted time and energy."* Another teacher described the constant interruptions in her classroom, including state assessments, make-up tests, referrals, and

[16] We use the phrase "follow-up interviews" to describe both the telephone conversations as well as the email correspondence we conducted with selected respondents. See Appendix A for a more detailed explanation of the methodology that was used to collect data for this study.

**Exhibit 2: Specific conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers**




Notes:

- These respondents indicated that the condition affected their decision to leave either "a lot" or "somewhat" (as opposed to "not at all").
- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C.
- The descriptions of conditions in this graph are abbreviated. The actual descriptions of conditions that appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B.
- Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The percentages shown for this condition in the graph represent the portion of this subset of respondents who responded "a lot" or "somewhat."

announcements on the intercom. This 30-year veteran acknowledged, *"I feel as if I teach between the interruptions."* Another 30-year veteran commented, *"The endless testing and bookkeeping is incredibly overwhelming even for someone like me with years of experience. I cannot imagine what a young, new teacher must feel as he or she plows through it all. Never does the administration say 'good job' or 'you're on the right track'; it's just an expectation that we get higher test scores. No wonder new teachers drop out."*

The narratives from leavers point to other ways in which school bureaucracies negatively affect their work. The issue was not just the activities that interrupted their teaching, though they were distracting; the central issue was the very constraints on what they taught and how they taught it. Nearly 1 in 4 dissatisfied leavers said an **overly scripted and narrow curriculum** contributed to their decision to leave. **The lack of local decision-making authority**, an apparent consequence of increased bureaucracy and a factor we discuss in more detail below, was cited by many dissatisfied leavers. After teaching for 14 years, one teacher said this about her career and the prospects of returning to it: *"I left teaching because of the testing and mandated curriculum. As long as there are straightjackets imposed by state and federal programs, I'm not going back."*

Over half of leavers (52%) cited **poor administrative support from district** as a reason for leaving. It is notable that the second most common reason for leaving does not originate at the school site, but from another location and organizational structure, the district office. In follow-up interviews, teachers' responses again pointed to a variety of problems that led to their basic needs being unmet, ranging from slow or dysfunctional district processes to inadequate professional development. For example, one middle school teacher in his third year of teaching said, *"The Payroll department didn't address my needs. I was in the wrong pay scale for a whole year and Payroll dragged its feet. They needed to fix things and be more prompt."* A beginning teacher experienced this problem in her district: *"There were no new-hire training sessions at the district level. It would have been nice to have met with district administrators to find out how the district was run, who we could contact if we needed help with anything, and who were the district's 'master' teachers."*

Some teachers' comments also pointed to more complex district problems, such as the lack of a shared vision between their district and their school. For example, one elementary teacher who had been teaching in a school for just one year complained about the lack of district support for goals generated at the school level: *"The principal was placing a lot of energy on the school environment such as graffiti clean up and community gardens. The district did not support her efforts. They just wanted more structure and wanted our classes to be quieter. We need a broader definition for what it means to be a successful principal and teacher. Good principals support us when we're trying to make a difference. When my principal left, I left."*

Teachers who cited a **lack of resources** as a reason for leaving (42%) described a variety of problems: not having a sufficient number of up-to-date textbooks, inadequate access to educational technology, run-down facilities, and a lack of basic supplies. Many teachers expressed resentment over having to spend their own money to purchase essential learning materials. One beginning teacher at a high-poverty elementary school was justifiably indignant: *"Every three or so weeks we run out of paper. If you expect teachers to copy, you should provide them with paper. I've bought cases of paper, which I've shared with teachers. We started the school year without enough textbooks. If we're expected to follow the curriculum, we need a book for every student."* In some cases the problem was not so much the lack of resources but rather getting access to them. One teacher said, *"I feel like I'm reinventing the wheel—there are resources, it's just accessing them that's a problem, whether it's a curriculum room, or time talking to another teacher who can guide me. There's no support and I don't know where to look for these resources."* In other cases, teachers' materials were inappropriate

to the task at hand. As one teacher revealed, *"The textbooks don't match the resource books. I tried to get a new resource book and they said no. I have a brand new resource book that cost over 300 dollars, but it doesn't match so it's useless."*

Just over one-third of dissatisfied leavers (36%) pointed to the absence of another valuable resource: **time for planning and collaboration**. One beginning teacher who planned to leave the high-poverty school she had worked in explained, *"Because I am just starting out, I'm learning new strategies every year. I need more time to talk with my fellow teachers about curriculum, lesson plans, and classroom management."* Another teacher said that too little time is devoted to professional development, a problem he believed originated at the district level: *"The biggest problem is that the district office doesn't have any money for in-services during classroom time. The principal does the in-service training during the staff meetings. If the district office expects students to learn, teachers need time to understand the materials and what's being taught. We can't teach all day long and then go to meetings after school when we're tired. I remember once when our principal told us that she was going to give a five-day in-service in two hours. If the district wants teachers to learn new curriculum and new techniques, they need to put the teachers in a professional learning environment: pay for subs and provide the professional time for dialogue during our regular hours—not after school or on the weekend."*

Poor school leadership plays a significant role in teachers' deciding to leave. Forty-two percent of dissatisfied leavers said they left (or planned to leave) because of an **unsupportive/ineffective principal**. Some of the problems cited by these teachers included difficulty gaining access to their principal, poor management practices (e.g., long meetings with no clear agenda), and a principal's tendency to side unfairly with parents or district office personnel when disputes arose. Several teachers also reported that their principals were poor instructional leaders or that they were unable to maintain a positive climate or healthy relationships among staff. One teacher who left after teaching for 17 years explained: *"She talks a good game, but she doesn't direct. 'You figure it out' is the clear implication. She's never helped us with instructional strategies. The district has turned over curriculum development to the principal, but she hasn't been in the classroom for 30 years…and then she was a special education teacher."*

Another veteran teacher said, *"I've taught for 26 years and twice in my career I've thought about leaving teaching. In both cases it was because of a poor administrator. I am leaving now because we have a very serious problem with gangs, knives, and violence. It isn't safe, but our new principal just refuses to admit there is a problem. This was once a wonderful school with great parents, but because the principal doesn't maintain a safe environment, the school has become chaotic and families are beginning to leave. Our staff, which has been together for a long time, used to get along great but now people are screaming and yelling at one another. The principal simply allows it to go on."*

Teachers want their principals to be effective instructional leaders, but they also want them to create safe and clean teaching environments where staff members are able to participate in decision-making (as noted below when we describe other sources of dissatisfaction), where teachers have adequate time to collaborate and plan, and where unnecessary bureaucratic demands are minimized. Admittedly, this is a tall order for principals, and it may be that these expectations from teachers are difficult to meet, given the accountability pressures principals are under today to meet the student performance targets established by the state and federal government. Precisely because school leadership plays such a central role in teacher retention and because the solutions are complex, we devote considerable attention to this topic in Chapter 5, *Recommendations for Retaining California's Teachers: From Understanding to Action.*

### Other sources of dissatisfaction

Our findings point to other sources of dissatisfaction among teachers who leave the classroom. Forty-one percent of dissatisfied leavers cited **poor compensation** as a factor in their

decision to leave. Several teachers said they simply could not make ends meet with the salary they were earning. One 10-year veteran complained, *"In my case, the main reason for leaving was that I couldn't afford to live in the area where I was teaching—not with the cost of day care I was paying for my own children."* Another leaver who had just begun her career in teaching said, *"It's just not enough money for the work I put into school. I'm barely making it. I didn't fight hard to get through college to be in this financial situation. I'm going to go into medicine because it pays better."*

Interestingly however, 60% of the stayers in our survey cited **compensation** as a factor that led them to stay. There are several reasons why leavers might view compensation so differently than stayers. It might be because of differences in what teachers in different districts earn, or differences that exist in the cost of living in various regions of the state. After analyzing the survey data from leavers and stayers along with data on regional variations in compensation, we came to the conclusion that many leavers and stayers perceive their compensation differently because of the differences in their teaching and learning conditions. We focus more attention on the role that compensation plays in teachers' decisions to leave or stay in Chapter 4.

Another reason for leaving that was cited by many leavers (41%) was **inadequate decision-making authority** over curriculum, instructional strategies, school governance, and budgeting. (Conversely, the opportunity to be involved in decision-making was the single most frequently cited factor by stayers.) One leaver offered a cautionary example of the impact on student learning when teachers are not involved in the decisions that affect their teaching: *"The administrators in our district decided how funds should be spent, and they purchased a basal reading program without consulting teachers. There was little teacher buy in. As it turned out, there was no alignment with other curriculum materials, and because of this we found significant gaps in student learning throughout the year."*

When asked to describe what decisions teachers should be involved in, another teacher said, *"Curriculum, assessment, governance, school climate…everything. That doesn't mean teachers should necessarily make final decisions, but giving teachers some input gives them the feeling that their skills and knowledge are valued and that they have some ownership of their jobs."* A middle school teacher described the problem this way: *"We are told to prepare our students for testing using state academic standards as a guide. I have kids who are supposed to learn 7th-grade history, but they read at a second-grade level. We are required to use curriculum materials that don't address these students' needs. We should be allowed to figure how to deal with these kinds of problems but this was not supported."*

Thirty-five percent of the dissatisfied leavers in our survey also pointed to **accountability pressures**. Thirty-three percent also cited a related condition, **standardized testing**, which, as we noted above, some teachers viewed as a type of bureaucratic impediment. After working for 8 years as an elementary teacher, this leaver explained, *"Since the beginning of the year, I had logged over 50 hours of testing for students, and I've had kids crying because of it. It's been very difficult to watch because this amount of testing is not meeting their needs."*

One of the most frequently cited reasons for leaving was **low morale among staff**, a problem experienced by 45% of our dissatisfied leavers. This factor appears to be a symptom that develops when teachers encounter the range of problems described above. For example, one beginning teacher thought ineffective leadership and a lack of resources caused the low morale she witnessed at her school. *"Administrators should be exceptional leaders, not just paper-pushers. When our principal did not treat teachers like professionals, many of us felt inadequate. Morale was a problem because we had little support for our teaching and not enough learning materials for our classrooms."*

For another leaver, morale among teachers was poor because they had too little time to

meet changing expectations. *"We're handed new curriculum materials every year; we get two hours of exposure to them, and then are expected to incorporate them into our teaching. We can't implement new curriculum effectively without more time to plan."* Another teacher explained how accountability pressures affected the morale at his school: *"I think it's inevitable that good people will suffer to some degree under the current political climate. A teacher is a hard-working person who prides him or herself on having done everything that is expected, and then there's the rest of the world saying, 'You're an idiot.' This is why morale is so low: teachers are being told that you have to teach to these standards, but in some cases the standards cannot be met. You're being asked to do something that is absolutely unrealistic."*

When asked how low morale affected her school, a teacher who left a high-poverty elementary school revealed, *"There was a lot of negativity—people talking about others unprofessionally. No one was volunteering for committees; no one wanted to go above and beyond the regular job, which had a huge negative impact. Because a lot of committees went unfilled, the principal forced teachers to serve on a minimum of three committees. But people just did the minimum amount of work."*

Since low morale is very likely a symptom of the problems teachers face in their work environments, the way to improve morale must focus on improving the conditions in schools that cause teachers to become dispirited about their work. In other words, educators will have little success improving teacher morale simply through pep talks and positive attitudes among administrators. Though it is true, as we say earlier in this report, that strengthening collegial supports can begin with something that costs nothing—a changed mindset—it's this commitment to a positive attitude *combined with the commitment to make very specific changes* that effectively improves a school's work environment. One without the other is insufficient.

## Differences between dissatisfied leavers of high-poverty and low-poverty schools

The data from our survey reveal a key reason why high-poverty schools are more difficult to staff than low-poverty schools. Thirty-three of the 35 unfavorable teaching and learning conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers were cited *more frequently* among those leaving high-poverty schools compared to those teachers leaving low-poverty schools.

The discrepancies in responses from leavers of high- and low-poverty schools were particularly great in some areas. Teacher preparation was cited very infrequently by dissatisfied leavers (13%), but among the small number of beginning teachers in our sample who left high-poverty schools, teacher preparation was more problematic. Twenty-eight percent of this sub-group said their **credential program coursework** did not prepare them be successful in their school, compared to just 2% in low-poverty schools.[17] Similarly, 21% of those who left high-poverty schools said their **student teaching experience** did not prepare them to be successful, compared to 4% of those who left low-poverty schools.[18]

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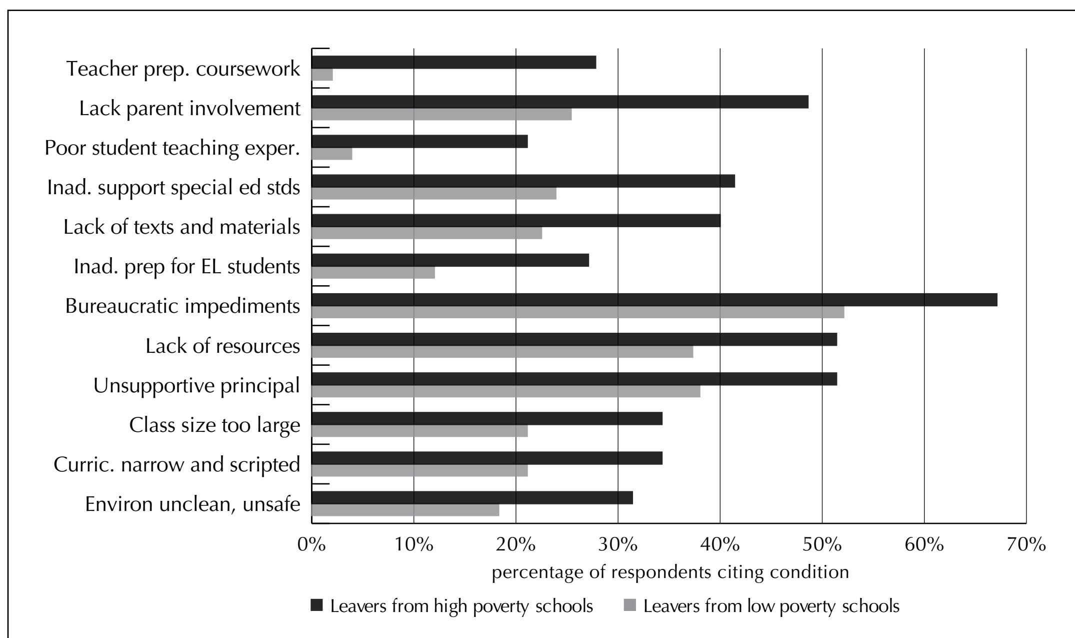
[17] The greatest disparities in responses between leavers of high- and low-poverty schools were found with items related to teacher preparation and student teaching. However, because these two items were presented only to respondents in their first 4 years of teaching, the total number of respondents to these items was considerably smaller than for other items. These results should be interpreted with caution. Sample sizes and additional discussion about the reliability of the data can be found in Appendix A.

[18] These differences in response about teacher preparation might be explained by the different pathways teachers in each of these groups took in obtaining a credential. Thirty-three percent of the respondents who left high-poverty schools had completed their pre-service fieldwork requirement with an emergency permit. In contrast, 20% of the respondents who left low-poverty schools had completed their pre-service fieldwork requirement with an emergency permit. An emergency permit allows non-credentialed individuals to earn a salary as a classroom teacher, but these teachers-in-training receive no classroom supervision. When pre-service teachers complete their fieldwork requirement through a traditional pathway, they receive classroom support from a university or district supervisor.

The responses among leavers of high- and low-poverty schools also differed on parent involvement. Almost half (49%) of dissatisfied leavers from high-poverty schools said the **lack of parent involvement** affected their decision to leave (see Exhibit 3). In comparison, just 25% of leavers from low-poverty schools cited this factor. This is consistent with research showing that wealthier parents are, for a multitude of reasons, more likely to be involved in school activities than poorer ones (Desimone, 1999). What has up to now been less well known is the impact of parent involvement on teacher retention.

Several other areas of difference between the responses of dissatisfied leavers from high- and low-poverty schools point to gaps in basic support systems. Leavers from high-poverty schools were more likely to cite a **lack of texts and materials**, **bureaucratic impediments**, a **lack of resources** for achieving the school's educational mission, an **unsupportive principal**, or an **unclean or unsafe environment**. These findings reinforce much of what was alleged in the recent lawsuit, *Williams v. State of California.* In settling that case in 2004, the state agreed to improve school working conditions and to ensure that all students in the schools named in *Williams* have access to qualified teachers. It is too early to tell how much of a difference these efforts have made and will make, but progress in this area will undoubtedly require the implementation of effective retention strategies. Another working condition, **unmanageable class size**, was cited 62% more frequently by leavers from high-poverty schools. This difference cannot be attributed to differences in class sizes because class sizes do not vary significantly between low- and high-poverty schools (California Department of Education (CDE) Educational Demographics Unit, 2005a).

**Exhibit 3: Differences in responses from leavers working in high- and low-poverty schools**




Notes:

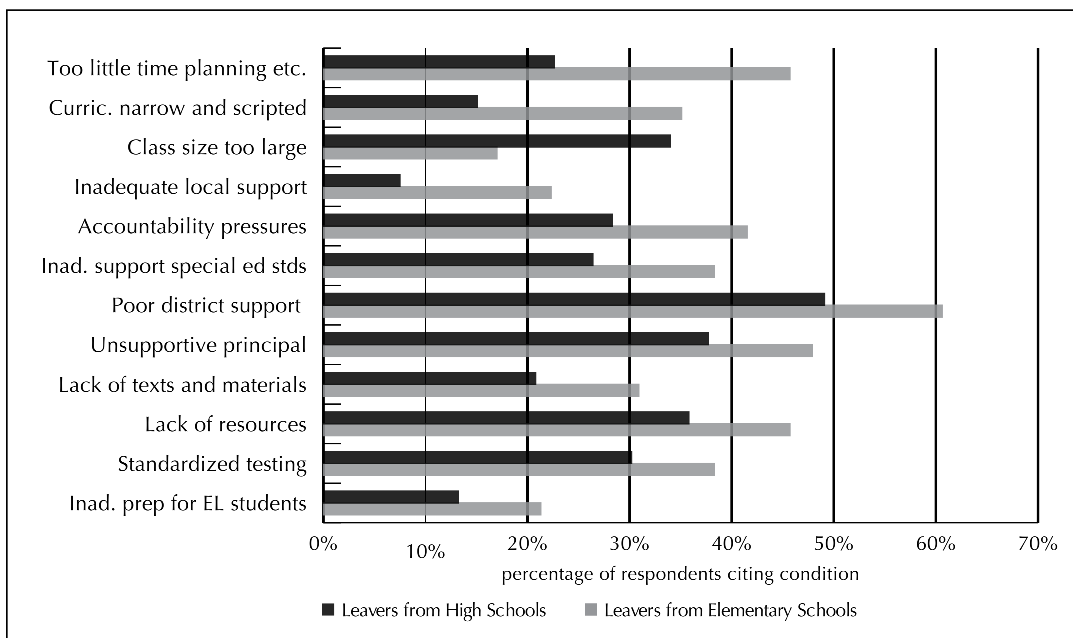
- The twelve conditions included in this graph are those that resulted in the greatest disparities in responses between the two groups of respondents: teachers in low-poverty schools and teachers in high-poverty schools.
- These respondents indicated that the condition affected their decision to leave either "a lot" or "somewhat" (as opposed to "not at all").
- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C.
- The descriptions of conditions in this graph are abbreviated. The actual descriptions of conditions that appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B.

The difference in response between leavers of high- and low-poverty schools relative to class size is most likely because teachers in high-poverty schools are teaching students who come to school less prepared and further behind grade level than their more well-to-do counterparts. Class sizes for them are unmanageable because they do not have sufficient time to provide the individualized attention that so many of these students require.

In terms of special needs students, dissatisfied leavers of high-poverty schools were more likely than leavers of low-poverty schools to cite **inadequate support for special needs students** as a reason for leaving (41% versus 24%). One possible explanation is that high-poverty schools have an especially difficult time retaining qualified and experienced special education teachers (Esch *et al.*, 2004). Inadequate numbers of qualified special education teachers in certain schools could very well account for the inadequate support for special needs students cited by general education teachers working in these schools. If true, improving the retention rates of special education teachers might also lead indirectly to increased retention rates of general education teachers, at the same time that this outcome has direct benefits for special education students.

Leavers from high-poverty schools were also 2.3 times more likely to leave because their **school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners.** This is not surprising since there are much higher concentrations of English learners in high-poverty schools. These findings suggest that inadequate support for English learners is taking a heavy toll on teachers and is contributing significantly to teacher attrition, especially in high-poverty schools.

**Exhibit 4: Differences in responses from leavers working in different school levels**




Notes:

- The twelve conditions included in this graph are those that resulted in the greatest disparities in responses between the two groups of respondents: elementary school teachers and high school teachers.
- These respondents indicated that the condition affected their decision to leave either “a lot” or “somewhat” (as opposed to “not at all”).
- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C.
- The descriptions of conditions in this graph are abbreviated. The actual descriptions of conditions that appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B.

### Differences between dissatisfied leavers of elementary and high schools

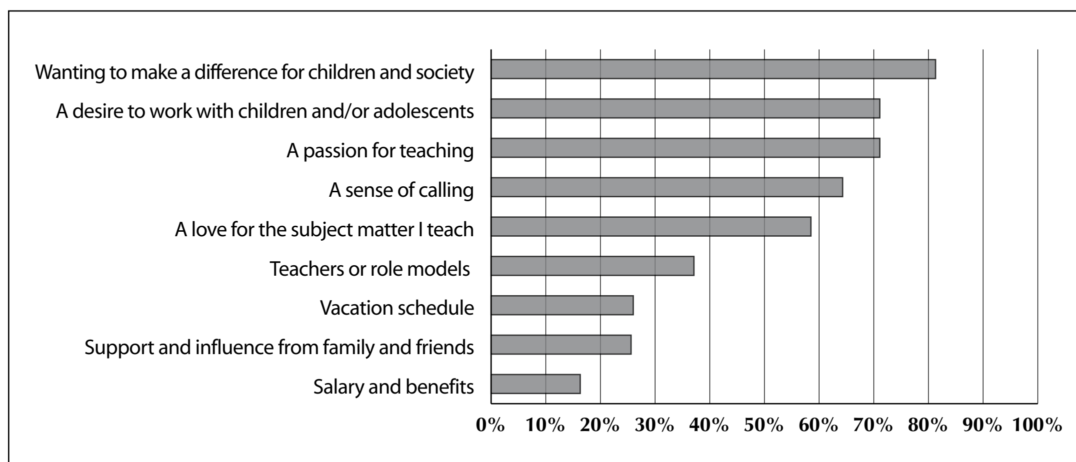
Teaching and learning conditions as a whole were cited more frequently by dissatisfied leavers from elementary schools than by those working in high schools. In some cases, where the differences in frequency were significant, the reasons were predictable. For example, most high school teachers have preparation periods built into their daily schedules, which is why, we think, elementary teachers pointed approximately twice as often to the **lack of time for planning and collaboration** (see Exhibit 4). Elementary leavers were also more likely to report that an **overly narrow or scripted curriculum** contributed to their decision to leave. Again, this was not surprising given increased accountability pressure to raise reading and math scores at the elementary level and the recent, widespread adoption of elementary-level curriculum materials that prescribe in great detail how teachers should present the content to their students. Explanations of other differences in response from elementary and high school, such as **poor district support or lack of resources**, are less clear.

One problematic condition that high school teachers pointed to more frequently than elementary teachers was **unmanageable class sizes**. This difference is due, at least in part, to funding that has been provided by the state since 1998 for class size reductions in grades K – 3.

### Reasons for leaving versus reasons for entering

We asked all teachers who participated in our survey to indicate why they became teachers. Their responses would enable us to determine whether teachers leave the profession when they are unable to obtain what they were seeking when they entered the profession. When asked why they decided to become teachers, 81% pointed to their **wanting to make a difference for children and society** (see Exhibit 5). A large proportion of teachers also cited their **desire to work with children or adolescents** (71%), their **passion for teaching** (71%), and **a sense of calling into the teaching profession** (64%). These top-ranking reasons indicate that teachers generally choose the profession because they have a personal attraction to the work, its perceived internal rewards, and the positive impact their work would have on others. Only 26% said **vacation schedules** was a positive factor and even fewer, 16%, said they entered the profession because of the **salary and benefits**.

**Exhibit 5: Reasons for becoming a teacher**




Note: All survey respondents were asked to indicate which of the factors listed in the graph above represented a "Very Important" reason for becoming a teacher. Respondents were allowed to select multiple factors.

Given the high percentage of teachers who said they entered the profession to make a difference in the lives of children and for society in general, we predicted that a large portion of dissatisfied leavers would have cited the *inability* to make a difference as a reason for leaving. Surprisingly, only 16% of them responded that way. The fact that so few dissatisfied leavers believed they *weren't* making a difference suggests to us that other factors cited frequently by leavers (e.g., bureaucratic impediments, inadequate system supports, accountability pressures) overshadowed whatever satisfaction leavers might have derived from the sense that they were making a difference for children and society.

### Summary: Why Teachers Leave

Nearly one-half of the teachers in our study who left California's public school classrooms did so for personal reasons, not because they were dissatisfied with the work environment or compensation. Some retired, some decided to pursue work in other fields, and some left because of health issues (including pregnancy). The other half left teaching because they were dissatisfied with some aspect of their work or because of inadequate compensation. The factor most commonly cited as a source of dissatisfaction was bureaucratic impediments—too much paperwork, unnecessary meetings, and unreasonable constraints on their teaching. Inadequate system supports such as a lack of time for planning and poor administrative support from the district office are also significant contributors to teacher dissatisfaction and teacher attrition. Finally, dissatisfied leavers cite poor compensation, inadequate decision-making authority, accountability pressures, and poor professional relationships at the school. Low morale, one of the most commonly cited reasons for leaving, is most likely a symptom of poor teaching and learning conditions that leavers encountered in their schools, rather than a root cause itself.

### Willingness of leavers to return to the classroom

When teachers leave the profession, little has been done statewide or locally to lure them back to the classroom. The assumption among policy makers and local education officials seems to be that these teachers have left the profession for good. We decided to test the validity of this assumption by asking leavers whether, and under what conditions, they would consider coming back to teaching.

The reason for posing the question in the first place was that if enough leavers were found to be willing to return, there are good reasons to try to get as many of the good ones back to the classroom as possible. This would translate to the state's not having to spend as much as it currently does to prepare new replacements, and the schools would have access to a new pool of credentialed teachers whose expertise had already been established through classroom experience and professional development.

As shown in Exhibit 6 on the following page, our findings indicate that there may be a sizable number of leavers willing to return to the classroom. In most cases, getting these teachers back would not require increases in salary but, rather, improvements in the conditions in schools that caused them to leave in the first place.

To test whether this approach might represent a fruitful staffing strategy, we asked leavers whether they would consider returning to the classroom if they were able to earn more than they earned when they left (we did not specify an amount). We also asked them to tell us whether improved teaching and learning conditions (with and without an increase in compensation) would bring them back to the classroom. Their responses reveal that increased compensation would be sufficient for some, but far more would come back if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions.

What is especially interesting about these findings is that the prospect of additional compensation adds virtually nothing to the value proposition

**Exhibit 6: Willingness of leavers to return to the classroom**

| Question presented to leavers: **Would you consider returning as a classroom teacher?** **Response options:** | |
|---|---|
| No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or the conditions in such a school. | 22% |
| Yes, if many of the conditions described in the survey were corrected, even if I were not offered a higher salary. | 28% |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions described in the survey were corrected. | 17% |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, and if many of the conditions described in the survey were corrected. | 29% |
| Yes, under other circumstances. | 21% |

*Note: If respondents did not select the first option they were allowed to select one or more of the remaining options.*

for prospective returnees, provided that teaching and learning conditions are improved. There is no doubt, however, that compensation is an essential consideration for some leavers. As one elementary teacher explained, *"I left because both my spouse and I are teachers and we could not afford to pay daycare for our three children, a mortgage (on a small townhouse) and other reasonable expenses on two teachers' salaries. I make more money now working in a licensed home daycare facility. I miss teaching in the public school setting and would return if higher salary or part-time positions were more readily available."* Others made the comparison of teaching to jobs in other sectors, and found little reason to return without better pay. Another leaver told us, *"I feel that it is not worth going back to teaching—and having to deal with all of the pressures and bureaucratic flip-flopping—when I could get a job in the corporate world and make twice the money, with less emotional investment."*

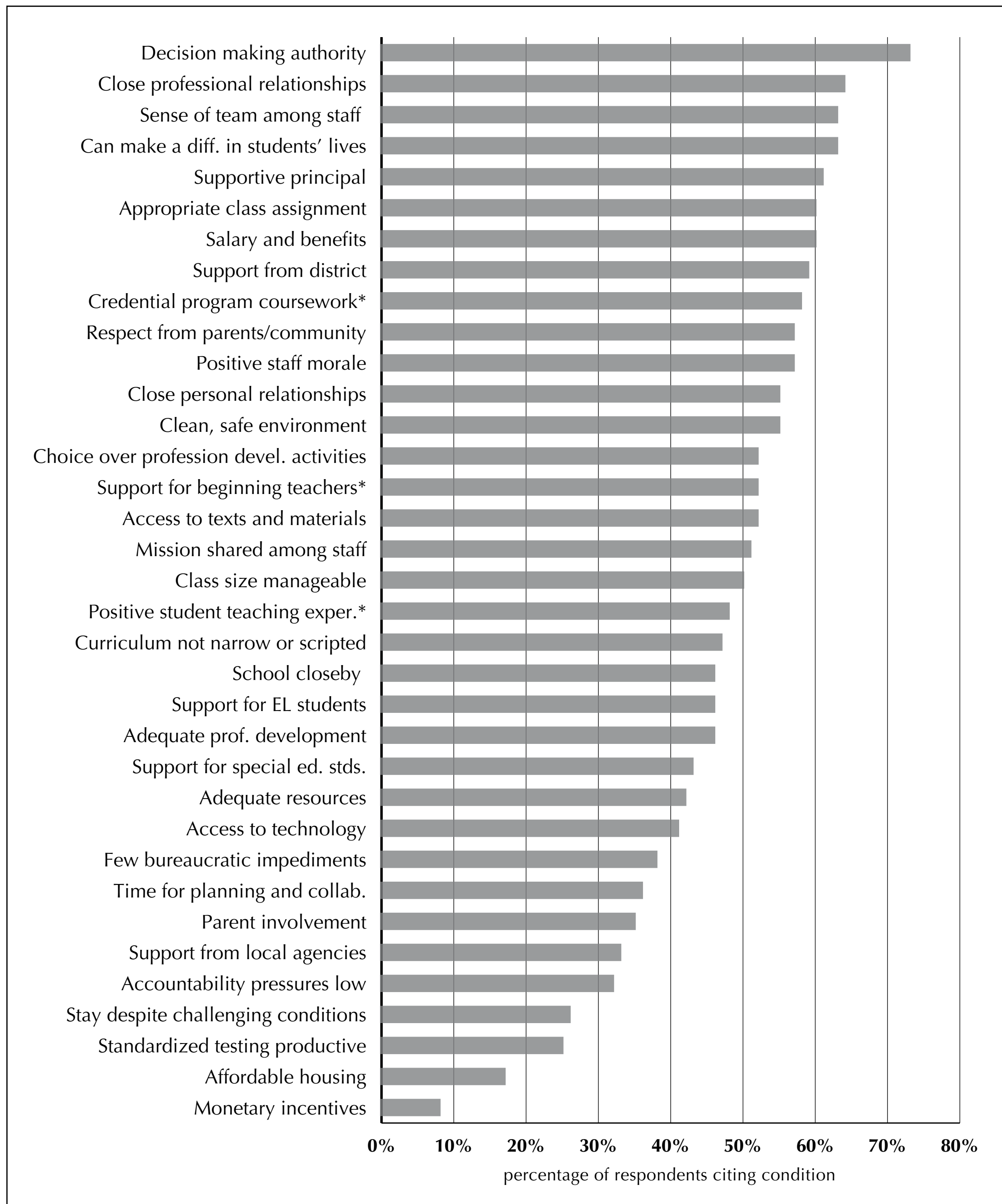
Another elementary school teacher who left teaching after just 3 years would require a more satisfying professional environment and, intriguingly, more respect for parents. *"I would want to work in a school where my special skills and talents are appreciated; where fellow teachers are positive, empathetic, and supportive; where the principal values the needs of parents just as much as those of the teachers because she/he understands that a healthy positive learning environment for students requires mutual respect and collaboration among all relevant parties. I would still be teaching today if these conditions existed when I taught."*

Not surprisingly, getting teachers to come back to the classroom would require state and local education officials to address the conditions that caused them to leave the profession. What did surprise and encourage us was the large percentage of teachers who have left the profession but who are still willing to come back to teaching if schools were more satisfying places to work. By following the recommendations we make in Chapter 5, *Recommendations for Retaining California's Teachers: From Understanding to Action,* we believe schools will not only retain more teachers, but many well-prepared, experienced teachers may decide to return to the classroom.

## THE REASONS TEACHERS REMAIN IN THE PROFESSION AND IN THEIR SCHOOL

As we reported on page 25 in Exhibit 5, teachers say they enter the profession because they want to make a difference in students' lives. Many teachers remain in the profession because they have been able to achieve this goal. But many of them discover other aspects of teaching that they come to prize just as much. When asked to indicate the aspects of their work that contributed most to remaining in the classroom, stayers frequently pointed to the broad spectrum of human dimensions of their work. As shown in Exhibit 7 on page 28, **close professional relationships**, **a sense of team among staff**, a

**Exhibit 7: Specific conditions cited by stayers**




Notes:

- These respondents indicated that the condition affected their decision to stay either "a lot" or "somewhat" (as opposed to "not at all").
- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C.
- The descriptions of conditions in this graph are abbreviated. The actual descriptions of conditions that appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B.
- Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The percentages shown for this condition in the graph represent the portion of this subset of respondents who responded "a lot" or "somewhat."

**supportive principal**, **respect from parents and the community**, and **close personal relationships** all ranked among the factors cited most frequently by stayers.

Predictably, stayers also pointed to the presence of other more tangible conditions like **support from the district office**, **access to textbooks and learning materials**, **clean and safe facilities**, and **manageable class sizes**—the kinds of supports that drove teachers out of the classroom when they were absent.

There were also some perplexing surprises in the data from stayers. The factor that most said kept them in the classroom was the **decision-making authority** they were given at their school. While the absence of authority was problematic to many leavers, we did not expect this condition to rank first among the 35 that we presented to stayers. We were also surprised that **compensation** ranked high among stayers' responses, especially when it was cited so frequently by leavers as a reason for leaving the classroom.

In the following section we analyze stayer responses to key conditions in order to gain a clearer understanding of what keeps teachers in the classroom. This, combined with our analysis of the factors that cause teachers to leave the classroom, serve as the basis for the recommendations we make in Chapter 5.

### Decision-making authority

Among stayers, the most frequently cited reason for staying was "the administration and teaching staff are given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting." Seventy-three percent of stayers reported that this contributed *somewhat* or *a lot* to their decision to stay in the profession or in their school.

In follow-up interviews, teachers elaborated on the type of decision-making authority that mattered most to them. Teachers spoke frequently and enthusiastically about having a say over the content of curriculum and over the specific instructional strategies they were allowed to use. A 19-year veteran teacher working in a high-poverty elementary school described the professional authority she and her colleagues enjoy at school and why it is important to them. *"We're given choice over the state-adopted textbooks that we are supposed to use, and then we're given freedom over the way we use those books in our classroom. And as long as there is continuity from grade level to grade level in terms of skills, we are given some freedom in terms of how we teach the curriculum. For me, this freedom allows flexibility in my classroom, like being able to pace my presentation of the curriculum and not having to be on such-and-such a page on day 38. Kids don't fit into nice little molds like that."*

A beginning elementary teacher offered this observation about the benefits of having a principal who invited teachers to share in the decision-making process. *"Our principal wanted to buy a reading program for the computer lab. She came to us and wanted to know if we wanted it and how we would use it. We did want to use it and helped her write a proposal to get the funds we needed. This kind of involvement gives you control over what you do. If you have buy-in into what you're teaching, you're going to do a much better job than if you're just told what you need to be teaching."*

Several stayers also mentioned the benefit of having access to discretionary funds for their classroom and having a say in how money is spent at their school. The beginning elementary teacher quoted just above added: ***"****If our school has money, we are always asked at the end of the year what we need. Our principal found some extra money for us this year and, just last month, each grade level was given $1,300 to improve Language Arts instruction. That money was given to us to use as we saw fit."*

In the previous section, we reported that the factor most frequently cited as a reason for leaving was "bureaucratic impediments." Interestingly, however, only 38% of the stayers said the *lack* of bureaucratic impediments was a reason for staying. This occurred, we believe, because stayers

would be less inclined to point to the absence of negative conditions than to the presence of positive conditions. In this case, when stayers cite decision-making authority as a plus, it was most probably an indication of the lack of bureaucratic impediments in their schools.

### Strong collegial support systems

After decision-making authority, stayers pointed most frequently to the quality of their collegial relationships as a reason to continue teaching. Sixty-four percent of stayers said they stayed because of **close professional relationships** with other members of the staff. Nearly the same percentage (63%) responded to a similar condition we presented to them: **the staff works effectively as a team and relationships generally are strong**. Also among the top factors cited by stayers were **respect from parents and the community** (57%), **positive morale among staff** (57%), and **close personal relationships** (55%).

In follow-up interviews, teachers elaborated on the importance of these relationships to their effectiveness as teachers and to their job satisfaction. When asked what they thought contributed to positive relationships and a sense of team, they spoke about ample opportunities for collaboration, common instructional goals, mutual respect between novice and experienced teachers, and social connections among staff away from school. A teacher who had worked for 26 years at the same high-poverty middle school explained why the relationships with her colleagues are so sustaining. *"I have a group of teachers that I meet and have coffee with before school every morning. That sets us up for the day. I see several of the teachers that I work with on vacation. Those kinds of relationships are extraordinarily important to me. When we get new teachers at our school, we all make a huge effort to engage with them and to include them in what we do. We see each other as people we can learn from, and we work hard to value what everybody has to say, even brand-new teachers."*

Another 24-year veteran teaching special education at a high school remarked, *"We meet once or twice a week, sometimes daily, to work together. There is a lot of collaboration. It's part of the system that was in place before I got here and it's the reason I came to this school. I worked at a junior high that didn't have close professional relationships and that was because we all had different prep times. It's often just logistics that makes the difference."*

An elementary teacher explained how a sense of team was developed at his school. *"Finding people who 'fit the chemistry' was really important. We've always selected staff members who have that ability to work collaboratively. We're willing to take risks together, to problem-solve together, and to keep our egos out of the process of working toward a common goal."*

Some teachers described what their administrators did to foster strong working relationships among staff. An elementary teacher working at a high-poverty school offered this observation: *"Administrators who promote healthy interaction in their schools are themselves friendly. They go out of their way to greet the teachers. I can spot a troubled school in seconds by observing the interaction between the administration and the teachers. In these schools, there is the 'us versus them' attitude and I know that the teachers are looking for their next job."* An elementary teacher at a school whose students were predominantly Latino described how positive relationships were developed with parents and the local community: *"Our current principal places a lot of emphasis on community outreach and parent support. For our Open House this year our principal went to one of the big farming companies and got several hundred dollars of food donated, so we provided a free dinner to the parents who came to Open House. We had a huge turnout, much larger than we had gotten in previous years."*

These findings point to the important role that collegial support systems play in retaining teachers. Even more important than professional development, manageable class sizes, and access to technology, most teachers say the quality of their professional relationships, positive morale,

a sense of team, and a shared mission matter more. As many stayers indicate, administrators are instrumental in maintaining these collegial support systems. In Chapter 5 we explain what can be done to help local school leaders, especially principals, perform this role more effectively.

### Effective system supports

After decision-making authority and a variety of collegial supports, stayers pointed frequently to having essential system supports including:

- A supportive principal (61%)
- Being assigned to classes that are appropriate, given the teacher's credential and subject matter preparation (60%)
- Administrative support from the district office (59%)
- A clean, safe environment (55%)
- Adequate access to texts and materials (52%)
- Manageable class sizes (50%)

In follow-up interviews, teachers explained why administrative supports were so important in their decisions to stay. In discussing site-level administrators, teachers said they valued principals who backed their instructional decisions and allowed them to try new things, who supported them in conflicts with parents, and who gave them time to work together. One veteran high school teacher described the characteristics of principals that are most important to him: *"Number one, someone who is a straight shooter. I can work with someone who disagrees with me, but not one who is dishonest. Number two, someone who tries to clear the deck so we're not saddled with the bureaucratic chores. I want the principal to deal with these things so we can worry about teaching. Also, a principal must not be afraid to give some control to his staff. Right now, we have input and the principal accepts our advice, sometimes even when he disagrees. He tries to empower us and give the staff ownership. I'm able to do what I'm paid to do."*

One middle school teacher explained why it is so important to be given an appropriate class assignment, another indication of a properly functioning administrative system: *"You have to feel comfortable in what your knowledge is and what you're able to teach students. If you're not comfortable with the content, then you don't have the desire or drive to do a good job. You're just trying to keep up and keep going. It's survival mode, not teacher mode."*

An elementary teacher working at a high-poverty elementary school spoke about the importance of, but also the challenge in, creating a safe and clean learning environment. *"Safety matters a lot at our school. Staff and students all feel secure, but providing a safe and conducive learning environment in a downtown urban school is not always an easy task. I think everyone at the school working together to reinforce responsible behavior and pride in our school is the main factor in achieving a good learning environment. Everyone cares and looks out for each other. Our positive behavior policy fosters mutual respect between students and teachers."*

### Other notable reasons for staying

In addition to the system and collegial supports discussed above, stayers pointed frequently to several other positive aspects of their work. Sixty-three percent said their decisions were affected, in part, because they **could make an important difference in their students' lives**. As already noted in Exhibit 5, this factor was the single most important one cited by all teachers as a reason for entering the profession. In a follow-up interview, one 26-year veteran elementary teacher offered a stirring account of what teaching is or can be: *"Teachers who have truly enjoyed their professions and enjoy working with kids realize that they are making a lasting impression on the kids, the parents, and the community. I feel I have an enormous opportunity to provide these kids with an education, to make them productive citizens, and to help them think. I feel that I help make the world a better place."*

One particularly surprising finding from stayers was that 60% of them cited **adequate salary and benefits** as a reason for staying. As noted earlier, what makes this surprising is that 41% of the dissatisfied leavers cited *inadequate* salary and benefits as a reason for leaving. Why, we wondered, do leavers rank compensation high on their list of reasons for leaving, while stayers rank compensation high as a reason for staying? Possible reasons are that compensation among leavers is lower than it is for stayers, or because the cost of living in regions where leavers work is higher than it is where stayers work. Or perhaps the differences can be explained by perceptions about compensation that vary depending upon differences in teaching and learning conditions. This important question will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, many stayers (in this case, those who had taught for less than 5 years) reported that their teacher preparation experiences helped them be successful in their school and were a reason for staying in their job. Specifically, 58% said their **teacher preparation coursework** was a positive factor and 48% said their **positive student teaching experiences** also played a role. As shown earlier in Exhibit 2, dissatisfied leavers seldom cited teacher preparation as a factor that contributed to their decision to leave (although leavers from high-poverty schools were more likely to do so). These findings suggest that existing teacher preparation programs are contributing more to teacher retention than to teacher attrition.

### Differences between stayers at different types of schools

Unlike the noteworthy differences in responses we discovered among dissatisfied leavers working in different types of schools, we found no such differences when we disaggregated the data gathered from stayers. Whether the stayers were working in high schools or elementary schools, whether they worked in high-poverty schools or low-poverty schools, all pointed surprisingly uniformly to the importance of decision-making authority and to strong human and system supports as positive retention factors.

### Summary: Why Stayers Stay

Most teachers stay in the classroom because they are given ample decision-making authority over their teaching, the way educational money is spent, and how their school operates. Teachers are also more inclined to stay when their schools have a strong system of collegial supports that include satisfying relationships with co-workers and a sense of team among the staff as a whole. Teachers believe these positive human dynamics are fostered through collaboration, shared values, and a culture of respect and trust that is nurtured by capable site-level leadership.

Stayers also point to strong system supports such as clean and safe facilities and adequate resources, but stayers do not cite these factors as frequently as they do decision-making authority and collegial supports. We suspect this is because many take for granted the presence of basic system supports in their schools and are disinclined to cite them as factors that cause them to stay.

Stayers also point frequently to other factors. Many stay because they believe they are making an important difference in students' lives. Many stay because of the compensation they are receiving. Among teachers who are just beginning their careers, many stay because they believe their teacher preparation programs helped them be successful in their job.

### Willingness of teachers working in low-poverty schools to transfer to high-poverty schools

In the previous section that focused on leavers, we examined the likelihood that some might return to the classroom if certain conditions were met. We discovered that there may be a pool of experienced, credentialed teachers who would come back if teaching and learning conditions were sufficiently attractive. Recruiting former teachers back to the classroom would allow

the state to spend less money on new teacher preparation and would increase the overall pool of well-qualified teachers from which local educators could select the best candidates for their schools.

Getting stayers to transfer from low-poverty schools to high-poverty schools, especially if it is *within* their current school districts, could have similar benefits. The state would not have to invest in as many new teachers because, in most cases, the vacancies created at the low-poverty schools could be filled by tapping into the large applicant pools to which most of these easier-to-staff schools have access. In addition, teachers who have already proven themselves to be desirable as well as hirable could transfer without having to take a cut in salary.

This intra-district transfer strategy would not work, of course, if all schools in a district were hard to staff. Luring teachers away from schools that have difficulty staffing their schools would amount to "robbing Peter to pay Paul." There would be no net staffing gains because while some schools would benefit by the addition of well-qualified teachers, others would suffer the consequences of attrition of well-qualified teachers and increased teacher turnover. Getting teachers to transfer in from *outside* the district holds more promise when all or most of the schools in a district are difficult-to-staff. But this approach will work only if governing boards and union representatives in these districts are willing to allow experienced teachers from outside the district to transfer in without taking a cut in salary. Currently, many districts have policies that limit the years of service experienced teachers are able to bring with them. Because teacher salaries are almost always tied to experience, a twenty-year veteran willing to work at a hard-to-staff school in a new district would earn significantly less money if the district she transferred into only recognized, say, 10 years of service. District officials and local union representatives should consider making exceptions to these agreements for schools that are difficult to staff.

There is one additional issue that must be addressed when considering the merits of this approach. We may not be able to assume that teachers who have been working in low-poverty schools would be effective right away with the students they would be teaching in high-poverty schools. Teachers who lacked experience or training with the challenges presented in these schools (e.g., English learners, students several years behind grade level, cultural tensions, low parent involvement) would undoubtedly require professional development. Unless the district were willing and able to provide it, many teachers would struggle and some would undoubtedly leave if they discovered they were not making a difference for their students.

*So how willing are teachers in easier-to-staff, low-poverty schools to transfer to harder-to-staff, high-poverty schools?* To answer this question, we asked stayers in low-poverty schools whether and under what circumstances they would be willing to transfer to a high-poverty school. Exhibit 8, on page 34, shows the response options we offered them and the percentage of stayers who selected each option.

The data indicate that most teachers in low-poverty schools (61%) were not willing to transfer to high-poverty schools, regardless of the incentives offered to them. Our follow-up interviews provide insights into their reasons for staying put. Several said they were happy with their current school and community. One 29-year veteran elementary teacher described a nearly optimal situation: *"I enjoy the school staff I work with. Everyone tells us we are very lucky because we all work together and help each other. I've heard that is not true of many staffs. I also enjoy the size of my school. My partner teacher and I work well together and have done so for 14 years. If I were unhappy with my partner teacher and didn't have a choice of partnering with someone I liked, I would probably transfer schools, but we work well together to provide our sixth-grade students with a well-rounded education."*

**Exhibit 8: Willingness of stayers to transfer to high-poverty schools**

| Question presented to stayers working in low-poverty schools: **Would you consider transferring to a high-poverty school? Response options:** | |
|---|---|
| No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or the working conditions in such a school. | 61% |
| Yes, if many of the conditions described in the survey were in place, even if I were not offered a higher salary. | 8% |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions described in the survey were in place. | 10% |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, and if many of the conditions described in the survey were in place. | 20% |
| Yes, under other circumstances. | 6% |

Note: If respondents did not select the first of these options, they were allowed to select one or more of the remaining four options.

When asked to explain why she would not want to transfer, a middle school teacher with 14 years of experience explained, *"I used to commute hours to and from the high-poverty school where I taught. I would not want to transfer to a high-poverty school because I truly enjoy being part of the community where my students are in the grocery store or where I see their parents at the movies. Nearly half of my inner city students were bused into my middle school and I had no connection to the school or the community. What a difference here."*

Among those who would consider transferring, a greater percentage (20%) would want an increase in salary *and* improvements to teaching and learning conditions. Only 8% said they would consider transferring for better working conditions, and only 10% said they would consider transferring with a sufficiently high salary.

When asked in a follow-up interview about transferring to a school in need, many teachers' responses mentioned both salary and working conditions. For example for this middle school teacher, when asked about transferring to a school in need, compensation and working conditions would have to be improved. She told us, *"I would consider going to a school that is 'in need,' but I would have to see the situation. If I felt I could really help I would consider a transfer. I would like many of the working conditions in the survey to be in place, and if there were a higher salary then I wouldn't mind if some of these conditions were lacking."*

Others focused solely on teaching and learning conditions. An elementary special education teacher talked about the need for adequate support to help students and parents in high-poverty areas: *"I would consider going if parents were required to support and help their children; if there were smaller class sizes for all grades; if there were mentor teachers to help with class management skills; if there were enforceable discipline policies for unruly students; and if I could be assured the amount of paperwork and the number of meetings would be manageable."*

Given the reluctance many teachers feel about transferring into high-poverty schools, even with better salaries and improved teaching and learning conditions, it may not be wise for state and local educators to spend time and money promoting teacher transfers. Still, if educators focus their attention on improving teaching and learning conditions in hard-to-staff schools, we would expect that a certain number of teachers in easier-to-staff schools would naturally gravitate to them.

# CHAPTER 3 | SURVEY RESULTS FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

The often discouraging classroom conditions that cause general education teachers to leave the job also affect special education teachers. In addition, special educators face a unique set of challenges such as their complex and sometimes testy working relationships with general education teachers, additional paperwork and meeting requirements, and a work environment that some special education teachers liken to a legal minefield because of the litigious stance of many parents of special needs students. On top of all this, working all day with special education students (and often their parents) can be taxing in the extreme. Together, these various factors conspire to push many special education teachers out of the job they trained for. The problem of staffing in special education is so chronic and severe that it requires special attention in this report and warrants particular attention from policy makers and local education officials.

### In 2004-05:

- 14% of all special education teachers were not certified to teach special education.
- 49% of first-year special education teachers were not certified to teach special education.
- 22% of special education teachers working in high-poverty schools were not certified to teach special education. In low-poverty schools, the figure was just 6% (Esch *et al.*, 2005).

Teacher turnover occurs when teachers leave their classrooms or when they leave the profession altogether. With special education teachers, much turnover is caused when certified special education teachers opt to work in general education classrooms. We refer to that group of teachers as "inactive special education teachers" and that group comprises over one-third of all special education teachers surveyed. In other words, **65% of special education credential holders in our study were found to be working as special education teachers; the remaining 35% had moved to general education classrooms.** Given the scarcity of special educators, it is reasonable to assume that most special education credential holders not currently teaching in special education classrooms have transferred *voluntarily* to general education classrooms. While these teachers are retained in the teacher workforce, their movement out of special education contributes significantly to the shortage of special education teachers. These individuals have considerable professional training and, in many cases, valuable classroom experience that cannot be replaced easily or inexpensively.

Our study on teacher retention in California included a separate survey of a large sample of special education credential holders (see Appendix A for details). In this chapter we discuss the particular reasons teachers report for leaving special education, as well as the reasons some teachers elect to stay in special education. Follow-up interviews with leavers and stayers offered a particularly rich set of comments and reflections, and they are liberally shared in this section of the report. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of data collected about the conditions that might entice inactive special education teachers back to special education.

## WHY SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS LEAVE THE CLASSROOM

### Inadequate System Supports

Though it might seem that special and general education teachers face very different challenges in the classroom, the data from our survey indicate that special education teachers leave the classroom for many of the same reasons that general educators do. Like general education

leavers, special education leavers are most likely to point to a lack of system supports. As shown in Exhibit 9, 70% of special education leavers indicated that **bureaucratic impediments** contributed to their decision to leave. Sixty-one percent pointed to a lack of reliable and appropriate administrative support from their district office. Fifty-four percent said they left because they did not have enough **time for collaboration with colleagues**, and 52% said their school did not have **adequate resources** to achieve its mission. Forty-seven percent said their **principal was not a supportive and effective leader**.

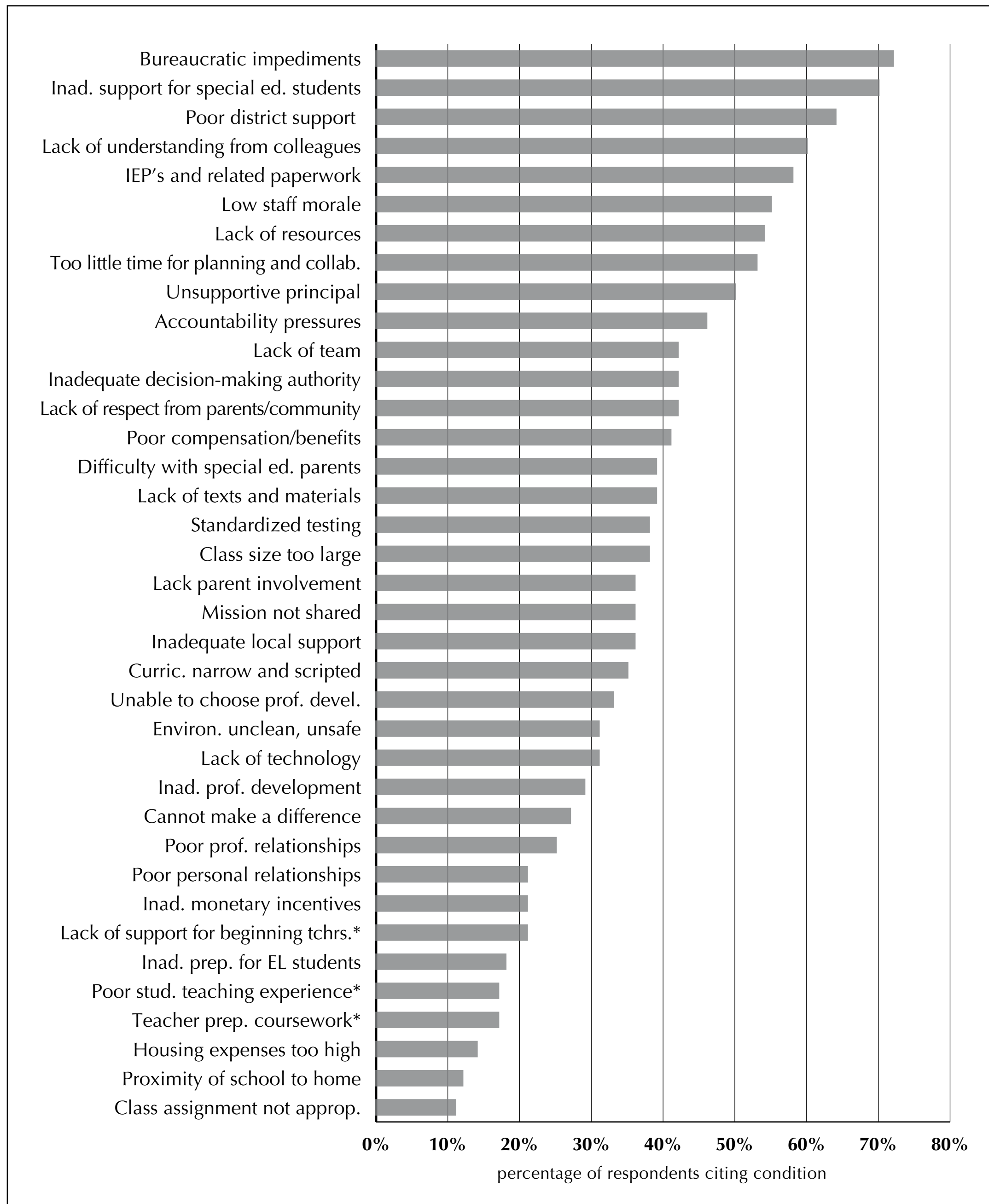
### Reasons for leaving that are unique to special education

Special education leavers reported some additional reasons for leaving that differed from those given by general education leavers. For example, the second most frequently cited reason for leaving was **inadequate support for special education students**, cited by 66% of all special education leavers. Sixty percent cited a **lack of understanding from colleagues about special education challenges**. Fifty-eight percent said they left, in part, because handling **Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and related paperwork** was overly complex and laborious. In follow-up interviews, special educators who left were asked probing questions about their reasons for leaving that are specific to special education; their responses were at times painfully eye-opening but helpful in understanding why there has been such an exodus of special education teachers from our special education classrooms.

When asked specifically about the **lack of adequate support for special needs students**, special educators described how their students and programs are lacking in adequate materials, physical space, and attention from administrators. One special education teacher working at a high-poverty elementary school said, *"For 9 of the 12 years I have worked as Resource Specialist, I had no materials of consequence, and I shared one room with FOUR others, all teaching at the same time to groups as large as 10. The noise, chaos, and confusion were hard to bear. In desperation, I found an empty room and I moved every month to a new room for one and a half years."* Another high school special education teacher with eight years of experience spoke about the lack of administrative attention and commitment to special education. *"Many administrators resent special education departments, students, and teachers because of the exceptional needs and demands exceptional learners put on a school: smaller classes, educational assistants (paraprofessionals/aides), low test scores, greater need for specialized curriculum materials, shorter useful life for educational materials, and the need for more consumable curriculum supplies. Special education students have higher absenteeism and higher percentages of exceptional students requiring discipline interventions. Administrative participation in IEPs is viewed as a waste of the administration's resources."*

This quote points to another frequently cited problem: the **lack of understanding from general education colleagues** about special education challenges. When asked about this factor in follow-up interviews, special educators spoke about feeling isolated from colleagues and frequently at odds with them. One 14-year veteran special education teacher explained, *"The lack of understanding from general education colleagues translated into being more isolated, left out, excluded and devalued. Oftentimes special education teachers at my school aren't viewed as 'real teachers.' We are always needing to fight battles—advocating for the children to be included, getting basic teaching supplies/resources for them, or getting the teachers to understand and follow IEPs. Often administrators expect special education teachers to do more with less and fail to realize how many meetings we attend without understanding how stressful this can be, and how long it takes to complete paperwork. For me the biggest issue is being devalued as a teacher and forgotten. Trying to get my kids included in that environment is hard and, frankly, draining. It is the children that have kept me in the classroom this long."*

**Exhibit 9: Specific conditions cited by active special education leavers**




Notes:

- These respondents indicated that the condition affected their decision to leave either "a lot" or "somewhat" (as opposed to "not at all").
- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C. The descriptions of conditions in this graph are abbreviated. The actual descriptions of conditions that appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B.
- Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The percentages shown for this condition in the graph represent the portion of this subset of respondents who responded "a lot" or "somewhat."

Another special education elementary school teacher described her difficult experience this way: *"I have had general ed teachers upset at me so many times. Most teachers view these students as a problem. They do not want to deal with them and certainly don't want to help students progress academically. Most teachers will take every opportunity to leave special education kids out of most of their daily routine. It is a struggle just to remind the teachers to include them. I gave up awhile back worrying that those teachers were not going to like me when I asked them to take the students to work with computers or involve them in plays, etc. But then there is that occasional teacher who involves them in everything. I try to communicate with all teachers what the children need and how it is not that much more work than with their other students. As a final resort, I pull out the IEP and remind them of their legal responsibilities. I have done that but don't like it a bit."*

Another prominent reason for leaving is that **IEPs and related paperwork are too complex and laborious**. Only four factors were cited more frequently by special education leavers. When interviewers asked about this factor, special education leavers pointed to the frequent changes to IEPs, the lack of standardization across the state, and the lack of time or assistance for completing them. A teacher with 7 years of experience in special education complained, *"IEPs seem to change every year, and it is frustrating that IEP forms are not standardized throughout the state. It takes extra time to find information on IEPs for students coming from other districts. I spend at least 4 hours testing every child, 2 hours writing every IEP, at least 5 hours testing for triennial reviews, and another 2-3 hours writing the report for EVERY child. Most of this takes place on weekends or after school gets out. We do not have release time to work on these reports. The paperwork overload is out of control. Teachers are burning out and something needs to give. I love teaching. I really do not love the paperwork."*

Special education leavers cited **difficulty dealing with parents of special education students** less frequently (39%) than some of the other reasons, but their comments on the subject offer insight into this unique challenge and, some report, the nearly constant threat of legal action faced by special education teachers. One special education high school teacher told us, *"The last 6 years, I have had many, many difficult situations with parents of special education students. Here are just a few: 1. Failure to return paper work, phone calls, attend meetings, monitor their child. 2. Blaming the teacher for the student's poor attendance, poor academic performance, poor attitude, etc. 3. Accusing the teacher of prejudice against blacks or Mexicans and telling us that this prejudice is the reason their child is failing. 4. Parents who developed a 46-page IEP with the Program Specialist because they were a 'high maintenance family' (i.e., possible law suit). All of this is very, very discouraging."*

### Other notable reasons for leaving

In our follow-up interviews, many leavers pointed to concerns about **inadequate compensation**, particularly because many special educators spent more money getting their credentials to teach in a special education classroom than their general education peers spent on their credentials. One elementary school teacher described the added financial burden this way: *"It costs more to obtain the special education credential and it costs thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of additional class work to clear your special education credential. I've spent five years trying to pay off my original student loans for my special education credential, only to have to spend an additional $6 - 7,000 to clear my credential and obtain the Level II credential that is now required. General education teachers don't have to pay for and take these additional classes, and the two classes they need to clear their credentials are provided by the county or district for free."* Another 31-year veteran pointed out that special educators generally have more meetings to attend and paperwork to complete than general educators, as well as more training required, yet are paid the same. She said, *"I have a general education credential, a Learning Handicapped credential, a Severely Handicapped credential, a Master's in special education and my Administrator's certificate, and after thirty-one years, I make $62,000. That is obscene."* In the survey, 39% of special education leavers

felt their salary and/or benefits were inadequate. (Compensation as a variable affecting retention of all teachers is discussed in Chapter 4.)

Some special education leavers also mentioned **accountability pressures** as a key reason for leaving. An elementary teacher who recently moved to California pointed to problems that she believed were unique to this state. *"Right now the administration where I work is terrible. I have been told that if I am unable to bring my special education students' standardized test scores up to a certain number, I will be labeled an ineffective teacher, even though some of the students are not cognitively capable of making this kind of growth. I have worked in other districts in a different state, and their policies on education and the conditions of their schools set the students up for success, rather than forcing the teachers to fight a losing battle the way that California does. After this year, I no longer want to be a part of the California school system and hope to find other means of employment until I move out of state."*

## WHY SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS REMAIN "ACTIVE" SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Our study revealed compelling and often troubling reasons that caused nearly one-third of special education teachers to leave those classrooms and migrate to general education. Fortunately, nearly two-thirds remain in special education and these teachers express similar reasons for staying as those who have chosen to remain in general education classrooms.

### Strong collegial support systems

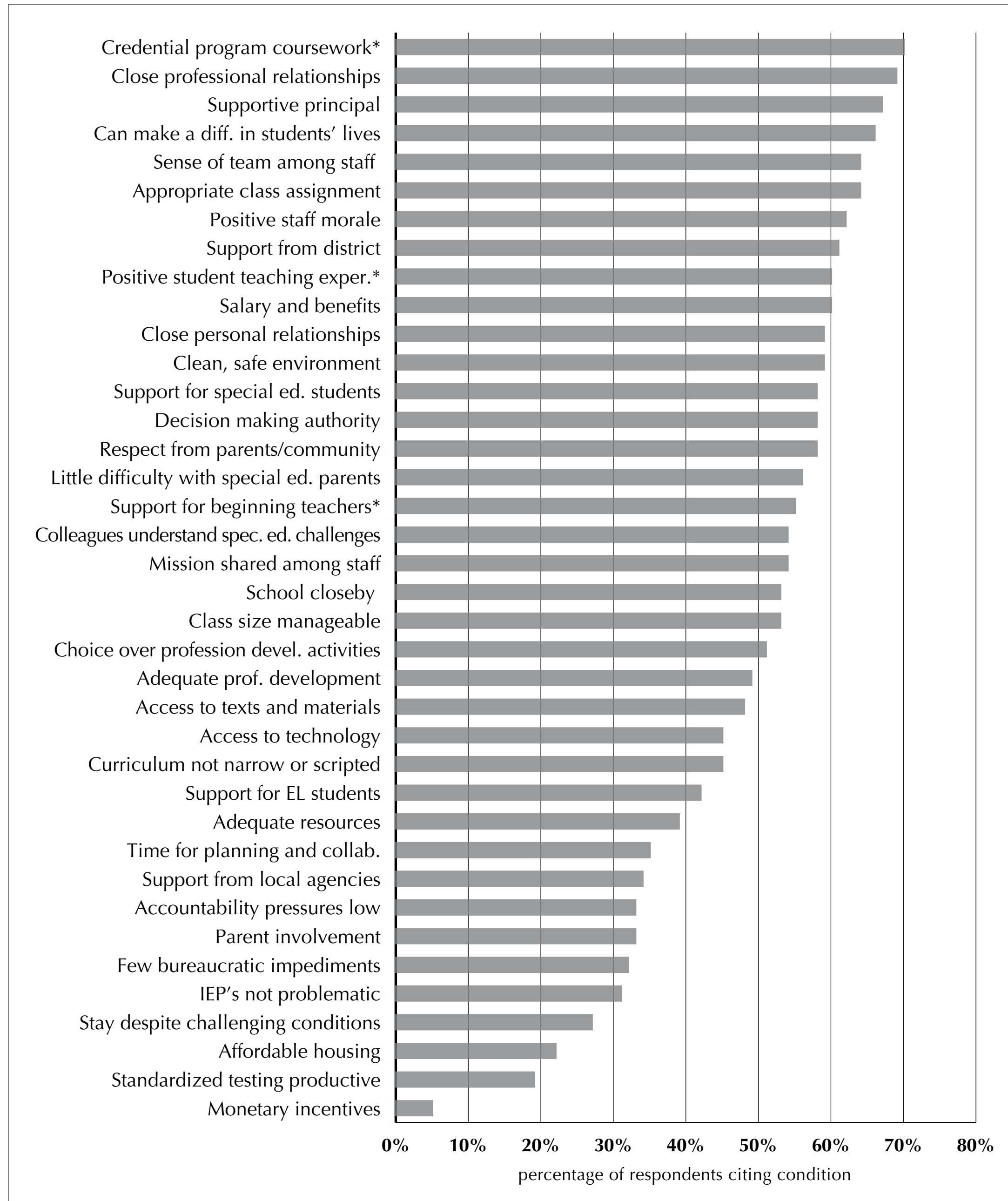
Among special education stayers (here we are referring only to "active" special education teachers), the three most frequently cited reasons for staying are related to the "collegial supports" in their workplace—those elements that maintain strong relationships among staff. As shown in Exhibit 10, many of the factors cited most frequently by stayers fall into this category. Sixty-eight percent of special education stayers said they stay because of **close professional relationships** with other members of the staff; 67% because their **principal is supportive and effective**; and 66% because their **staff works effectively as a team**. Sixty percent said they stay because there is **positive morale among the staff**, and the same percentage cites **close personal relationships** with other staff members.

These figures point, once again, to the critical role relationships play in teachers' attitudes toward their jobs. One special educator described how just one professional relationship in the workplace has greatly influenced her decision to persevere: *"I stay because I work with a partner in special education who is highly regarded by staff and administration, and who was my mentor when I started at the junior high school setting. I have learned that special education can be very lonely and many times I have self-doubts. The progress we see is usually slow and is not always valued by the parents, and certainly does not seem to be valued by society in general. I stay where I am because I have a co-teacher who shares my philosophy and whom I respect. The job is so isolating at times but even though I could make quite a bit more money elsewhere, I cannot replace the support I get."*

### The rewards of teaching special education students

Many special education teachers (65%) reported staying in special education because they feel they **make a difference in their students' lives**. One special educator explained, *"The most important factors influencing my decision to stay in teaching in general and special education in particular are the beliefs, reinforcement, and validation that I am making a positive difference in the lives of the students I teach. That does not mean that my students only 'perform' based on state standards, but that I have a daily (and, I hope, lifelong) positive impact on outcomes for these students—whether these outcomes are social, emotional, vocational, or educational. Knowing that I have reached a level of competence, confidence, and expertise in working with students has helped me become proud of my*

**Exhibit 10: Specific conditions cited by stayers in special education**




Notes:

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- The numbers and percentages of survey participants who responded to each condition appear in Appendix C.
- The descriptions of conditions in this graph are abbreviated. The actual descriptions of conditions that appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B.
- Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The percentages shown for this condition in the graph represent the portion of this subset of respondents who responded "a lot" or "somewhat."

*career choice—even in discouraging times."* We were surprised to learn that many leavers as well as stayers feel they are making (and have made) a difference in their students' lives, but for some teachers in very challenging work environments this sense of noble purpose and reward is simply not enough to motivate them to stay.

Sixty-four percent of stayers in special education cited **appropriate decision-making authority** as a reason for staying. Several special education stayers mentioned that they appreciated the freedom they were given to make instructional decisions. According to one 26-year veteran, *"The most important factor for my staying in education is the ability to establish systems that work for my classroom. Students must be motivated to come to class and learn, and that takes innovative approaches. Realistic expectations for classes must be made on an individual class basis. We have to avoid templates and blanket policies."* Many special education stayers also cited good or adequate system supports as reasons for staying. As noted above, 67% cited a **supportive and effective principal** (both a collegial support and a system support). In addition, 63% cited an **appropriate classroom assignment**, 62% cited reliable and appropriate administrative **support from the district office**, and 58% cited a **school environment that is safe, clean, and conducive to learning**. General education stayers cited adequate system supports with similar frequency.

Fifty-seven percent of special education stayers cited **adequate salary and benefits** as a reason for staying. In follow-up interviews some reported that they stayed because of their "fair and equitable salary," their retirement plan and benefits package and, in one case, the monetary benefits of the APLE forgivable loan.[19]

Interestingly, two highly ranked reasons for staying involve teacher preparation. Two-thirds of special education stayers said they remained in the classroom because their **credential program coursework** prepared them to be successful. Fifty-nine percent cited their **student teaching experiences** as a reason for staying.[20]

### Collegial support systems help stayers stay

Being a special education teacher is one of the most demanding positions in public education. We were not surprised to find that special education stayers point to a host of collegial support mechanisms as reasons they remain in and continue to derive pleasure from their profession.

In follow-up interviews, we asked special education stayers about the teaching and learning conditions that are unique to their field. Many spoke about the factors in their schools that contribute to the successful inclusion of special education students in general education classes, including strong collaboration between general and special education teachers, and clear support from the administration. One special education teacher spoke about the collaborative nature of the staff and leadership at her elementary school: *"My students are fully included in general education classes and the general education teachers and I work together to meet their needs. The administration has taken proactive measures to support us in areas including collaborative training, staff development, placement decisions, scheduling, materials, and planning time. The support staff is very collaborative and provides necessary supports and services when needed. I am passionate about my work and have been able to remain optimistic because I know I am supported at my school."*

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[19] California's Assumption Program of Loans for Education (APLE) was designed to encourage teachers to teach in schools that are experiencing critical teacher shortages. The program allows the state to assume up to $19,000 in students loans for qualified teachers who agree to work in high-need schools. For more information, see http://www.csac.ca.gov/.

[20] As with the general education survey, only special education teachers with fewer than five years of experience were asked about the effect of their teacher preparation on their decision to stay. As a result, the number of respondents for these items is considerably smaller, making the findings less reliable. These findings should be interpreted with caution.

A related collegial support factor cited by many special education stayers (54%) is **adequate understanding from colleagues about special education challenges**. Many teachers pointed to this factor as an important contributor to good morale. One veteran special education teacher reported, *"As a resource teacher who must work with general education teachers to provide for my students' needs, I have seen the difference that general education teacher attitudes can make in how well I can do my job and how well my students' needs are met. It can be extremely frustrating and emotionally draining to have to try to work with colleagues who have negative views about my students, who are unwilling to differentiate instruction, or who refuse to collaborate to provide accommodations or assign grades. I do have to work with a few of these teachers, but fortunately I have several who 'get it.' If I were at a school with entrenched negative views about special education students, my teaching experience would be very different. Burnout could occur. I do believe, however, that it is my expertise and professionalism as well as my own positive views about my students and my ability to show what they can do that has changed some of my staff's perceptions."*

A novice special educator similarly reported on the importance of informed, supportive colleagues in general education: *"I love that our general education teachers seek out collaborative relationships with special educators. These teachers feel more equipped to meet student challenges, and that allows me to do my job more effectively. I don't have to fight for students to remain in general education because our staff understands the importance of accommodations and modifications. This enables me to concentrate on collaborative teaching. I can be creative and feel positive coming to work. If teachers weren't this informed or understanding, my job would be much more frustrating."* When asked how this environment was created, she said, *"Administrative vision was at the core of this change. I truly believe that in order for our school to be completely understanding of all students' needs, a school-wide change had to occur. Staff development on collaboration, teaching strategies, disability awareness, behavior modification, and curriculum was key."*

Stayers were asked about the often complex and laborious process of **completing IEPs and related paperwork**. One teacher described how the help she received from her colleagues made the task more manageable: *"While completing IEPs can be time consuming, once you know the forms it becomes much easier. Having the support of other special education staff makes it easy for me to get help if I need it. If I were alone on a staff it might be more difficult. Connecting teachers to other teachers and giving them someone they can go to for support will help them stay with the job longer."*

### Dealing with parents of special education students can be a positive

Quite movingly, follow-up conversations with a number of stayers revealed a wisdom they developed on the job in dealing with parents of special education students that then positively tethered them to that job. Fifty-six percent of special education stayers reported that they have **little difficulty dealing with parents of special education students**, and cited this as a reason for staying. In follow-up interviews, several described their successful strategies for working with parents. A teacher working in a high-poverty elementary school said that teaching the same children for multiple years helps her better understand the students and her work with their parents. Additionally, she said, *"I have had a great deal of training so that I can focus on students' strengths, which helps me deal with parents as well. I called one parent who cried because she said no one had ever given her positive feedback about her child."* A veteran high school teacher offered these comments about having strong relationships with parents of special education students. *"I have been working in special education for 24 years with students that have ranged from 3 to 21 years of age with the full spectrum of disabilities. I have had parents in all stages of the 'grieving process' and understand what they go through. When I approach parents I try to make it a problem-solving*

*situation in which they are partners with me. Most of my parents know I work hard for their children because I phone them, email them, meet with them frequently. In years past, I have had one or two parents that have been extremely difficult. In these cases, I make certain I have an administrator and/or program specialist involved every step of the way."*

## GETTING INACTIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS BACK TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

As described above, many teachers holding special education credentials have chosen to work in general education classrooms. Given the chronic shortage of special education teachers and the substantial investment that has already been made in their training, getting these "inactive special education teachers" back to special education is a worthy goal. Many of these teachers left because they were dissatisfied with some aspect of their work in special education. What, if anything would motivate them to return to special education? Would it take an increase in salary, assurance of better working conditions, or some combination of both?

When surveyed, answers from inactive special education teachers revealed that the prospect of better working conditions is a more powerful motivator than an increase in salary. Just 8% of the inactive special education teachers said they would consider returning to special education if they were offered a sufficiently high salary. A higher percentage, 22%, said they would consider transferring to special education if many of the working conditions affecting special education teachers were corrected, with no offer of a higher salary. Only a slightly higher percentage, 24%, said they would consider transferring to special education if they were offered a sufficiently high salary *and* if many of the conditions affecting special education teachers were corrected. In other words, salary increases would motivate only a few special education leavers to consider returning to special education, while improved working conditions would lead many more to consider it. Doing both (increasing salary and fixing working conditions) would attract only a few more than addressing working conditions alone.

When asked about the possibility of transferring back to special education, many teachers voiced strong concerns about the many adverse working conditions in special education, and in some cases were extremely skeptical that conditions could ever be improved enough to entice them back. One veteran elementary teacher said, *"Special education is out of the question for me as it is currently being run. There is no way I would even consider it. The parents are extremely difficult, the laws and student advocates are incredibly difficult to deal with, and it is a paper jungle with little time and energy for the children. The threat of lawsuits is constant and personal injury, in some cases, is part of the job. There is little district support for teachers and the district is afraid of parents, advocates, and lawsuits. It's not at all about helping children but rather avoiding problems and covering our fannies with endless paperwork. There are too many meetings and hoops to be jumped through."* A high school teacher was similarly pessimistic, saying, *"There is no way that all of the conditions I would require to go back into special education would be corrected. Therefore I cannot see myself going back. Teaching special education in its current state takes years off your life."*

In other cases, inactive special education teachers pointed to specific problems that, if corrected, could lead them to consider returning to special education. One inactive special education teacher told us, *"I would and have considered returning to special education but would like to see a class size limit, appropriate and adequate curricular materials, and placement of students based on the students' needs, not the district's, parent's or lawyer's needs."* An elementary teacher said, *"I would consider going back if aides were well trained before they were placed in a classroom and if professional development were conducted before the start of the school year rather than mid-year or at the end of the year."*

Another deterrent to returning to special education was the lack of certification or adequate training for the demands facing special educators today. One veteran elementary teacher explained, *"I found teaching a Special Day class for students with learning disabilities to be very stressful due to large classes, behavior problems, extra meetings, and mountains of paperwork. Now our Special Day classes have students with autism and severe handicaps. I was not trained to teach these students and do not feel qualified. A lot has changed since I got my special education credential in 1984."*

Another elementary teacher described how there is little incentive—financial or otherwise—to take on the additional demands of special education. She said, *"Why would I want to teach 18 severely disabled students when I can teach 20 regular education 2nd-graders for the same salary and less paperwork to fill out? Most districts do not recognize advanced degrees or specialist credentials in their pay schedule. I spent an additional year in college and an additional semester of student teaching for my specialists' credentials, but I am not compensated for them. Now that I am a general education teacher, I get all the behavior problem students in my class because of my special-education degree, but no extra pay."*

In general, those who have left special education are unwilling to return to it without improvements in teaching and learning conditions. The range of concerns expressed by special educators indicates that there is no single, simple change to teaching and learning conditions that would motivate them to return. That said, the positive and stirring comments from stayers point to a host of system and collegial supports that can keep our valued special education teachers in the classrooms for which they were trained and even lure a fair number of them back. What will be needed is a multifaceted approach that is based on local assessments of teaching and learning conditions and teacher-generated solutions for improving them.

### SUMMARY: SOBERING FINDINGS AND GLIMMERS OF HOPE FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

A survey of special education credential holders revealed that over a third (35%) are teaching in general education classrooms rather than in special education. This attrition from the specific discipline along with the attrition from the profession itself contributes significantly to the severe shortage of special education teachers in California.

Like general education leavers, those who have left special education most frequently cite problems with system supports (e.g., problems with bureaucratic impediments, poor administrative support and leadership, and inadequate time or resources). Special education leavers also cite additional reasons for leaving, including inadequate support for special education students at their school, a lack of understanding from general education colleagues, and the overly complex and laborious task of managing IEPs and related paperwork. In follow-up interviews, leavers also cited concerns with inadequate compensation, accountability pressures, and legal threats on the job.

Those who have stayed in special education do so because they enjoy strong collegial supports. Many also report staying because they are able to make a real difference in their students' lives, because they are appropriately involved in decision-making, they have strong system supports, and they believe they are fairly compensated. Many new special education teachers credit their teacher preparation experiences for helping them succeed and stay. Finally, many special educators report that they stay because their school offers adequate support for special education students and because their general education colleagues understand and appreciate the challenges they face as special educators.

Of those who have left special education, few (8%) would consider returning for a salary increase alone. More (22%) would consider returning if there were an improvement in working conditions alone. Improvements to both

salary and working conditions will lead only slightly more (24%) to consider returning to special education.

Because these questions on the survey were admittedly hypothetical and the teachers who answered them have not had an opportunity to see, first-hand, what improved teaching and learning conditions would actually look and feel like, one cannot predict how many teachers would really make the move back to special education. These data suggest that improving teaching and learning conditions would attract a modest number of special education credential holders back to special education. Given the skepticism some teachers expressed that teaching and learning conditions could be improved, we might discover that even more would return to special education if districts were to provide the kinds of system and collegial supports teachers say they want. Regardless of the actual number of "inactive" special education credential holders who would choose to become "active," improving teaching and learning conditions would undoubtedly prevent many of them from leaving special education in the first place. That's the most hopeful part of our findings on retention of special education teachers in California.

In Chapter 5, we offer several recommendations that we believe will enable state and local decision makers to retain more special education teachers.

# CHAPTER 4 | SO HOW IMPORTANT IS COMPENSATION?

Compensation and monetary incentives such as signing bonuses and so-called "combat pay" take considerable airtime in today's debates about how to attract and retain teachers. But much of the research, including findings from this teacher retention study, shows that compensation and school teaching and learning working conditions both play a role in retaining teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hanushek *et al*., 1999; Prince, 2002). What has not been so clear from the educational literature is how different levels and types of compensation would affect teachers with and without other changes to the work environment. Would teachers really be more inclined to stay in the classroom if additional compensation were offered, but no improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions? What if working conditions were improved without additional compensation? Would teachers transfer to hard-to-staff schools if they were offered additional financial incentives?

The data from our retention study do not allow us to provide definitive answers to these complex questions, but they do offer some useful insights that will help inform the debate over the role that compensation and other monetary incentives play in teacher retention. We found that while compensation matters a great deal to most of the teachers who took our survey, teaching and learning conditions matter even more. While this is not a reason to reduce compensation or even a reason to maintain it at current levels, the data suggest that increased compensation *by itself* is not likely to improve teacher retention rates. We also found that increased compensation would be a weak lever in getting leavers to come back to the classroom or to get stayers to transfer to hard-to-staff schools. Moreover, when teachers are satisfied with their work environment—that is, when strong system and collegial supports are in place—compensation is not viewed as a problem by most stayers. One of the most surprising findings from our study was that a large percentage of stayers actually cite compensation as *a reason for staying.*

In this chapter, we examine leavers' and stayers' views about their base compensation and we consider the implications of their responses to several questions about the attractiveness of monetary incentives as a means for getting teachers to transfer to hard-to-staff schools.

## HOW LEAVERS AND STAYERS VIEW COMPENSATION

A high percentage of the dissatisfied leavers in our study (41%) cited inadequate compensation as a reason for leaving, ranking it sixth among 34 factors presented to them (see Exhibit 2). But compensation was seldom the *only* factor cited by leavers. On average, leavers citing inadequate compensation also pointed to 11 other factors related to poor teaching and learning conditions.

Given the number of leavers who said inadequate compensation helped push them out of the classroom, we did not expect that many stayers would point to compensation as a reason for staying. We thought most would say they stayed because of positive teaching and learning conditions *despite inadequate compensation.* What we found, however, was that the majority of stayers (66%) said their compensation was adequate and that it contributed to their decision to stay. This condition also ranked sixth among the 35 conditions presented to stayers. Why, we wondered, would so many leavers view compensation as a negative while two-thirds of the stayers viewed it as a positive? In analyzing the data, we speculated that stayers might be earning more than leavers, or that the cost of living in regions where stayers work is lower than it is where leavers work. If either of these conditions were true, it would suggest that increased

compensation might *by itself* play an important role in retaining teachers.

In order to answer this question we looked at the years of service accumulated by the stayers and leavers in our survey. Because classroom experience is positively correlated with compensation, it would serve as a proxy for their levels of compensation. We found that the average experience level of stayers who viewed their compensation positively was 12.1 years, while the average for leavers citing compensation as a negative was 7.7 years. This means these stayers in our survey had, on average, 4.4 more steps than leavers on their respective district's salary schedules. If we assume a beginning teacher at salary step 1 earns $35,000 annually and that the most experienced teacher at a top salary step of 18 earns $65,000 annually, then the stayers in our survey with 4.4 additional salary steps were earning approximately $7,330 more per year than the leavers ($1,666 per step multiplied by 4.4 steps).

But stayers, as a group, might also be earning more than leavers if they work in districts that pay more. And the purchasing power of their salaries might be greater if they live in regions where the cost of living is lower. Without knowing stayers' and leavers' actual salaries or the cost of living where they live, we cannot know for certain if these scenarios are true, but according to a recent study of school finance in California, teacher salaries for school districts tend to correlate positively with the cost of living in their region. That means that teachers are more likely to earn more in locations where the cost of goods and services is higher (Sonstelie *et al.*, 2000).

If in fact stayers are earning more than leavers, the difference is most likely a result of their additional experience, which places them higher on the salary schedule. But even if this is true, what prevented the stayers from leaving when, with less experience, they were making less money? Did they simply stick it out long enough to get to a point where their compensation was sufficient to retain them? Or is it possible that the quality of their teaching and learning conditions affected their attitudes about compensation? The data from our study support the hypothesis that teachers tend to see their compensation as adequate, even as a plus, when they are satisfied with their teaching and learning conditions. The stayers who viewed their compensation positively *also* pointed, on average, to 20 positive aspects of their work environment as reasons for staying. The policy implications of this finding are significant. It means that increased teacher compensation may not be necessary to achieve higher teacher retention rates if the right kinds of improvements are made to school teaching and learning conditions. This is *not*, however, an argument against increasing teachers' salaries. As we point out later in this chapter, there are still sound reasons to enhance school teaching and learning conditions *and* to increase teacher compensation.

### Would better salaries get leavers back to the classroom?

When designing our teacher retention survey, we wanted to find out whether those who had already left would consider returning to the classroom if, hypothetically, they were offered a sufficiently high salary (we did not specify an amount). As shown in Exhibit 6 on page 27, 17% said they would consider such an offer even if teaching and learning conditions remained as they were when they left. A higher percentage of leavers, 29%, said they would consider returning if the offer for a higher salary was accompanied by improvements to school working conditions. Interestingly, however, 28% said they would consider returning if working conditions were improved even *without* additional compensation. These findings underscore once again the relative value of working conditions over compensation. In this case, offering returning teachers more money offered virtually no added value. *If schools became more desirable places to work*, these findings suggest there is a sizable pool of qualified and experienced teachers that could be lured back to the classroom.

### Would monetary incentives get teachers to transfer to hard-to-staff schools?

Policy makers throughout the country have increasingly turned to financial incentives as a means of recruiting and retaining teachers. In addition to raising salaries to maintain adequate supplies of teachers, many states, including California, have used other monetary incentives such as signing bonuses, tuition credits, housing subsidies, and tax credits to attract teachers to high-need schools.

The incentives used in California have been used primarily to get beginning teachers to go to hard-to-staff schools, but this approach has been problematic. While many novice teachers bring great passion and excellent training to their work, many of them leave these schools within a few years because the teaching and learning conditions are so poor and because there are so few veterans available to mentor them. California has yet to discover a way to get large numbers of *experienced* teachers to go to hard-to-staff schools, and until it does, these schools will continue to struggle academically.

A number of proposals have been floated in recent years that would provide financial incentives to experienced teachers in high-need schools. Education policy analyst Cynthia Prince (2002) argues that financial incentives can and have been used successfully in schools that have been difficult to staff, especially when these incentives are coupled with other aspects of teachers' work experience.

> *How money matters becomes much clearer if salary is viewed as just one of many factors that employees weigh when assessing the relative attractiveness of any particular job, such as opportunities for advancement, difficulty of the job, physical working conditions, length of commute, flexibility of working hours, and demands on personal time* (Prince, 2002).

In California no large-scale differential pay programs have been adopted, largely because teacher unions have opposed them (National Education Association, 2001; National Education Association; Odden *et al.*, 2001; Prince, 2002). Putting aside for the moment the concerns that some union officials and policy makers have about differential pay programs, the findings from our survey indicate that, *in the absence of any other reforms,* differential pay would have limited effect in attracting and retaining teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

When participants in our survey identified themselves as stayers working in low-poverty schools (i.e., those that are typically easier to staff), we asked them about the conditions under which they would consider transferring to high-poverty schools. Only 9% expressed interest in such a transfer if offered a sufficiently high salary (we did not specify an amount). About the same number, 8%, said they would consider a transfer without additional compensation but with improvements to working conditions. Nineteen percent responded affirmatively if both compensation and working conditions were improved. The last scenario seems to hold the greatest promise for getting more veteran teachers into hard-to-staff schools. Though a 19% response rate might seem somewhat low, the good news is that it translates to a relatively large pool of qualified teachers willing to transfer to our neediest schools. Still, we cannot emphasize enough that offering teachers additional pay for harder assignments does not appear to be an effective staffing strategy without addressing other aspects of the work environment.

Education writer Frederick Hess (2004) observed that educators in Palm Beach County, Florida, discovered problems with the compensation-only approach when veteran teachers were offered $10,000 to transfer to low-performing schools. Less than 10% of the teachers selected for this program agreed to transfer. The findings from our study lead us to agree with Hess' analysis that "[t]o be effective, inducements intended to get teachers to leave familiar, comfortable environments for low-performing schools need to be large, sustained, part of a coherent package,

and augmented by reforms designed to replicate the focus and collegial culture of high-performing schools."

## THE CASE FOR INCREASED COMPENSATION FOR TEACHERS

What we have learned from our study is that improving the quality of school work teaching and learning environments would have a positive impact on teacher retention. We also deduce that increased compensation would not, by itself, lead to better retention rates; even if it did, it does nothing to improve the conditions in some schools that impede good teaching and cause many teachers to leave quickly. So why not invest exclusively in improved teaching and learning conditions and leave compensation alone?

A strong case can be made for improving teaching and learning conditions *and* for paying teachers more money. Even if all schools become good places to work and that, in turn, produced an adequate supply of qualified teachers, some of the best teachers would continue to leave the profession for better paying jobs in non-teaching roles (e.g., school administrator, curriculum specialist) or outside the education field altogether, especially in regions where the cost of living is exceptionally high. Increased compensation, when coupled with improved work environments, would retain more teachers and it would help attract new ones to the profession. By creating a supply of teachers that *exceeds* demand through improved conditions *and* higher compensation, school administrators would be in a position to staff their schools not only with *well-qualified* teachers but with a robust selection of *high-quality* teachers who would be a good fit for their schools.

The greater goal, then, in solving the teacher shortage should not be to have just enough teachers to fill the most pressing number of unfilled positions, but to cultivate an abundant pool of effective teachers from which all schools can draw. This seemingly impossible dream becomes quite possible if California can ensure that our schools are satisfying and supportive places in which to work, and that our teachers are well compensated for the extraordinary effort that their job requires.

# CHAPTER 5 | RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETAINING CALIFORNIA'S TEACHERS: FROM UNDERSTANDING TO ACTION

The findings from our study demonstrate that teaching and learning conditions play a critical role in teachers' decisions to stay or leave the classroom—even more than compensation. The teaching and learning conditions that matter so crucially to teachers are not whether there is fresh paint on the walls or whether the windows are in working condition, or whether they are given enough time to eat their lunch, though these elements can be surprisingly important. What teachers really want is adequate time to plan good lessons and problem-solve with their colleagues; they want fewer classroom interruptions and less paperwork so they have more time to teach their students; they want to participate in the curricular and managerial decisions that affect the way their schools are run; and they want to work in a team environment that promotes mutual trust and collaboration among colleagues. In short, what teachers want from their work environment are system and collegial supports that enable them to be successful with their students.

Because of the strong correlation between teacher retention and student learning, we know that improvements in teaching and learning conditions will lead to improvements in what everyone (from students to parents to teachers to administrators to those who govern the state) wants from our schools: a positive school experience that enables all students to achieve California's high academic standards.

But our study would not have added anything new to the body of research on teacher retention if it merely demonstrated that teaching and learning conditions are positively correlated with teacher retention. Other studies have found that as well (Buckley *et al.*, 2005; Hirsch, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). We believe that the particular value of our findings is that they provide insights into the complex nature of school teaching and learning conditions and how *particular* features of the workplace affect teachers in *particular* types of public K-12 schools in California. In our study, findings are differentiated between elementary and high schools; low- and high-poverty schools; and general education and special education in terms of the factors that contribute most to teachers' staying or leaving.

Still, we learned one underlying truth despite the different types of schools in which a teacher might work. We learned that the lack of certain system supports like time for planning and classroom resources as well as a host of "bureaucratic impediments" are much more likely to drive teachers out of the classroom than, say, lack of technology or the absence of monetary incentives. We also discovered that collegial supports, the teaching and learning conditions stayers point to most frequently, are of enormous importance to teachers. This should come as no surprise to anyone who has studied the workplace in general, but this study confirms that the quality of relationships teachers have with colleagues can make all the difference—in fact it can be the deciding factor in whether they remain in the job.

By providing educators and policy makers with a clearer understanding of both the specific and general types of teaching and learning conditions that really matter to teachers, we hope this study will help reformers construct strategies that improve teaching and learning conditions in ways that that will keep more teachers in the classroom, especially experienced teachers. Schools will always need new teachers to replace the ones who retire, and new teachers in their own right often bring vibrancy and fresh thinking to the schools that hire them. That is why we must do all we can to prevent them from leaving during their

early (and, for most, their most challenging) years in the classroom. But recruiting more novices cannot solve California's teacher shortage, not when so many experienced teachers are fleeing the classroom before reaching retirement age. If California hopes to solve its teacher shortage and to preserve the invaluable wisdom and expertise that resides in an experienced teaching workforce, retaining more of our *experienced* pre-retirement teachers must become a priority. And to retain them we must understand what it is that they most want from their teaching experience.

The six recommendations outlined below represent a balance of strategic and tactical actions that are borne out of the data collected from this K-12 teacher retention study. Implementing these recommendations will require action from local educators and statewide education officials. If, together, they commit to improving teacher retention rates in California schools, there is an excellent chance that student learning will also improve.

**The six recommendations are:**

1: Assess teaching and learning conditions *locally* and *continuously*

2: Elevate California's student funding to (at least) adequate levels

3: Resolve the bureaucracy conundrum (not all bureaucracies are bad)

4: Re-focus school leadership on instructional quality *and* high-quality teaching and learning conditions

5: Establish statewide standards for teaching and learning conditions

6: Assess and address specific challenges in retention of special education teachers

## **RECOMMENDATION 1:** ASSESS TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS LOCALLY AND CONTINUOUSLY

The results from our study point to features of the school work environment that are most problematic to teachers, but we believe that in order to fully understand the problems teachers face in *particular* schools, the teachers themselves must be asked. Amazingly, despite the high turnover rate among teachers, human resource departments in most school districts do not conduct exit interviews to find out why teachers are leaving. Neither do many district administrators or school principals ask teachers to express their opinions about their teaching and learning conditions *before* they decide to leave. The opposite is true in most corporate environments where exit interviews and staff surveys are routinely conducted. That's because successful business owners understand the high costs associated with employee turnover, and because most businesses want to be "learning organizations" open to improving elements that are dysfunctional or simply not working as well as they should be.

We believe there are two reasons for this "blind spot" in our schools. The first is that severe teacher shortages in this country are a relatively recent phenomenon. California did not experience them until 1998 when class size reductions heightened the demand for teachers that is still not being met. And only within the past few years have educators and policy makers begun to recognize how serious the educational consequences can be when students do not have access to well-prepared teachers. It has now become increasingly apparent that teachers with no pedagogical training and scant subject knowledge cannot accomplish what a fully credentialed, 10-year veteran teacher can accomplish. Further, as the high monetary costs of teacher turnover have become understood, educators and policy makers have begun to look for ways to stop the premature exodus of so many of our qualified teachers out of the teaching profession. Some observers have argued that more pay is the only way to eliminate the teacher shortage. As long as school administrators mistakenly buy into this notion (i.e., that nothing will change unless teachers get paid more), it's unlikely they will feel motivated to ask teachers specifically about their work environments. Though increased pay is certainly important for teachers, a concept that was addressed in detail in Chapter 4, our study showed that the desire for greater compensation is not the primary reason teachers cite for leaving. In fact, when teachers stay and when teachers view their working environment positively, most of them view their compensation as a plus.

The second reason that district administrators might avoid asking teachers about their work environment is that they mistakenly assume they already know what the answers will be. And since they assume they know what these teachers would say, administrators take the defeatist position that nothing could be done differently, anyway. In other words, if administrators really could not fix the things that were causing teachers to leave, then not asking teachers why they left might not seem so irrational. But the evidence from our study indicates that there is a great deal that can be done, often with little expense, to respond effectively to the concerns that leavers shared with us. They have to be asked, though. We believe that if district and school administrators listen carefully, respectfully, and often to teachers' concerns and suggestions for improving their work environment, they will be pleasantly surprised at what they hear and how fixable many of these problems actually are.

If teachers have an opportunity, before they decide to leave the classroom or profession, to construct and implement solutions in collaboration with their school and district

administrators, our study indicates that more leavers will become stayers. Of equal importance, after strategies have been implemented to address deficiencies, these assessments must be repeated to evaluate the effectiveness of these remedial actions and to make adjustments and updates when necessary.

There is an added benefit to this approach. The very process of asking teachers about their schools and soliciting their help in making these schools better places to work is not just a step toward solving a problem—it is an important part of the solution. Even before a single bureaucratic impediment is eliminated or an extra hour is found for teachers to plan, teachers will have already experienced two things they want dearly: an opportunity to exercise control over their work environment, and the sense that their leaders take seriously their individual as well as collective concerns about the supports required to teach students more effectively. The clear message we got from our survey data and follow-up interviews is that teachers want to be treated as respected professionals.

Of course, soliciting this kind of involvement from teachers is only a first step. District administrators and the teachers themselves, once the dialogue has begun, must be committed to implementing an improvement plan that is doable, given existing human and fiscal resources. And they must be open to fine-tuning that implementation plan. Teacher discontent will only intensify, causing some of them to leave more quickly, if nothing comes of these efforts. As we've noted previously, one bit of good news from our study is that much of what teachers want in their schools is not an expensive proposition. Asking teachers to provide a thoughtful assessment of what's needed in their schools through informal focus groups or through existing online survey technology costs practically nothing. Cultivating trust and a sense of teamwork among colleagues (a key finding among stayers) requires little more than a mindset that recognizes the fundamental significance of collegial supports.

With the use of online technology, school districts in several other states are proving that local assessments of teaching and learning conditions can lead to improved teacher retention. In North Carolina and Nevada, for instance, school districts have begun to take advantage of a powerful new online resource called the Teacher Working Conditions Toolkit that allows teachers to participate in multi-dimensional surveys about the working conditions of their schools (Hirsch, 2004).[21] Confidential results are tabulated and sent to districts so they can address areas of greatest need. According to the developer of the Toolkit, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality in Chapel Hill, North Carolina,

> *Its many resources include examples of schools that have addressed teacher working conditions successfully, checklists and concrete ideas to provide a roadmap for activity on working condition reforms, and background research to give users some theoretical perspective in identifying school reform strategies. The tool is organized for the needs of various groups including community members, teachers, principals, district officials and policymakers.*

In North Carolina, the results of the survey have led not only to improvements in working conditions at the local level, but to important changes in state education policy (Emerick & Hirsch, n.d.; Hirsch, 2004). In Clark County, Nevada, where a growing demand for new teachers has created a shortage of teachers, administrators and union representatives are using data collected using the Toolkit in a negotiating process called "interest-based bargaining." In contrast to "position bargaining," where each side takes opposing positions and tries to get what it can

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[21] The survey provided in the Teacher Working Conditions Toolkit includes many of the same items that appeared on the survey used in our study of teacher retention. Information about the Toolkit is available at http://www.teacherworkingconditions.org.

from the other side, the parties in Clark County are defining the problems they want to solve and are agreeing to solve them together (Spangler, 2003). One year after piloting this collaborative, data-driven approach in thirteen of its schools, the district witnessed a dramatic drop in the number of dissatisfied leavers. District officials are now conducting local working condition assessments and using interest-based bargaining in all 60 schools in one region of the district.

Making schools more hospitable to teachers, making them more effective places to work cannot be done by speculating on what teachers want and need. The important lesson from North Carolina and Nevada is that teachers can be retained when local stakeholders engage in systematic gathering of local data from teachers and when they use this data as the basis for continuous improvements to school work environments.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2:** ELEVATE CALIFORNIA'S STUDENT FUNDING TO (AT LEAST) ADEQUATE LEVELS

Even though much can be done with little expense to reduce teacher turnover, the teacher shortage cannot be solved without adequate school funding. California ranks 43rd in the nation in per-pupil expenditures after cost of living adjustments are made. Making matters worse, because of the way some districts allocate resources some schools in California are not getting a fair share of state resources, a problem that was corroborated by our own survey data. Among dissatisfied leavers who participated in our survey, 53% of those working in high-poverty schools cited a lack of school resources as a reason for leaving. In low-poverty schools, the percentage was 37%. The inequalities in school funding that writers like Jonathan Kozol (1992) have long called to our attention came to the forefront in California in the lawsuit brought by *Williams* against the State of California in 2003. That case drew attention to the deplorable working conditions that exist in many schools that serve poor and minority students. When the case was settled in 2004, the state acknowledged that many low-performing schools lacked basic learning materials, safe and clean facilities, and qualified teachers, but the monetary settlement it agreed on is only enough to correct the most egregious deficiencies like non-flushing toilets, broken heating systems, and the lack of current textbooks for all students.[22]

A recent study by EdTrust West (2005) found "pervasive gaps" in spending levels *within* school districts. High-poverty and high-minority schools frequently receive less money than do low-poverty and low-minority schools in the same district. The authors of the study explain how this happens:

> *When teachers with more experience and high-level degrees migrate to lower poverty and minority schools where there are often fewer challenges and better conditions, they take their ever-bigger salaries with them. District and school leaders committed to tackling this problem are frequently paralyzed in combating this trend because the common sense strategies they might employ—more pay, smaller workloads, and the like—are often prohibited by the single salary schedule and other provisions of the contract* (pp. 6 – 7).

We agree that salary schedules and contract provisions may be part of the problem, but there is nothing that prevents district leaders

[22] Details on the Williams case can be found at http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/ce/wc/wmslawsuit.asp

from ensuring that working conditions in all of their schools are of equal quality. Because improvements to the work environment would attract experienced teachers to high-poverty schools, these improvements would help narrow the spending gap.

As long as schools in California continue to receive far less money than schools in most other states, and as long as resources are not distributed equitably among these schools, teaching and learning, especially in the state's poorest schools, will never improve enough to attract and retain all the teachers they need.

However, in a promising development, a bi-partisan group of state leaders recently called for an in-depth study to answer the question: How much would it cost to provide a quality education to all children in California? A group of private foundations have agreed to provide $2.6 million to fund the research required for this long-awaited undertaking. But the task will not be an easy one for the team of experts who have agreed to participate in the study. That is because several methodologies have been used in other states to determine adequate funding levels, and each methodology can produce widely varying results, especially when schools and student demographics vary dramatically, as they do in California (Odden, 2003). We urge the experts who have undertaken this analysis to give strong consideration to school conditions that are positively associated with high teacher retention. In order to calculate how much it costs to educate a child, one must be able to calculate how much it costs (and saves!) to retain our best teachers.

The question that ultimately matters most is whether policy makers and the governor will agree to *spend* the money deemed necessary for all children in California to have an opportunity to succeed in school. Higher per-pupil spending, allocated annually in the state budget, will be needed. In parallel, our study shows unambiguously that students will have a greater chance of succeeding as learners if the state can retain many more of its teachers, especially the good ones. That chance of maximizing a student's potential in the classroom will therefore be based on many things, but it will almost certainly be based on higher per-pupil spending as well as the presence of a professionally satisfied, qualified teacher in the classroom.

## RECOMMENDATION 3: RESOLVE THE BUREAUCRATIC CONUNDRUM (NOT ALL BUREAUCRACIES ARE BAD)

Public schools systems are by nature bureaucratic and this is not necessarily a bad thing. Like any complex organization, schools operate according to rules, procedures, divisions of labor, and chains of command designed to achieve a mission in an effectively structured way. Many of these bureaucratic structures and systems are established by local school boards and administrators, but because schools are publicly funded institutions, policy makers at the state and federal levels also have a strong say in the way schools operate. Now with heightened school accountability there is an especially high expectation among policy makers that teachers should follow proven instructional practices, use pre-selected curricular materials, and regularly demonstrate that they are meeting the state and federal standards that have been set for them.

Because school systems are inherently bureaucratic, those who work in and oversee our schools often assume that bureaucratic aspects of schools are a benign fact of life for those who educate our children. But the fact that dissatisfied leavers in our study pointed more frequently to "bureaucratic impediments" as reasons they left than to any other condition suggests these burdens are far from

benign. Despite the best intentions of those who created the rules, procedures, and accountability measures that set the professional landscape for teachers, when these guidelines are perceived as bureaucratic *impediments* by teachers, they drive many of them right out of the classroom. Further evidence of this was provided in a story that appeared recently in the *Los Angeles Times* (Rubin, 2006). According to the author, close to 700 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District have recently transferred into the district's 100 charter schools where these teachers say they have more freedom and support. "[T]eachers expressed frustration about the lack of flexibility they have to improvise under the district's strict teaching plans, which are tied closely to the state's academic standards and aim generally at keeping teachers on the same subjects at the same time." Given the devastating effects that teacher turnover has on the stability of the school and on student learning, local school officials and state and federal policy makers must rethink the cumulative effects that unnecessary bureaucratic requirements can have on the quality of our schools and on the teaching experience itself.

Presented with this line of reasoning, some might conclude that bureaucracies are inherently bad for organizations and that we should reduce and even eliminate the top-down bureaucratic structures that stifle our school system. If we want to retain teachers and create better schools, the argument might go, we should treat teachers as professionals and give them the freedom they want to run their schools the best way they know how. In other words, government officials and district offices should get out of their way!

### Creating good school and district bureaucracies

It is true that many of the teachers who participated in our survey were negatively impacted by the bureaucratic impediments they encountered in their schools. But our analysis of teachers' responses to other items in our survey indicates that *eliminating* bureaucratic structures is not the solution most of them are seeking. After bureaucratic impediments, the most common reasons for leaving pertained to poor system supports like too little time for planning, lack of resources, and lack of administrative support from the district office. At first these responses might seem contradictory but they aren't. They tell us that teachers want policies and procedures they can count on—ones that support rather than impede their teaching. Teachers want to be given authority over decisions affecting their school, and at the same time they want sensible policies and procedures to maintain a level of order, efficiency, and fairness. Teachers do *not* want to be left entirely alone in a structureless environment.

In the article, "Sometimes Bureaucracy Has Its Charms," Susan Moore Johnson (2000) came to a similar conclusion about what teachers want after conducting a study of deregulated charter schools. While the prospect of working in a school with few external constraints initially attracts many teachers to charter schools, Johnson discovered that those working in the most autonomous charter schools were, surprisingly, *less* satisfied with their jobs than those working in schools with moderate regulation. In some instances, these teachers were simply overwhelmed by the stress and fatigue from being involved in constant decision-making. Others yearned for policies to deal with salary and employment decisions or for procedures allowing complaints to be heard in a fair and timely fashion.

While the absence of external regulation is common among charter schools, teachers in traditional public school settings are more likely to encounter too much, rather than too little, regulation. In these schools, bureaucratic policies and procedures often become so rigid and ingrained in the culture of the school that nobody questions their purpose or merit (or thinks they can be questioned). As educational researcher Richard Elmore (2002) observes:

> *The structure and resources of the organization are like wallpaper—after living with the same wallpaper*

*for a certain number of years, people cease to see it. In the present political and social environment of schooling, this lack of attention is dangerous and irresponsible. Schools are under pressure for increased accountability for student learning, and too many educators cannot account for the basic [bureaucratic] elements of their organization and how these elements affect the learning that teachers and students engage in* (pp. 22-25).

To retain teachers, both new and experienced, and to help them become more effective, teachers and administrators must be encouraged to examine the bureaucratic "wallpaper" of their schools. The goal should not simply be to reduce or eliminate bureaucracy—that is a fairly tired call to action—but to create fluid, rational bureaucracies: policies, procedures, and paperwork that truly support effective leadership and quality teaching, making sure these guiding structures remain relevant and useful. One way to reach that goal is by cultivating support staff (e.g., human resources personnel, administrative assistants, secretaries, custodians) who are flexible, responsive, and effective problem solvers. Retaining individuals with these characteristics will go a long way toward retaining teachers. (The specific role of school leadership in creating effective bureaucracies is addressed in recommendation #4.)

When structures and processes impede or cease to support the mission of the school, or when their sheer volume becomes problematic, they should be modified or eliminated. When new policies or procedures are needed to support good teaching, they should be adopted but not before they have been carefully evaluated in terms of how they fit into the paperwork and assessment demands already placed on teachers and administrators.

We found that some of the most important functions teachers want their district offices to perform are:

- Providing current textbooks and adequate materials and supplies
- Maintaining safe, clean, and attractive school facilities
- Providing and maintaining current technology for students and teachers (e.g., computers, Internet connectivity, copy machines)
- Orienting and providing special support for new faculty
- Managing professional development programs that are responsive to teachers' professional needs
- Offering clear, consistent, and reliable human resources services (e.g., school transfer procedures, payroll and benefits, retirement options)
- Addressing teacher concerns early and proactively before they become serious distractions or formal grievances.

### Striking the right balance

When teachers and administrators examine or "re-see" the bureaucratic wallpaper, many will undoubtedly identify problems that can be traced to the district office. That is because, after "bureaucratic impediments," "poor district support" was cited most frequently by dissatisfied leavers. While the district office can be overly involved in the educational affairs of the school, it can also be under or improperly involved. Again, teachers were not asking that the district office leave them alone but rather that it provide consistent and reliable support. One dissatisfied leaver complained that her school, which she described as one of neediest in the district, received the least resources among all schools. *"My classroom was filled with things that I had to purchase with my own money,"* she said. Another teacher criticized her former district office for overly interfering with the professional decision-making process that had taken place at her school. *"Our teachers met as a curriculum committee and decided to use a particular program. The district office overruled the teachers and chose a program that the teachers did not support. This also happened with other subjects like math and language arts."*

Because school contexts vary so widely, there is no magic formula that can dictate an optimal level of bureaucracy, nor is there an established set of rules and procedures that all schools should abide by. Getting a rational and helpful amount of school- and district-level bureaucracy in place requires frequent recalibration and modification based on input continuously gathered from teachers and administrators. Our first recommendation, which called for local assessments of teaching and learning conditions, provides a means for identifying bureaucratic structures that seem onerous or may impede teaching. But these assessments will undoubtedly point also to bureaucratic structures that are *lacking*, such as when leavers in our survey complained about the incessant classroom interruptions that disrupted their teaching (like random intercom announcements and unscheduled visits by parents and school staff). What the leavers undoubtedly would have appreciated was a school-wide policy that prohibits classroom interruptions except when there is an emergency.

Interestingly, our call for continuous, local assessments is itself a call for a bureaucratic procedure—one that asks teachers to take time away from their teaching to do paperwork (in this case, responding to a survey about their teaching and learning conditions). But, we suspect, few teachers would view this type of paperwork as busywork or as an intrusion. Most would welcome the opportunity to talk about their work environment, especially if this effort leads to needed improvements in the ways they can teach.

### Catch-22?

With increased accountability pressures and high-stakes testing, many district offices are taking a dramatically more active role in setting district-wide instructional and curricular policies. These policies often dictate the instructional methods teachers are expected to use, how much time they will spend teaching particular subjects, and what learning materials they will use. Rigid bureaucracies all-too-quickly insinuate themselves and well-prepared, experienced teachers flee when overly prescriptive bureaucracies deprive them of the decision-making authority they say they need.

Administrators have undoubtedly taken a more active role in their school's academic practices because they lack confidence that their teachers and principals will make good professional choices if given the opportunity to make them. Of course, this lack of confidence is not entirely unfounded, especially if large percentages of the teachers (and, perhaps, the principal) are underprepared and inexperienced. Top-down academic authority may be justified for schools that have been unable to retain qualified, experienced teachers. It's not reasonable to expect that a school staffed largely by novices and newcomers will be capable of making sound professional decisions on curriculum, personnel, or governance issues, especially if they and the veterans at the school have become embittered by poor teaching and learning conditions.

But if the district insists on maintaining a highly intrusive position, it virtually guarantees that its teaching staff will remain underprepared and inexperienced. As our data from dissatisfied leavers demonstrated, many well-prepared, experienced teachers flee when overly-prescriptive bureaucracies deprive them of the decision-making authority they say they need. Still, this presents a catch-22 for district administrators who are faced with schools that are weakly staffed: administrators are understandably reluctant to offer more authority to teachers because they are not convinced they will use it well; but if they don't offer them more authority, they cannot get the teachers who could handle the authority or grow and develop into that authority.

### Comprehensive redesign, one school at a time

A promising way out of this catch-22 is for districts to construct and implement comprehensive re-design plans, one school at a time. These plans should provide increased local decision making authority *along with* an effective school principal, and a work environment that

has the system and collegial supports that teachers need to be successful. With these "incentives" built into a comprehensive school plan, principals would find it easier to recruit well-prepared and experienced teachers to their schools. The district would also discover that it has a significantly larger pool of effective and enthusiastic principals from which to choose for these schools. This approach would offer teachers in particular schools a coherent system of supports all at once, rather than incrementally adding one or two fixes at a time and waiting to see what difference is made. We believe a comprehensive turnaround strategy in schools with high teacher turnover and poor academic performance would trigger a positive "tipping point" leading to dramatic improvements in student academic performance and teacher retention (Futernick, 2005).

If the district office is struggling to perform its valued bureaucratic functions, evidence of it will surely surface if teachers have an opportunity, as we urged in our first recommendation, to participate in local assessments of teaching and learning conditions. But in conducting these assessments, district officials must remember to have teachers talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the support provided by the district office.[23] That will take courage, since district officials themselves may be implicated and expected to take action. The initial findings from these assessments might be an earful, with much that is painful to hear, but until the problems are identified and discussed there is little chance that deficiencies can be remedied. And until they are, the district will continue to pay a steep price, monetarily and academically, for persistent teacher turnover.

**Not an oxymoron: effective government bureaucracy**

One teacher made the clear statement about why state bureaucracy has pushed him out of teaching: *"It was the increasing amount of paperwork and testing, more and more throughout the year; during instructional time, during reading, writing, and math. The tests cut back on the amount of time I could spend teaching my students."* Another teacher complained, *"A lot of the problem is No Child Left Behind and how it affects schools like ours. Our school is getting closer to being sanctioned. With that comes a lot of extra hoops teachers are required to jump through to prove they are digging themselves out of the ditch. With the students, it's become a lot more rigid as far as what we're allowed to do with them. Your entire day is pretty much dictated."*

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) added considerable accountability pressure by stipulating that high poverty schools could be closed, re-staffed, and lose significant federal funding if their students continued to perform poorly on achievement tests. Interestingly, one of the pressures NCLB places on districts is that they must employ only those teachers who are "highly qualified."[24] For California this has meant that schools receiving federal assistance are no longer permitted to use "pre-interns," teachers working with emergency permits, or teachers who lack subject matter knowledge in core subject areas. While many districts in California have been able to reduce their reliance on non-highly qualified teachers, many have a long way to go before they comply with this provision of NCLB.

But there are indications from our teacher retention study that NCLB is working at cross-purposes. The direct and indirect pressures placed on teachers and administrators by NCLB to improve student achievement scores may in fact

[23] Local educators should consider using the "Bureaucracy Cutting Toolkit," which has been used successfully in the United Kingdom to streamline the functions of school bureaucracies. A description of the Toolkit can be found at http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/r/reducingbureaucracy. The Toolkit itself can be downloaded from http://remodelling.org/downloads/83.pdf.

[24] According to NCLB, to be considered "highly qualified" a teacher must have a bachelor's degree, have a teaching credential (or be working toward one), and have knowledge of the subjects one is assigned to teach.

be making it more difficult for at-risk schools to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. The authors of NCLB were right to recognize that schools would need highly qualified teachers in order for students to learn, but if NCLB's expectations for student achievement are unrealistic, as some critics charge,[25] or if schools lack the capacity to fix the problems that prevent them from hiring or keeping highly qualified teachers, then the law might actually drive student achievement down in some schools.

Many policy makers and educators are calling for modifications to NCLB when it is expected to be reauthorized in 2007. If NCLB is to accomplish its goals for student achievement, then the next iteration of the law will need to ensure that it works to attract and retain the teachers it says schools must have. That means having performance standards for schools that are achievable and in California, especially, it means schools must have the resources necessary to create teaching and learning conditions that will attract and keep good teachers.

NCLB is an artifact of the federal education bureaucracy, but many of the impediments that teachers in our survey point to emanate from California's own bureaucratic structures that have become increasingly centralized ever since Proposition 13 was passed in 1978. Before Proposition 13, which cut property taxes by an average of 57% for California property owners, the majority of school funding came from local property taxes. With direct access to school revenues, local school boards had considerable control over key operations of their schools including budget allocations, curriculum content, textbook options, class-sizes, and evaluation of student progress. After Proposition 13 the bulk of the revenues for schools shifted from local districts to the state. With the state in control of these revenues much of the decision-making control over school operations also shifted from local school boards to state policy makers.

The performance of California's public schools has steadily declined since the mid 1970s in part because of the loss of school revenues that resulted from Proposition 13. Some have argued that the shift away from local control over schools has also contributed to the state's education woes. The authors of a report that examined the effects of these changes in school finance concluded that state finance has not been good for California's schools. Per-pupil spending has decreased and resources have not been allocated equitably to disadvantaged students. In addition, "Increases in private school enrollment and voluntary contributions to public schools also suggest that California parents are increasingly dissatisfied with public education" (Sonstelie *et al.*, 2000, p. 180).

Sonstelie and his colleagues acknowledge that state finance is not necessarily the cause of California's poor school performance or the negative perceptions parents have about their schools. The findings from our study suggest that the increase in bureaucratic control that has accompanied state finance may account for the dissatisfaction reported by many of our leavers. If state finance has in fact contributed to teacher dissatisfaction (and, in turn, to greater teacher turnover), then one could argue that state finance really has contributed to the performance problems of California's schools.

The current strong state bureaucracy is not producing strong overall gains in school performance, and it may indeed be contributing to teacher turnover. We suspect, however, that many policy makers would argue that for all of its shortcomings, the current top-down approach makes more sense than simply ceding all oversight and control to local educators. As long as the state is entrusted with the funds that support its schools, the argument would go, it must ensure that these funds are spent wisely. After all, it has an obligation to hold schools accountable for the academic

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[25] James Popham (2004) provides a valuable critique of the testing component of NCLB in his recent book, *America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Educators Can Cope with No Child Left Behind.*

achievement of their students. The problem, of course, is that under this top-down model, hundreds of schools in California (with hundreds more right behind them) have now reached the end of their accountability rope. Because these schools have failed to improve for several years in a row, the state has the legal authority to take drastic action (like closing the school, converting it to a charter school, or assigning management to another entity), but there has been no indication yet that the state has the will or the capacity to implement any of these sanctions.

The argument in favor of a strong state role in public schools may have some validity, but only because the policy options have been framed so narrowly. Simply shifting control from the state back to local schools and districts would not necessarily improve school performance, and it would undoubtedly produce a host of new bureaucratic problems at the local level. And even though teachers place great value on local autonomy—41% of teachers cited inadequate decision-making authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting as a reason for leaving—offering more of it without a *comprehensive* plan for school improvement would probably not reduce teacher turnover rates at all. But we must remember that increased autonomy was not the *only* thing teachers were asking for. They also pointed to a broad range of system and collegial supports that included time for planning, books and learning materials for all students, and effective local leadership. And as we have already mentioned, they want bureaucratic structures that support rather than impede their teaching.

If these conditions were met, and teachers had a realistic opportunity to be successful in their schools, then the state could get out of the business of trying to manage schools from Sacramento. Under this scenario the state's role would be focused on ensuring that schools have adequate resources and protections in place to ensure that resources are distributed equitably to (and within) districts. The state could still hold schools accountable for meeting academic standards, but it could also perform another important accountability function: establish standards for teaching and learning conditions and then hold *itself* and districts accountable for meeting them. We explain how this could be done and why it would be particularly helpful in recommendation #5.

We think teachers will accept being held accountable for student learning if the state and school districts are held accountable for providing a working environment that allows good teaching to take place. The bureaucratic conundrum can be solved if schools get adequate resources from the state, and if they get the more specific bureaucratic supports they need from their district office such as good professional development, reliable assistance from the human resources office, and well-maintained facilities. More local autonomy and less state bureaucracy (but more state support for creating and enforcing standards for teachers' teaching and learning conditions) makes sense when it becomes merely one component of a comprehensive strategy to improve teacher retention and school performance (Futernick, 2005). Good bureaucracy is not an oxymoron. It's an achievable reality that will contribute to teacher retention.

## **RECOMMENDATION 4:** REFOCUS SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY AND HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS

School principals, like teachers, are acutely aware of the pressures of state and federal policies that hold them accountable for student performance. Today, principals are expected to be strong instructional leaders whose day-to-day activities lead *directly* to measurable gains in student learning. If students do not meet the state's academic growth targets, their schools can be shut down and the principals themselves can be reassigned to other schools. This instructional focus for principals is stated unambiguously in a document describing a state-supported training program for school administrators:

> *The school site principals serve multiple and interconnected roles. First, and foremost, is the role of instructional leader for the school site. The principal is responsible for establishing the vision for student achievement; fostering commitment across, and providing guidance and support to, teachers and staff; and ensuring the full implementation of effective instructional programs with supporting technology* (State Board of Education, 2001).

This training document also describes a secondary set of roles for school principals that focus on the management of financial, human, and technological resources. In performing these roles, principals must ensure that their schools are staffed with qualified and competent personnel and that the work environments for these personnel are "collaborative and productive." Creating positive teaching and learning conditions for teachers (in the language of our teacher retention study, those system and collegial support systems that retain teachers) is obviously important, but that role is viewed by this state-supported program as secondary and somewhat different from being responsible for instructional excellence.

We disagree with this line of thinking. The complete interconnectedness of the principal's two roles of being a steward for instructional quality as well as teaching and learning conditions is supported by our survey findings and by other research on effective schools. It is the aim of this fourth recommendation—to focus school leadership equally on instructional quality and teaching and learning conditions—to dispel the notion that there is a "first and foremost" role and then a "secondary" role that principals play. The so-called secondary management roles are no less essential to the success of the school than the functions provided by an effective instructional leader. Nor are they less demanding or complex or even separate from the instructional role. Instead, the two roles are positively reinforcing, with one leading directly to the other and back. These management roles are co-equal because both contribute directly to the core mission of the school: promoting student achievement.

According to our survey participants, effective principals are those who run interference for teachers to protect them from unnecessary interruptions, meetings, paperwork, and a host of other bureaucratic impediments that become obstacles to good teaching. Effective principals also ensure that teachers have enough books and supplies, adequate time for planning, and a clean and safe environment in which to work. By ensuring that essential system supports are present, effective principals build instructional capacity, enable their teachers to become more effective and, as our data show, increase the likelihood that their teachers will remain committed to schools in which they are teaching.

In addition to ensuring that teachers have the *system supports* they need, principals also play a critical role in cultivating the *collegial supports* that teachers say are just as important in their work. Roland Barth (2006), a former teacher and recognized expert on effective school administration, makes the point this way:

> *The nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else. If the relationships between administrators and teachers are trusting, generous, helpful, and cooperative, then the relationships between teachers and students, between students and students, and between teachers and parents are likely to be trusting, generous, helpful, and cooperative. If, on the other hand, relationships between administrators and teachers are fearful, competitive, suspicious, and corrosive, then these qualities will disseminate throughout the school community* (p. 1).

Still, it's easy to see how a countervailing argument develops to refute Barth's point. It goes along these lines: Overly burdened administrators should not be asked to spend *more* of their time managing the work environment and the relationships among staff. These additional demands might be what drives more school administrators, another group that is in short supply, out of the profession. And these tasks will cut into the time they should be spending with teachers making sure they are providing quality instruction to their students.

The fallacy with this argument is that it protects against the wrong issue. Administrators will not be effective instructional leaders, no matter how knowledgeable they are about instructional quality, if poor school work environments drive teachers away from their schools. School administrators need to create a positive work environment and strong relationships among staff precisely so they can avoid the harmful consequences that teacher turnover has on student learning.

Principals who create good work environments for their teachers will discover that they have more, not less, time to focus on quality instruction. That's because teachers who are less encumbered by bureaucratic impediments, have a sense of ownership in the operation of the school, and enjoy professional and friendly relationships with their colleagues, will be more inclined to volunteer for important school-wide activities such as developing a comprehensive instructional plan for the school, meeting with parent groups, evaluating new learning materials, and conducting extra-curricular events for students—activities the principal might have to perform alone or activities that might not take place at all if teachers aren't willing to assist. In schools where teachers want to stay, principals will spend far less time recruiting, screening, and preparing replacements. Then with *more* time to focus on instructional quality, we think principals will discover that their teachers are indeed more receptive and eager to work with them in sharpening their teaching skills.

The findings from our study did not tell us how well principals are performing in every aspect of their jobs, but we did learn that many of them are struggling to maintain work environments that are sufficiently attractive to keep their teachers. In order to know what courses of action are needed to foster more effective school leadership, we first need to understand why principals might be struggling in this area. One possible explanation is that principals lack the requisite skills and knowledge to address school teaching and learning conditions effectively. It may be that they do not understand the full range of system and collegial supports that are necessary for teachers to thrive, or do not know how to correct problems once they are identified. If district officials such as superintendents and human resource personnel were to perform their own assessments of principals and discovered that some were inadequately prepared in this area, then they could provide professional development to help principals address teaching and learning conditions more effectively. If there is evidence that large numbers of principals *statewide* lack such preparation, then the university-based credential programs that prepare new principals should refocus their instruction to ensure that new school leaders are capable of creating work environments that will retain teachers.

Another probable reason that principals have difficulty with this aspect of the management role, the role that the principal-training document cited above described as "secondary," is that it is viewed by some principals (and by others who hire and evaluate them) as a *distant* second, even as non-essential compared with their assumed primary role as an instructional leader. But maintaining high-quality work environments for teachers must be regarded by school board members, by the superintendent, district officials, and the principals themselves as a critically important determinant of the district's ability to achieve its educational mission. The specific role that school and district leaders have in maintaining a collaborative and productive work environment should be explicit and should be given high priority. Even more important, these expectations should be reflected in the criteria used in hiring and evaluating school administrators.

There is a third reason why many principals could be having difficulty maintaining work environments that adequately support teachers. Our survey findings show that many teachers are negatively affected by bureaucratic constraints and poor support from the district office. If principals were asked, it is likely that they too would point to many of the same problems about their own work environments and their interactions with the district office. A survey conducted of school administrators in 2001 found that politics and bureaucracy were the primary reasons administrators left the field (Public Agenda, 2001). This being the case, we should not assume that principals, even ones who have the skills and the will to create strong working environments, are in a position to buffer teachers from negative school bureaucracies or to make up for support that should have come from the district office—not when principals are suffering at least as much from the same debilitating problems.

In order for principals to create satisfying and productive work environments for their teachers, in order for principals to be successful in any aspect of their work, school boards and superintendents must ensure that the same positive work environment that teachers yearn for is also available for principals. If principals lack the supports they need, or if they are overly burdened by unresponsive and intrusive district or state bureaucratic structures, then they too will leave. Simply stated, if the district cannot retain good administrators, there is little chance it will be able to retain good teachers. Implementing the other recommendations we offer in this chapter, such as reducing bureaucratic impediments and providing adequate funding for schools, will go a long way toward making a principal's work environment more attractive and sustainable. Also, as we urged in our first recommendation, *all* school personnel should be invited to participate regularly in assessments of their teaching and learning conditions. Superintendents and school board members should pay particular attention to the comments and suggestions they obtain from principals about their working conditions and then ensure that their concerns are addressed.

Teacher retention and its central by-product, student learning, can improve significantly if we cultivate school leaders who are capable of promoting both high-quality instruction and high-quality work environments for teachers. Training programs like the one cited at the beginning of this recommendation for practicing principals and programs that prepare new administrators can play a critical role in making this happen. State education officials and district administrators must make certain that well-prepared administrators are not impeded by the demoralizing aspects of district and state bureaucracies, and that they receive the support *they* need to perform their job well. Otherwise districts will be unable to attract and retain capable school leaders. If that happens, there is almost no chance the district will be able to attract and retain good teachers.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5:** ESTABLISH STATEWIDE STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS

Though California ranks 43rd among all states in per-pupil spending and ranks near the bottom in academic achievement, California now has some of the most rigorous academic content standards for its K-12 public schools. These standards define the knowledge, skills, and concepts that students are expected to acquire at each grade level. Many policy makers and educators believe these content standards will help improve California's academic standing because they set clear and high expectations for all students, especially those who come from less privileged families.

But merely expecting a lot from students does not by itself guarantee that they will succeed academically, especially if the schools they attend are run-down, ill-equipped, and staffed with teachers who leave soon after they are hired. In order for students to meet the state's high academic expectations, policy makers must have equally high expectations for the quality of schools these students attend. This is possible if the state establishes clear *statewide standards for teaching and learning conditions* that all schools are expected to meet.

Currently, California has only the most rudimentary standards for school teaching and learning conditions. In the absence of a full set of "opportunity-to-learn standards," the quality of the state's schools varies dramatically. And there is strong evidence that teaching and learning conditions tend to be the most problematic in schools with the highest concentrations of poor and minority students. This inequity came to a legal head in 2000; the American Civil Liberties Union filed a class action suit against the State of California on behalf of Eliezer Williams and 100 other public school students in San Francisco alleging that the state had failed to provide public schools with equal access to instructional materials, clean and safe facilities, and qualified teachers.

The state settled the *Williams* case in 2004 and allocated close to $1 billion to address deficiencies in the state's lowest performing schools. The *Williams* case also led to changes in California's School Accountability Report Card (SARC), a report that provides data on the academic performance and teaching and learning conditions of each public K-12 school. These changes provide important new information related to the overall physical condition of the facilities, the number of non-certified teachers, and the availability of textbooks and learning materials. Schools that rank in the bottom three deciles of the state Academic Performance Index (API) are now monitored by county offices of education to make certain that these school conditions comply with the provisions of the *Williams* settlement. The *Williams* settlement is a significant step forward because it has drawn attention to serious inequities in students' opportunities to learn in California. The case also created new resources and a rudimentary set of opportunity-to-learn standards to address these inequities.

While this is a necessary first step, we believe the state can and should do more to ensure that the teaching and learning conditions in all of California's K-12 public schools will attract and retain our best teachers. The standards that were established through *Williams* represent a minimum threshold, or "floor," for school teaching and learning conditions. Getting all of our schools to meet these basic standards is essential, but if we want to create school environments that attract and retain sufficient numbers of well-prepared teachers, we must create standards for the conditions that address the full spectrum of system and collegial supports required for teaching effectiveness.

This is precisely what policy makers did in North Carolina when, in 2001, they established 30 working condition standards for their

public schools. The five standards below seem particularly relevant to the conditions that our study showed were positively associated with increased teacher retention:

- There is scheduled time in the day for teachers to focus on development of successful curriculum, classroom management, strategies, and techniques to individualize instruction for student success.
- Teachers have necessary office and instructional supplies and access to funds for purchasing supplies which allows them to involve students in meaningful work.
- School leaders at all levels shield educators from disruptive distractions in order to ensure that teachers can focus on what is best for their students and for learning.
- Within the educational community there is an atmosphere of mutual respect, where each professional is empowered to do his/her work.
- Sufficient resources are available to allow teachers to take advantage of important professional development opportunities (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004).

In order to determine how well schools are meeting these standards, teachers in North Carolina participate regularly in a survey about the level of compliance with these standards. Researchers who have analyzed the survey data have confirmed that teacher working conditions are indeed strong predictors of teacher retention and student achievement. For instance, high schools were 9.4 times more likely to make Adequate Yearly Progress—the benchmark set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act—when teachers reported having sufficient time for planning (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004).

Armed with research demonstrating that improved working conditions are strong predictors of teacher retention and student achievement, policy makers in North Carolina have invested in several initiatives to ensure that all of their schools meet the state's working conditions standards (Emerick & Hirsch, n.d.). For example, new school principals are now required to participate in a professional development program that focuses on teacher leadership, school academic climate, and teacher retention, and $2 million have been allocated for professional development to help school personnel improve school working conditions by first identifying the conditions that are sub-standard and then taking action to correct specific deficiencies.

We urge policy makers in California to follow North Carolina's lead in adopting a comprehensive set of teaching and learning conditions standards for its public schools. These standards would identify specific features of school environments that promote teacher retention and student learning. When linked to an efficient gathering data process, these standards would enable policy makers and district administrators to take corrective measures, as North Carolina has been doing, when the standards were not being met. California's students are far more likely to achieve the state's rigorous academic standards if the state establishes a parallel set of teaching and learning conditions standards and the means to ensure that schools will meet them.

## **RECOMMENDATION 6:** ASSESS AND ADDRESS SPECIFIC CHALLENGES IN RETENTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Many of the factors responsible for special education teachers leaving and staying are the same for teachers working in general education classrooms. But there are conditions in schools that must be addressed that are uniquely problematic for special education teachers. Our study revealed four areas of significant concern to special education teachers. If these areas are addressed successfully, many more special education teachers will continue teaching special education students. These measures could also encourage inactive special education teachers—i.e., those with special education credentials who are working in general education classrooms—to return to special education. Specific recommendations that address these four concerns are:

### Specifically collect data on special education teachers and incorporate this data into retention strategies

As discussed in the first of our recommendations above, the most effective retention strategies will be based on locally gathered data. This is because the challenges teachers face are likely to vary from one school and region to the next. As the data collected from this survey indicate, many special education teachers face a unique set of difficulties that include overly burdensome IEPs and related paperwork, challenging relationships with general education colleagues and, at times, difficult interactions with parents of special education students. In order to determine the specific factors that cause excessive turnover among special education teachers, those who set out to collect data about school conditions from their teachers will want to incorporate questions that allow teachers with special education credentials to offer feedback on these unique challenges. Inactive special education teachers should be asked to describe the conditions under which they would return to special education.

Initially, however, district human resource offices should collect data about the current staffing patterns among their special education teachers. Answers to the following questions will help pinpoint the problems that are most severe, and the data will serve as a baseline that the district can use to evaluate the effectiveness of future actions taken to improve special education staffing.

- To what extent have each school's special education students been taught by fully-qualified special education teachers? Are trends improving or worsening?
- What is the experience level of special education teachers? How much support are novice teachers receiving from experienced special education teachers?
- What is the school-by-school turnover rate among special education teachers?
- How many of the district's teachers have become inactive special education teachers?

### Reduce the unnecessary burdens imposed by IEPs and related paperwork

A large portion of dissatisfied leavers (58%) said IEPs and related paperwork contributed to their leaving. While special education teachers say they understand the need for IEPs (both legally and educationally), many seem desperate for more time to work on them and a more efficient method of writing and managing them. One especially problematic aspect of IEPs is the lack of consistency in paperwork from one location to another and from one year to the next. Several teachers called for greater standardization, even a "universal IEP," to reduce the questions that arise when teachers encounter confusing elements of new versions of IEPs. That solution may be unappealing to some special education administrators who insist on using their own

forms, but we urge these administrators to weigh the overall benefits of a standardized IEP against what might be lost by giving up the district's customized forms.

Given the vast amounts of IEP-related paperwork teachers report having to complete by hand, the availability of teacher-tested information technology would appear to be an excellent solution. If the state were to invest in this technology, districts would save money purchasing it on their own and a statewide system for documentation might result in the kind of consistency that teachers have called for. Local decision-makers should also consider giving special education teachers additional release time and clerical assistance for this aspect of the job. While professional development is usually sought to strengthen instructional practice, assistance with IEPs by local experts would help many teachers cope with the legal and educational complexities of this important task. In particular, this assistance would enable special education teachers to learn about the full range of instructional resources that could be incorporated into an effective IEP.

The use of technology and in-service training for teachers are examples of investments in time and resources that do not have a direct impact on student learning, but where the potential indirect impact could be significant. With these supports, teachers would be able to perform their reporting duties more efficiently and effectively, and it would give them more time to work with students. Such support might also be what prevents them from leaving special education.

### Cultivate better collegial supports for special educators

Great progress has been made in integrating special education *students* into schools' general education programs. The findings from our retention survey suggest that far less progress has been made to fully integrate special education *teachers* with their general education colleagues. Special educators often feel isolated and ignored and many find themselves at odds with school principals and their general education colleagues when advocating for their special education students. This aspect of special education is a significant contributor to the high turnover rates among special educators.

The segregation of special and general education teachers is undoubtedly a vestige of a school culture that operated very differently in the past. New policies that require greater integration of special and general education students have clearly not led to a set of institutional practices that is entirely consistent with policies affecting special education students. Unfortunately, the shortage of well-prepared special education teachers has been exacerbated as a consequence of this disconnect between old school practices and norms and new policies that run counter to them.

Special education teachers and their students are not the only ones to suffer as a result of poor relationships with general education teachers. Our survey findings suggest that general education teachers also pay a price. Nearly 30% of dissatisfied general education leavers said the lack of support for special education students contributed to their leaving the classroom. The percentage was much higher (42%) among those leaving high-poverty schools. Under current special education policies, many special education teachers are expected to provide support for their students who have been integrated into general education classrooms. They are also expected to work closely with the general education teachers who are teaching them. But if there are institutional factors at work that compromise their professional relationships, this might help explain why many general education teachers say they lack support for their special education students.

There are several ways to strengthen the professional relationships between special and general education teachers. The most effective and immediate approach would come through school leadership that recognizes the significance not

only of these particular collegial support systems but also the deeply engrained attitudes and practices that often conspire to keep special and general education teachers apart from one another (Cox, 2001; Smith & Leonard, 2005). Of the special education stayers who participated in our survey, nearly 70% indicated that the positive relationships they had with their colleagues affected their decision to remain a special educator at their school. Many of them credited their principals for including *all* teachers in school decision-making, in professional development activities, in every aspect of school life. Many of these special education teachers came to see themselves, first and foremost, as teachers at the school and secondly as special education teachers.

We think there is an additional approach that holds promise for improving professional relationships for special educators. In many universities, teachers-in-training participate in programs that are structurally detached from one another. For example, students earning special education credentials are often assigned to different academic departments than students earning general education credentials. They take separate courses, are taught by different professors, and complete fieldwork assignments in different schools. Because of these institutional arrangements, teachers in different programs miss important opportunities to learn about each others' professional worlds. Perhaps most important, they do not come to see themselves as colleagues who will be expected to work collaboratively with one another. Segregated teacher preparation programs simply reinforce the segregated practices and attitudes that were problematic for many of the special education teachers in our study. This phenomenon is somewhat ironic because many university faculty in special education have long been advocates for greater integration of special education students. What they may not realize is that the structure of their own programs (which are themselves deeply rooted in past practices and beliefs) may make it more difficult for new special education teachers to function effectively in today's integrated schools.

We believe those who are preparing to become special and general educators should have numerous opportunities to work collaboratively with each other from the outset of their preparation programs. These teachers-in-training should take classes together and should be placed in the same schools, whenever possible, for their practice teaching assignments. By participating in non-segregated teacher education programs, there is a good chance beginning general and special education teachers will approach their first job ready and eager to cultivate positive working relationships with all of their colleagues. The relatively small number of teacher preparation programs that operate this newer way have been shown to benefit pre-service students as well as the schools that hire them after they obtain their credentials (Demchak, 1999; Gut *et al.*, 2003; Kurtts *et al.*, 2005; Paul & Epanchin, 1995; Richards *et al.*, 2003; Voltz, 2001). If we in higher education subscribe to the notion of mainstreamed schools for special education students, and if we recognize the importance of strong, collaborative relationships among general and special education teachers, then it is incumbent upon us in higher education to ensure that the teacher preparation programs we operate reflect these ideals.

### Expand programs that support novice special educators

Compared to the general education teacher workforce, a significant percentage of special education teachers (14% in 2004-05) are not credentialed and therefore are not immediately eligible for BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program), the state's highly successful program of support and assistance for novice teachers. Special education teachers who lack access to established support programs commonly receive inadequate support and assistance in those critical first few years in the profession. This, combined with the unique challenges they encounter in

the workplace, puts special education teachers at high risk for early burnout and attrition. The state should consider expanding BTSA to support all novice teachers, and should give the highest priority to special educators.

Unfortunately, even those novices who are eligible to participate in BTSA are often underserved by the program because they cannot be paired with BTSA support providers who have a special education background. Because of the vast shortage of veteran special educators, there simply aren't enough to serve as support providers. Those who are available may reasonably feel they cannot find the time to be a BTSA support provider in addition to their regular classroom time and paperwork responsibilities. In many cases, this shortage leads BTSA administrators to pair beginning special education teachers with general education support providers—an arrangement that limits the usefulness of the partnership. A more effective approach would be for districts to release a few special educators from their classroom duties and have them support beginning special educators throughout the district full-time.

The state should also consider increasing the resources available for structured, well-supervised intern programs. This would allow thousands of special education teachers currently working with emergency permits, pre-intern certificates, or waivers to obtain critical professional support from their district and university credential program.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1: Assess teaching and learning conditions locally and continuously**

The results from our study point to features of the school work environment that are most problematic to teachers, but we believe that in order to fully understand the problems teachers face in *particular* schools, the teachers themselves must be asked.

- Human resources personnel should conduct exit interviews and/or surveys with leavers and those transferring to other schools.
- Surveys and/or focus groups should be conducted regularly and continuously with all staff, including site administrators, to assess the quality of school and district working conditions.
- Teachers should be invited to participate in the analysis of findings and in the development of plans to improve teaching and learning conditions.
- Efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions should be evaluated and adjusted.
- These assessments should be conducted annually.

**Recommendation 2: Elevate California's student funding to (at least) adequate levels**

Though much can be done with little expense to reduce teacher turnover, the teacher shortage cannot be solved without adequate school funding.

- Allocate and spend the funds necessary to ensure that school teaching and learning conditions are adequate to support teaching and learning.

**Recommendation 3: Resolve the bureaucratic conundrum (not all bureaucracies are bad)**

To retain teachers, both new and experienced, and to help them become more effective, teachers and administrators must be encouraged to examine the bureaucratic structures of their schools. The goal should not simply be to reduce bureaucracy but to create fluid, rational bureaucracies: policies, procedures, and paperwork that support effective leadership and quality teaching.

**At the local level:**

- Create bureaucratic structures that truly support effective leadership and quality teaching.
- Recruit, support, and retain school personnel who are flexible, responsive, and effective problem solvers.
- Reduce bureaucratic impediments and provide teachers with appropriate levels of autonomy over curriculum, instruction, and budgets.

**At the state and federal level:**

- Establish performance standards that are achievable.
- Encourage schools to adopt comprehensive improvement plans (e.g., the "tipping point" turnaround strategy) and reduce bureaucratic top-down control.

**Recommendation 4: Refocus school leadership on instructional quality and high-quality teaching and learning conditions**

Teacher retention and its central by-product, student learning, can improve significantly if we cultivate school leaders who are capable of promoting both high-quality instruction and high-quality work environments for teachers. You cannot have one without the other.

- Recruit and evaluate school leaders on the basis of their ability to establish strong system and collegial supports and quality instruction.
- Ensure that school leaders themselves have the support they need and that they are not encumbered by bureaucratic impediments.

**Recommendation 5: Establish statewide standards for school teaching and learning conditions**

If California's students are to meet the state's high academic expectations, policy makers must have equally high expectations for the quality of schools these students attend. This is possible if the state establishes clear statewide standards for teaching and learning conditions that all schools are expected to meet.

- Policy makers in California should follow North Carolina's lead in adopting a comprehensive set of teaching and learning conditions standards for its public schools. These standards would identify specific features of school environments that promote teacher retention and student learning.
- Take appropriate corrective actions when working condition standards are not being met.

**Recommendation 6: Assess and address specific challenges in retention of special education teachers**

Many of the factors responsible for special education teachers leaving and staying are the same for teachers working in general education classrooms. Factors that are unique to special education teachers must also be addressed.

- Specifically collect data on special education teachers, interpret data, and incorporate solutions into retention strategies.
- Reduce the unnecessary burdens imposed by IEPs and related paperwork.
- Cultivate strong collegial supports for special educators with special attention to the relationships between special education and general education teachers.
- Expand programs that support novice special educators.

# POLICY UPDATE AND EPILOGUE

In a promising development, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law several pieces of legislation at the end of the 2005-06 legislative session that will have an important impact on California's efforts to solve its teacher shortage and improve school performance. These initiatives dovetail nicely with the policy recommendations in this report, and they demonstrate increased recognition within the policy community that improving the state's public schools depends upon the presence of well-qualified, effective teachers.

**SB1614,** authored by Senator Joseph Simitian, will establish a teacher data system in California to track the movement of K-12 public school teachers in and out of the profession and from one school to another. The system will enable policy makers, educators, and researchers to monitor and analyze workforce trends, including retention, attrition, and turnover on a school-by-school basis. This will be particularly useful in evaluating strategies, like the ones recommended in this report, which are designed to improve retention rates (California Senate Bill 1614, 2006).

**SB1655**, authored by Senator Jack Scott, allows principals in the state's lowest-performing schools to refuse voluntary transfer requests from other teachers in the district.[26] Rather than having to accept the teachers who exercise the transfer rights afforded by their collective bargaining agreements, principals in struggling schools can now fill their vacancies with the teachers they deem the best fit for the vacancies. With the opportunity to build strong, compatible teams of teachers, these schools will be in a better position to attract and keep the kinds of leaders they need to be successful.

Teacher unions strongly opposed this bill because it removes some teacher transfer rights from the bargaining table. We believe that most teachers who work in low-performing schools will see a net benefit from this bill. They will encounter two things that were very important to many of our survey respondents: supportive leadership and a stronger sense of team among staff (California Senate Bill 1655, 2006).

**SB1209**, also authored by Senator Jack Scott, includes several measures to strengthen California's teaching workforce. The bill removes barriers for individuals entering the teaching profession, and it enables beginning teachers (including interns) working in high need schools to receive additional assistance from experienced teacher mentors. The bill also provides funding for school districts to develop alternative compensation programs to attract and retain teachers in high need schools (California Senate Bill 1209, 2006).

**SB1133**, authored by Senator Tom Torlakson, enacts the Quality Education Investment Act of 2006 (QEIA) providing 2.7 billion dollars over seven years for the state's lowest performing schools. Many of the provisions of QEIA are designed to help these schools attract and retain well-qualified teachers. Schools that receive funds will be required to maintain class sizes that do not exceed 25 students. Not only must all of the teachers at these schools be "highly qualified," the average teacher experience level at funded schools must be equal to or higher than the average experience level in the district. This will require schools with high concentrations of novice teachers to bring in more experienced teachers. The bill also requires that teachers and paraprofessionals at the school

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[26] Much of the evidentiary support for this bill was provided by two reports produced by The New Teacher Project: *Missed Opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms* (Levin & Quinn, 2003) and *Unintended Consequences: The Case for Reforming the Staffing Rules in Urban Teachers Union Contracts* (Levin *et al.*, 2005).

receive high-quality professional development on an annual basis (Quality Education Investment Act of 2006).

Another important provision seeks to ensure that these schools are led by well-qualified and experienced administrators. We were pleased to see that the specific qualifications described in the bill for school leaders are consistent with the ones we called for above (in Recommendation 4): "Those qualifications shall include the ability to support the success of all pupils by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community as well as the ability to advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional program that is conducive to pupils learning and staff professional growth."

The data from our survey suggest that qualified and experienced teachers will be drawn to schools with manageable class sizes, high-quality professional development, and effective principals. It remains to be seen, however, whether other aspects of the work environment that are positively linked to teacher retention and student achievement (e.g., time for planning, the absence of bureaucratic impediments, and local decision-making authority) will be addressed. If the supports provided by QEIA become part of a *comprehensive* turnaround strategy, we believe the prospects for sustainable success for California's most highly challenged schools are excellent.

We stand by the rigor of our findings and the merit of our recommendations, but there is an admitted element of the quixotic in this report. Dreaming is part of education reform. Nevertheless, so much of what California public school teachers shared with us can be translated into implementable, Monday-morning, practical changes for our schools. These four pieces of legislation are a start.

If we can provide what teachers are asking for, more of them will stay or return to the classroom. In the process, our schools will retain more of the teachers who are fully qualified; that is what educators want, parents want, and students want. "Fully qualified" can include excellent novice teachers, but focusing our attention on them alone will not be enough to address the current and worsening teacher retention shortage.

What matters most in addressing teacher retention in California is making all of our schools easier to staff because a myriad of working conditions—teaching and learning conditions—have been improved. When this happens, thousands of qualified and experienced teachers will opt to stay in the profession. Many who have left will consider coming back, and a significant number of existing teachers will transfer to schools that had been difficult to staff. If that dream is realized, if every child in California gains access to a well-prepared, knowledgeable, and, ideally, caring teacher, then California's schools may once again rank among the best in the nation. Our students will be the greatest beneficiaries.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: STUDY METHODOLOGY, SAMPLES, AND RELIABILITY OF THE DATA

### Design of the Survey Instrument

The initial design of the survey instrument benefited from input obtained from individuals representing diverse perspectives including former and current teachers and administrators, educational researchers, and educational policy analysts.

After the initial version of the survey was complete and ready to use on the internet, it was field-tested by approximately 50 teachers who took the survey in a computer lab. Afterwards, these teachers provided comments and suggestions on the functionality of the survey as well as its content. Several items were modified and, in some cases, items were added, as a result of the feedback we obtained from this field test.

A second field-test of the revised survey instrument was conducted by sending our letter to participate to 100 randomly selected names from Sample Population A. This test, designed to simulate the actual conditions of the survey, enabled us to evaluate, once again, the technical aspects and content of the survey. Feedback from this second field-test resulted in a small number of changes to the survey.

### Follow-up Interviews

When respondents completed the survey, they were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview. Over 50% of the respondents agreed and provided telephone numbers and email addresses to assist in contacting them.

The primary objective in conducting interviews with Group A was to gather additional information about the factors for leaving and staying most frequently cited by *all* of the respondents in this group. It was discovered, for instance, that the factor cited most as one contributing to teachers' decisions to leave the classroom was presented as follows:

> *There are too many bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings)*

When respondents could be reached, research assistants posed questions about factors the respondents indicated contributed "a lot" to their staying in or leaving the classroom. Following the example above, these respondents were asked,

a. Can you tell me what, specifically, were the bureaucratic impediments that affected you?

b. How did these impediments affect your work with students?

c. Do you have any ideas about how this might be remedied?

A secondary purpose of the interviews was to have respondents identify and describe the factors that contributed *most* to their decisions about staying or leaving.

Toward the end of the interview process, a different follow-up method was employed with respondents whom we had not yet interviewed. This was done because of the difficulty encountered in finding mutually convenient times for interviewers to speak with respondents. The alternative was to send email messages to those who had agreed to be interviewed. The body of each email message was personalized and the questions were based on particular responses the respondent had given while taking the survey. In this report we use the phrase "follow-up interviews" to describe both the telephone conversations as well as the email correspondence we conducted with selected respondents.

One objective in asking follow-up questions of Group B participants was to learn more about the

factors affecting the stay and leave decision of special education teachers. A second objective was to have "inactive special education teachers" explain why they were not working in special education.

This alternative follow-up approach was very successful. After sending several hundred email messages, over half of them had replied within a week and the responses to the questions were as rich and thoughtful as those obtained from our telephone interviews.

### Estimating the reliability of percentages from this teacher retention study

Several exhibits in this report show the *percentages* of respondents who selected options in response to survey items. These percentages are the most reliable available estimates of the responses that would be made by the entire population of California's stayers and leavers**,** but the population's *actual percentages* may differ from the percentages that appear in this report. The chart below shows how many percentage points to add to and subtract from each percentage value in the report (the "margin of error") to estimate a *95% confidence interval* for that value. We include an example that illustrates how to use the chart.

The graph in Exhibit 2 shows that 57% of the dissatisfied leavers in our survey cited the factor, "There are too many bureaucratic impediments" as one that affected their decision to leave the classroom either "a lot" or "somewhat." In Appendix C, which provides technical details on the exhibits in the report, the table containing data for Exhibit 2 shows that a total of 220 teachers responded to this item: 125 indicated that "bureaucratic impediments" affected their decision "a lot" or "somewhat," and 95 teachers indicated that it was "not at all" a factor.

**Exhibit 11: Confidence Intervals for percentages that appear in this report**

| Percentages Near | Margin of Error (up or down): 95% | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Approximate Number of Respondents (N) for a Percentage in this report** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **300** | **200** | **150** | **125** | **100** | **75** | **50** | **25** | **20** | **15** | **10** | **5** |
| **5%** | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 19 |
| **10%** | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 12 | 13 | 15 | 19 | 26 |
| **15%** | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 22 | 31 |
| **20%** | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 16 | 18 | 20 | 25 | 35 |
| **25%** | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 12 | 17 | 19 | 22 | 27 | 38 |
| **30%** | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 18 | 20 | 23 | 28 | 40 |
| **35%** | 5 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 13 | 19 | 21 | 24 | 30 | 42 |
| **40%** | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 19 | 21 | 25 | 30 | 43 |
| **45%** | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 20 | 22 | 25 | 31 | 44 |
| **50%** | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 20 | 22 | 25 | 31 | 44 |
| **55%** | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 20 | 22 | 25 | 31 | 44 |
| **60%** | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 19 | 21 | 25 | 30 | 43 |
| **65%** | 5 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 13 | 19 | 21 | 24 | 30 | 42 |
| **70%** | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 18 | 20 | 23 | 28 | 40 |
| **75%** | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 12 | 17 | 19 | 22 | 27 | 38 |
| **80%** | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 16 | 18 | 20 | 25 | 35 |
| **85%** | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 22 | 31 |
| **90%** | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 12 | 13 | 15 | 19 | 26 |
| **95%** | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 19 |

In the chart on the previous page, in Exhibit 11, find the column for N's approximating 200 since 200 is closest to the 220 respondents we are using in this example. Moving down the chart column for N=200, find the row for *Percentages Near **55%*** because 57% is the observed value of the percentage in Exhibit 2. The value of this cell is 7 (which is the "margin of error"). To determine the 95% confidence interval for the finding that "bureaucratic impediments" affected dissatisfied leavers "a lot" or "somewhat" for 57% of these respondents, add 7% to the value (57% + 7 = 64%) and subtract 7% from the same value (57% - 7 = 50%). We can now estimate that if one had selected 100 samples from the entire population with random sampling and if there were approximately the same number of respondents to our question about "bureaucratic impediments," the percentage that we selected from Exhibit 2 (57%) would vary from 50% to 64% in 95 of the samples.

The margin of error increases when disaggregations of the data result in fewer observed cases. When the N's for a particular survey question are small, the confidence intervals expand making the findings less reliable. One must be cautious about the conclusions that are drawn from such findings.

## APPENDIX B. THE TEACHER RETENTION SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The teacher retention survey was administered online via the internet. Teachers who received invitations to participate in the survey were given a unique respondent ID number which they were instructed to enter when accessing the survey website.

Different portions of the survey instrument (i.e., sub-forms) were presented to respondents depending on their responses. For instance, respondents who indicated that they had no immediate plans to leave their present schools were presented with a sub-form containing a different set of prompts than those who had already left teaching.

A screen image of the each survey sub-form appears below. A note above each sub-form identifies the particular respondents the sub-form was presented to.

Note: The opening screen below was presented to all survey respondents

WELCOME

Respondent ID

Begin

Thank you for participating in this online teacher retention survey. As you probably know, many of California's public schools have had difficulty in recent years attracting and retaining qualified teachers. As we explained in the letter you received from us, in order for educators and policy makers to address this problem intelligently, they must have access to rich and reliable data to explain the conditions that account for the problem. As someone with first-hand experience in these schools, your responses to this survey will provide this kind of data. In particular, your responses will help us better understand the staffing patterns in California's public schools and to identify the factors associated with the decisions teachers make to remain where they are, to transfer to other schools, or to leave the teaching profession altogether.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**: At the end of the survey, we will ask if you would be willing to participate in a brief follow-up telephone interview. If you agree, we will prompt you for contact information. Whether you choose to participate in the follow-up interview or wish to participate only in this online survey, all of the information you provide as an individual will be kept confidential.

**TIME TO COMPLETE:** The survey should take approximately 25 minutes for you to complete.

Note: The sub-form below was presented to all survey respondents

**We would like to know why you decided to become a teacher. For each of the factors listed below, please select the most appropriate choice. If there were additional reasons, please list them in the text box labeled 'Other.'**

| Reasons for becoming a teacher | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Important | Not Sure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salary and benefits | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| A sense of calling | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| A passion for teaching | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Support and influence from family and friends | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Vacation schedule | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| A love for the subjects matter I teach | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Wanting to make a difference for children and society | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| A desire to work with children and/or adolescents | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Teachers or role models from the past who inspired me to become a teacher | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| **For Special Education Teachers:** I had relatives or close friends with special needs | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| **For Special Education Teachers:** I worked in a setting with special needs students. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other: | | | | |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to all survey respondents

Please indicate your **Current Employment Status** (or, if you are no longer teaching, your employment status when you stopped teaching).

- Select -

Please indicate the **Teaching Credential** you earned or were in the process of earning (if more than one, select the one that applies to your current [or last] position).

- Select a Credential -

Please indicate **the institution** from which you received your teaching credential

- Select an Institution -

| Question | Response |
|---|---|
| Have you completed your teaching credential program? | ○ Yes ◉ No |
| What year did you (or will you) receive your teaching credential? | ex: yyyy |
| Did you have a supervised student teaching or intern experience with either a supervising teacher or a university supervisor? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| During your student teaching or internship, what portion of time did you work with with low-income students and/or English Learners? | ○ All of the time ○ Most of the time ○ Some of the time ○ None of the time ◉ Does not apply |
| Did your credential program focus primarily on low-income students? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| Did your credential program focus primarily on English Learners? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| Did you work closely with a cooperating teacher during your student teaching? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure ○ Does not apply |
| Did you complete your credential program before being hired? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| What pathway did you take to a teaching credential? | - Select - |
| Would you have taken the same pathway (e.g., emergency permit, internship, traditional teacher preparation program) to a credential if you had it to do over again? If no, please explain. | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| What year were you first hired as fully-certified classroom teacher (if applicable)? | ex: yyyy |
| How many years have you been a paid classroom teacher (if applicable)? | |
| Have you, or are you currently, receiving support through BTSA? (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment) | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| Are you CLAD certified? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| Are you SB1969 certified? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| Are you BCLAD Certified? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| Have you achieved National Board Certification? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |
| If NO, do you plan on or are you currently working towards National Board Certification? | ○ Yes ○ No ◉ Unsure |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to all survey respondents

| OPTIONAL | |
|---|---|
| Gender | ○ Male ○ Female |
| Your age | - Select Age - |
| Marital status | - Select Marital Status - |
| Number of children | - Select Number - |
| Age of your youngest child | - Select Age - |
| Ethnicity/Race (Check all that apply) | ☐ American Indian or Alaska native<br>ASIAN<br>☐ Chinese<br>☐ Japanese<br>☐ Korean<br>☐ Vietnamese<br>☐ Asian Indian<br>☐ Laotian<br>☐ Cambodian<br>☐ Other Asian<br>PACIFIC ISLANDER<br>☐ Hawaiian<br>☐ Guamanian<br>☐ Samoan<br>☐ Other Pacific Islander<br>☐ Filipino<br>☐ Hispanic or Latino<br>☐ African American, not of Hispanic origin<br>☐ White, not of Hispanic origin<br>Other: |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to all survey respondents

| Please indicate your current teaching status | |
|---|---|
| **Current public school employees** | |
| Currently a full-time classroom teacher in a California public school | ○ |
| Currently a part-time classroom teacher in a California public school | ○ |
| Currently a substitute teacher | ○ |
| Currently working in a California public school in another role | ○ |
| Currently working as an administrator in a California public school | ○ |
| **Former public school employees.** | |
| I am no longer a teacher in a California public school (or I am currently on leave or on sabbatical) | ○ |
| **Other** | |
| Neither (please explain) | ○ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated that they were no longer teaching in a California public school.

Please identify the California public school you worked in prior to leaving:

| County | District | School |
|---|---|---|
| - Select - | - Select - | - Select - |

The school I taught in is not listed above.

The name of the school was:

The name of the district was:

How many years were you a teacher at this school?

What percent of the students you taught were English Learners? - Select Percent -

I taught the following grades just prior to leaving this school (please select all that apply)

| Pre K | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Non-classroom assignment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated that they were currently teaching in a California public school.

Please identify the school you currently work in:

| County | District | School |
|---|---|---|
| - Select - | - Select - | - Select - |

The school I teach in is not listed above.

The name of the school is:

The name of the district is:

How many years have you been a teacher at this school?

Do you expect to leave teaching or transfer from your current school to another school within the next two years? ○ Yes ○ No ○ Unsure

What percent of the students you teach are English Learners? - Select Percent -

I currently teach the following grades at this school (please select all that apply)

| Pre K | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Non-classroom assignment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated that they planned to leave teaching or planned to transfer to another school within the next two years.

| You indicated that you might transfer from or leave the school in which you are currently teaching. Please indicate how much each of the reasons below explains why this is true. | A Lot | Somewhat | Not at all | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am dissatisfied with the compensation or the conditions where I am teaching. | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| I plan to enter a graduate program or became a school administrator | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I dislike the negative public image of teachers | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I want to retire | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I expect to be laid off | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I expect to be transferred to another school | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I am leaving for other personal reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy, child rearing) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I plan to move away from the area | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I want to pursue another line of work | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I have discovered that, for personal reasons, teaching is not the right career choice for me | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| Other reasons **not** related to conditions at the school (please explain) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated that they were no longer teaching in a California public school. Respondents who indicated on this sub-form that *dissatisfaction with compensation or the conditions where they were teaching* (the first item in the sub-form) accounted "Somewhat" or "A Lot" for their leaving were presented with further prompts contained in the sub-forms below. When *dissatisfaction with compensation or conditions* did not account for a respondent's decision to leave they were presented with a closing screen that thanked them for their participation in the survey.

| Please indicate how much each of the reasons below accounted for your leaving the public school in which you last worked. | A Lot | Somewhat | Not at all | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I was dissatisfied with the compensation or the conditions where I was teaching. (If you select this item you will have an opportunity on the next page to specify what these conditions were.) | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| I entered a graduate program or became a school administrator | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I disliked the negative public image of teachers | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I wanted to retire | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I was laid off | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I left for other personal reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy, child rearing) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I moved away from the area | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I wanted to pursue another line of work | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| I discovered that, for personal reasons, teaching was not the right career choice for me | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |
| Other reasons **not** related to conditions at the school (please explain) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◉ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated:

a) they planned to leave their current school in the next two years, and

b) they were dissatisfied (either "A Lot" or "Somewhat") with the compensation or working conditions where they were teaching.

A virtually identical sub-form was presented to respondents who indicated:

a) they were no longer teaching in a California public school, and

b) they were dissatisfied (either "A Lot" or "Somewhat") with the compensation or working conditions where they had been teaching.

Only the verb tenses in the statements describing school and district conditions varied for these dissatisfied leavers. For example, the statement, "The district office does not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support," appeared in the sub-form presented to respondents who had left. Respondents who planned to leave were presented with a prompt reading, "The district office did not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support."

| In order for us to understand why you might leave the school in which you are teaching, please respond to the question at the right for each condition below | How much does this condition affect your decision to LEAVE your current school? | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | A Lot | Somewhat | Not at all |
| The district office does not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The district or state agency does not provide a monetary incentive (such as a forgiveable loan or a fellowship grant) to teach in this school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The salary and benefits package is not adequate. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| There are too many bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings) | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The principal is not a supportive and effective educational leader. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Teachers do not have an opportunity to choose the types of professional development activities they participate in. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The district, county, and state do not provide professional development that supports my teaching. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Not enough time is available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Teachers are not respected by parents and members of the local community. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school does not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I do not receive adequate support for my special education students. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school does not receive adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The educational mission and goals of the school are not understood nor widely shared by the administration and staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The administration and teaching staff are not given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Most parents are not involved in school activities or their child's education. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school staff is not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The size of my classes is not manageable. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Morale among staff is poor. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I do not have close personal relationships with other members of the staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I do not have close professional relationships with other members of the staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The staff as a whole does not work effectively as a team and relationships generally are not strong. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Standardized testing of students is counter productive. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Accountability pressures are too great. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Students do not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The curriculum is too narrow and overly-scripted. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students do not have adequate access to educational technology. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school environment is not clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I am not able to make an important difference in the lives of my students. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I am assigned to classes that are not appropriate given my credential and/or subject matter preparation. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Housing is too expensive near my school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school is not reasonably close to where I live. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| My credential program coursework did not prepare me to be successful in this school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| My student teaching experiences did not prepare me to be successful in this school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I did not receive adequate support and mentoring as a beginning teacher. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Other (a) | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Other (b) | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Other (c) | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |

Note: The following items were presented only to special education teachers

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of understanding from colleagues about special education challenges. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Difficulty dealing with parents of special education students. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| IEP's and related paperwork are too complex and laborious. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated:

a) they were no longer teaching in a California public school, and

b) they were dissatisfied (either "A Lot" or "Somewhat") with the compensation or working conditions where they had been teaching.

**One of the purposes of this study is to understand the conditions under which teachers who have left the profession would be willing to return to the classroom. At this point, would you consider returning as a classroom teacher? (Please select all that apply)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ☐ | No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or the conditions in such a school. |
| ☐ | Yes, if many of the conditions listed above were corrected, even if I were not offered a higher salary. |
| ☐ | Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions listed above were corrected. |
| ☐ | Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, and if many of the conditions listed above were corrected. |
| ☐ | Yes, under other circumstances. (Please explain in the comment box below) |
| | Comments: |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who indicated that they planned to remain in their current schools for at least two years.

| For each condition listed below, we would like you to respond to the question at the right. | How much does this condition affect my decision to REMAIN in the school in which I am teaching? | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | A Lot | Somewhat | Not at all |
| The district office provides reliable and appropriate administrative support. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The district or state agency provides a monetary incentive (such as a forgiveable loan or a fellowship grant) to teach in this school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The salary and benefits package is adequate. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| There are few bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings) | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The principal is a supportive and effective educational leader. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Teachers have an opportunity to choose the types of professional development activities they participate in. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The district, county, or state provides professional development that supports my teaching. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Enough time is available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Teachers are respected by parents and members of the local community. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school receives adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school receives adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I receive adequate support for my special needs students. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The educational mission and goals of the school are understood and widely shared by the administration and staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The administration and teaching staff are given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Most parents are involved in school activities and their child's education. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school staff is committed and prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The size of my classes is manageable. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| There is positive morale among staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I have close personal relationships with other members of the staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I have close professional relationships with other members of the staff. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The staff as a whole works effectively as a team and relationships are generally strong. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Standardized testing of students is productive. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Accountability pressures are not too great. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Students have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The curriculum is not too narrow nor overly-scripted. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Students have adequate access to educational technology. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The school environment is clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I am able to make an important difference in the lives of my students. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I am assigned to classes that are appropriate given my credential and/or subject matter preparation. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Housing is not too expensive near my school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| The school is reasonably close to where I lived. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| My credential program coursework prepared me to be successful in this school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| My student teaching experiences prepared me to be successful in this school. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| I received adequate support and mentoring as a beginning teacher. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who:

a) planned to remain in their current schools for at least two years, and

b) were working in general education, and

c) held a special education credential

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adequate understanding from colleagues about special education challenges. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| Little difficulty dealing with parents of special education students. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |
| IEP's and related paperwork are not overly complex or laborious. | ○ | ○ | ⊙ |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who:

a) planned to remain in their current schools for at least two years

b) worked in low-poverty schools

**The characteristics of the students who attend your school indicate that it is (or may be) the kind of school that has an easier time attracting and retaining teachers than those with higher concentrations of children from poor families. One of the purposes of this study is to identify the conditions under which teachers currently working in schools like yours would be willing to transfer to schools that are typically harder to staff.**

**At this point, would you consider transferring to a high-poverty school? (Please select all that apply)**

- ☐ No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or the conditions in such a school.
- ☐ Yes, if many of the conditions listed above were in place, even if I were not offered a higher salary.
- ☐ Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions listed above were in place.
- ☐ Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, **and** if many of the conditions listed above were in place.
- ☐ Yes, under other circumstances. (Please explain in the comment box below)

Comments on your responses:

Note: The sub-form below was presented to respondents who:

a) held a special education credential but were working in a general education classroom

b) planned to remain in their current schools for at least two years

| You indicated earlier in this survey that you also hold (or once held) a special education teaching credential. At this point, would you consider teaching in a special education classroom (Please check all that apply) | |
|---|---|
| ☐ | No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or working conditions. |
| ☐ | Yes, if many of the conditions that affect special education teachers were corrected. |
| ☐ | Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions affecting special education teachers were corrected. |
| ☐ | Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, and if many of the conditions affecting special education teachers were corrected. |
| ☐ | Yes, under other circumstances. (Please explain in the comment box below) |
| | Comments: |

Note: The sub-form below was presented to all survey respondents

**You have completed all of the questions in this online survey.**

**Thank you very much for your participation.**

| To obtain more in-depth information, we plan to conduct follow-up telephone interviews with a small number of respondents. The interviews will take no more than 20 minutes and all of the information collected will be kept confidential. If you would be willing to participate in a phone interview, please provide us with your contact information below. | |
|---|---|
| ☐ **Yes, I am willing to participate in a brief, confidential phone interview** | |
| Name: | |
| Phone (incl. area code): | |
| Email address: | |

## APPENDIX C. ADDITIONAL DATA FOR SELECTED EXHIBITS

**Additional data for Exhibit 1: General reasons cited by those who have left or plan to leave the profession** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Prompt: **Indicate how much each of the reasons below accounted for your leaving (or planning to leave) the public school in which you last worked.** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| I was dissatisfied with the compensation or the conditions where I was teaching | 53%* (285) | 47% (254) |
| I discovered that, for personal reasons, teaching was not the right career choice for me | 38% (132) | 62% (219) |
| I disliked the negative public image of teachers | 36% (135) | 64% (245) |
| I entered a graduate program or became a school administrator | 27% (81) | 73% (220) |
| I left for other personal reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy, child rearing) | 37% (124) | 64% (218) |
| I moved away from the area | 37% (128) | 63% (216) |
| I wanted to pursue another line of work | 55% (124) | 45% (100) |
| I wanted to retire | 20% (64) | 80% (253) |
| I was laid off | 11% (37) | 88% (280) |
| Other reasons not related to conditions at the school | 86% (53) | 13% (8) |

** The data in these cells reflect the respondents referred to in this report as "Leavers."*

**Additional data for Exhibit 2: Specific conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| There are too many bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings). | 57% (125) | 43% (95) |
| The district office did not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support. | 52% (114) | 48% (106) |
| Morale among staff was poor. | 45% (98) | 55% (122) |
| The school did not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 42% (93) | 58% (127) |
| The principal was not a supportive and effective educational leader. | 42% (92) | 58% (128) |
| The salary and benefits package was inadequate. | 41% (90) | 59% (130) |
| The administration and teaching staff were not given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting. | 40% (89) | 60% (131) |
| Not enough time was available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | 36% (80) | 64% (140) |
| The staff as a whole did not work effectively as a team and relationships generally were not strong. | 35% (76) | 65% (144) |
| Accountability pressures were too great. | 35% (76) | 65% (144) |
| Most parents were not involved in school activities or their child's education. | 34% (75) | 66% (145) |
| Standardized testing of students was counter productive. | 33% (72) | 67% (148) |
| I did not receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 30% (65) | 70% (155) |
| The educational mission and goals of the school were not understood nor widely shared by the administration and staff. | 29% (63) | 71% (157) |
| Students did not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 28% (61) | 72% (159) |
| Teachers did not have an opportunity to choose the types of professional development activities they participated in. | 27% (60) | 73% (160) |
| Teachers were not respected by parents and members of the local community. | 26% (57) | 74% (163) |

Table continued on the following page.

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| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| The size of my classes was not manageable. | 26% (57) | 74% (163) |
| The curriculum was too narrow and overly-scripted. | 26% (57) | 74% (163) |
| I did not receive adequate support and mentoring as a beginning teacher.* | 23% (21) | 77% (69) |
| The district, county, and state do not provide professional development that supports my teaching. | 23% (51) | 77% (169) |
| The school environment was not clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | 23% (51) | 77% (169) |
| I did not have close professional relationships with other members of the staff. | 17% (38) | 83% (182) |
| Housing was too expensive near my school. | 17% (37) | 83% (183) |
| The district or state agency does not provide a monetary incentive (such as a forgivable loan or a fellowship grant) to teach in this school. | 17% (37) | 83% (183) |
| The school did not receive adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | 16% (36) | 84% (184) |
| The school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 16% (36) | 84% (184) |
| Students did not have adequate access to educational technology. | 16% (36) | 84% (184) |
| The school was not reasonably close to where I lived. | 16% (35) | 84% (185) |
| I was not able to make an important difference in the lives of my students. | 15% (34) | 85% (186) |
| I did not have close personal relationships with other members of the staff. | 14% (31) | 86% (189) |
| My credential program coursework did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 13% (12) | 87% (78) |
| My student teaching experiences did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 12% (11) | 88% (79) |
| I was assigned to classes that were not appropriate given my credential and/or subject matter preparation. | 10% (22) | 90% (198) |

** Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The numbers and percentages shown for this condition represent the responses from this subset of respondents.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 3: Specific conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers from LOW POVERTY schools** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| My credential program coursework did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 2% (1) | 98% (50) |
| Most parents were not involved in school activities or their child's education. | 25% (36) | 75% (106) |
| My student teaching experiences did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 4% (2) | 96% (49) |
| I did not receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 24% (34) | 76% (108) |
| Students did not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 23% (32) | 77% (110) |
| The school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 12% (17) | 88% (125) |
| There are too many bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings) | 52% (74) | 48% (68) |
| The school did not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 37% (53) | 63% (89) |
| The principal was not a supportive and effective educational leader. | 38% (54) | 62% (88) |
| The size of my classes was not manageable. | 21% (30) | 79% (112) |
| The curriculum was too narrow and overly-scripted. | 21% (30) | 79% (112) |
| The school environment was not clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | 18% (26) | 82% (116) |

** Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The numbers and percentages shown for this condition represent the responses from this subset of respondents.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 3: Specific conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers from HIGH POVERTY schools** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| My student teaching experiences did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 25% (9) | 75% (27) |
| Most parents were not involved in school activities or their child's education. | 49% (34) | 51% (36) |
| My credential program coursework did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 28% (10) | 72% (26) |
| I did not receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 41% (29) | 59% (41) |
| Students did not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 40% (28) | 60% (42) |
| The school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 27% (19) | 73% (51) |
| There are too many bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings) | 67% (47) | 33% (23) |
| The school did not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 51% (36) | 49% (34) |
| The principal was not a supportive and effective educational leader. | 51% (36) | 49% (34) |
| The size of my classes was not manageable. | 34% (24) | 66% (46) |
| The curriculum was too narrow and overly-scripted. | 34% (24) | 66% (46) |
| The school environment was not clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | 31% (22) | 69% (48) |

** Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The numbers and percentages shown for this condition represent the responses from this subset of respondents.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 4: Specific conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers from ELEMENTARY schools** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| Not enough time was available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | 46% (43) | 54% (51) |
| The curriculum was too narrow and overly-scripted. | 35% (33) | 65% (61) |
| The size of my classes was not manageable. | 17% (16) | 83% (78) |
| The school did not receive adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | 22% (21) | 78% (73) |
| Accountability pressures were too great. | 42% (39) | 59% (55) |
| I did not receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 38% (36) | 62% (58) |
| The district office did not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support. | 61% (57) | 39% (37) |
| The principal was not a supportive and effective educational leader. | 48% (45) | 52% (49) |
| Students did not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 31% (29) | 69% (65) |
| The school did not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 46% (43) | 54% (51) |
| Standardized testing of students was counter productive. | 38% (36) | 62% (58) |
| The school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 21% (20) | 79% (74) |

**Additional data for Exhibit 4: Specific conditions cited by dissatisfied leavers from HIGH schools** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| Not enough time was available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | 23% (12) | 77% (41) |
| The curriculum was too narrow and overly-scripted. | 15% (8) | 85% (45) |
| The size of my classes was not manageable. | 34% (18) | 66% (35) |
| The school did not receive adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | 8% (4) | 93% (49) |
| Accountability pressures were too great. | 28% (15) | 72% (38) |
| I did not receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 26% (14) | 74% (39) |
| The district office did not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support. | 49% (26) | 51% (27) |
| The principal was not a supportive and effective educational leader. | 38% (20) | 62% (33) |
| Students did not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 21% (11) | 79% (42) |
| The school did not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 36% (19) | 64% (34) |
| Standardized testing of students was counter productive. | 30% (16) | 70% (37) |
| The school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 13% (7) | 87% (46) |

**Additional data for Exhibit 5: Reasons for becoming a teacher**

| Survey Prompt: **Indicate which of the following factors accounted for your becoming a teacher.** | **Respondents who selected "Very Important"** | **Respondents who selected "Somewhat Important"** | **Respondents who selected "Not Important"** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wanting to make a difference for children and society | 81% (659) | 17% (139) | 2% (13) |
| A desire to work with children and/or adolescents | 71% (574) | 24% (193) | 5% (40) |
| A passion for teaching | 71% (570) | 25% (202) | 4% (30) |
| A sense of calling | 64% (514) | 30% (242) | 5% (43) |
| A love for the subject matter I teach | 58% (473) | 33% (268) | 8% (68) |
| Teachers or role models | 37% (294) | 38% (300) | 25% (198) |
| Vacation schedule | 26% (211) | 46% (371) | 28% (229) |
| Support and influence from family and friends | 26% (205) | 43% (345) | 31% (252) |
| Salary and benefits | 16% (131) | 60% (481) | 24% (193) |

*Note: All survey respondents were asked to indicate which of these factors represented a "Very Important" reason for becoming a teacher. Respondents were allowed to select multiple factors.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 6: Willingness of leavers to return to the classroom**

| **Question presented to leavers: Would you consider returning as a classroom teacher?** | **Respondents who selected option (N and %)** |
|---|---|
| No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or the conditions in such a school. | 22% (49) |
| Yes, if many of the conditions listed above were corrected, even if I were not offered a higher salary. | 28% (62) |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions listed above were corrected. | 17% (38) |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, and if many of the conditions listed above were corrected. | 29% (64) |
| Yes, under other circumstances. | 21% (47) |

*Note: If respondents did not select the first option they were allowed to select one or more of the remaining options.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 7: Specific conditions cited by stayers** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to remain in the classroom?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| The administration and teaching staff are given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting. | 73% (117) | 27% (43) |
| I have close professional relationships with other members of the staff. | 64% (150) | 36% (85) |
| The staff as a whole works effectively as a team and relationships generally are strong. | 63% (149) | 37% (86) |
| I am able to make an important difference in the lives of my students. | 63% (147) | 37% (88) |
| The principal is a supportive and effective educational leader. | 61% (143) | 39% (92) |
| The salary and benefits package is adequate. | 60% (142) | 40% (93) |
| I am assigned to classes that are appropriate given my credential and/or subject matter preparation. | 60% (142) | 40% (93) |
| The district office provides reliable and appropriate administrative support. | 59% (138) | 41% (97) |
| My credential program coursework prepared me to be successful in this school.* | 58% (30) | 42% (22) |
| There is positive morale among staff. | 57% (135) | 43% (100) |
| Teachers are respected by parents and members of the local community. | 57% (135) | 43% (100) |
| I have close personal relationships with other members of the staff. | 55% (129) | 45% (106) |
| The school environment is clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | 55% (128) | 46% (107) |
| I received adequate support and mentoring as a beginning teacher.* | 52% (27) | 48% (25) |
| Teachers have an opportunity to choose the types of professional development activities they participated in. | 52% (122) | 48% (113) |
| Students have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 52% (121) | 49% (114) |
| The educational mission and goals of the school are understood and widely shared by the administration and staff. | 51% (120) | 49% (115) |
| The size of my classes is manageable. | 50% (118) | 50% (117) |
| My student teaching experiences prepared me to be successful in this school.* | 48% (25) | 52% (27) |
| The curriculum is neither too narrow nor overly-scripted. | 47% (111) | 53% (124) |
| The school staff is committed and prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 46% (109) | 54% (126) |
| The school is reasonably close to where I live. | 46% (109) | 54% (126) |
| The district, county, & state provide professional development that supports my teaching. | 46% (108) | 54% (127) |
| I receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 43% (102) | 57% (133) |
| The school receives adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 42% (98) | 58% (137) |
| Students have adequate access to educational technology. | 41% (97) | 59% (138) |
| There are few bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings). | 38% (90) | 62% (145) |
| Enough time is available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | 36% (85) | 64% (150) |
| Most parents are involved in school activities or their child's education. | 35% (83) | 65% (152) |
| The school receives adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | 33% (78) | 67% (157) |
| Accountability pressures are not too great. | 32% (76) | 68% (159) |
| I stay despite many of the challenging conditions in my school. | 26% (61) | 74% (174) |
| Standardized testing of students is productive. | 25% (58) | 75% (177) |
| Housing is not too expensive near my school. | 17% (41) | 83% (195) |
| The district or state agency provides a monetary incentive (such as a forgivable loan or a fellowship grant) to teach in this school. | 8% (19) | 92% (216) |

** Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The numbers and percentages shown for this condition represent the responses from this subset of respondents.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 8: Willingness of stayers to transfer to high-poverty schools** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: At this point, would you consider transferring to a high-poverty school? | Respondents who selected option (N and %) |
|---|---|
| No, for reasons that do not pertain to compensation or the conditions in such a school | 61% (89) |
| Yes, if many of the conditions listed above were in place, even if I were not offered a higher salary | 8% (12) |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, even if few of the conditions listed above were in place. | 10% (14) |
| Yes, if I were offered a sufficiently high salary, and if many of the conditions listed above were in place | 20% (29) |
| Yes, under other circumstances | 6% (9) |

**Additional data for Exhibit 9: Specific conditions cited by active special education leavers** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching? | Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat" | Respondents who selected "Not at All" |
|---|---|---|
| There are too many bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings) | 72% (85) | 28% (33) |
| I did not receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 70% (83) | 30% (35) |
| The district office did not provide reliable and appropriate administrative support. | 64% (75) | 36% (43) |
| Lack of understanding from colleagues about special education challenges. | 60% (61) | 40% (41) |
| IEP's and related paperwork are too complex and laborious. | 58% (59) | 42% (43) |
| Morale among staff was poor. | 55% (65) | 45% (53) |
| The school did not receive adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 54% (64) | 46% (54) |
| Not enough time was available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | 53% (62) | 47% (56) |
| The principal was not a supportive and effective educational leader. | 50% (59) | 50% (59) |
| Accountability pressures were too great. | 46% (54) | 54% (64) |
| Teachers were not respected by parents and members of the local community. | 42% (50) | 58% (68) |
| The administration and teaching staff were not given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting. | 42% (50) | 58% (68) |
| The staff as a whole did not work effectively as a team and relationships generally were not strong. | 42% (50) | 58% (68) |
| The salary and benefits package was inadequate. | 41% (48) | 59% (70) |
| Difficulty dealing with parents of special education students. | 39% (40) | 61% (62) |
| Students did not have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 39% (46) | 61% (72) |
| The size of my classes was not manageable. | 38% (45) | 62% (73) |
| Standardized testing of students was counter productive. | 38% (45) | 62% (73) |
| Most parents were not involved in school activities or their child's education. | 36% (43) | 64% (75) |
| The school did not receive adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | 36% (42) | 64% (76) |
| The educational mission and goals of the school were not understood nor widely shared by the administration and staff. | 36% (42) | 64% (76) |
| The curriculum was too narrow and overly-scripted. | 35% (41) | 65% (77) |
| Teachers did not have an opportunity to choose the types of professional development activities they participated in. | 33% (39) | 67% (79) |

Table continued on the following page.

Chart continued from the previous page.

| Survey Question: How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to leave teaching? | Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat" | Respondents who selected "Not at All" |
|---|---|---|
| Students did not have adequate access to educational technology. | 31% (37) | 69% (81) |
| The school environment was not clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | 31% (37) | 69% (81) |
| The district, county, and state do not provide professional development that supports my teaching. | 29% (34) | 71% (84) |
| I was not able to make an important difference in the lives of my students. | 27% (32) | 73% (86) |
| I did not have close professional relationships with other members of the staff. | 25% (30) | 75% (88) |
| The district or state agency does not provide a monetary incentive (such as a forgivable loan or a fellowship grant) to teach in this school. | 21% (25) | 79% (93) |
| I did not have close personal relationships with other members of the staff. | 21% (25) | 79% (93) |
| I did not receive adequate support and mentoring as a beginning teacher.* | 21% (5) | 79% (19) |
| The school staff was not committed or prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 18% (21) | 82% (97) |
| My credential program coursework did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 17% (4) | 83% (20) |
| My student teaching experiences did not prepare me to be successful in this school.* | 17% (4) | 83% (20) |
| Housing was too expensive near my school. | 14% (17) | 86% (101) |
| The school was not reasonably close to where I lived. | 12% (14) | 88% (104) |
| I was assigned to classes that were not appropriate given my credential and/ or subject matter preparation. | 11% (13) | 89% (105) |

** Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The numbers and percentages shown for this condition represent the responses from this subset of respondents.*

**Additional data for Exhibit 10: Specific conditions cited by active special education stayers** (N's and percentages)

| Survey Question: **How much did each of the factors below affect your decision to remain in the classroom?** | **Respondents who selected "A Lot" or "Somewhat"** | **Respondents who selected "Not at All"** |
|---|---|---|
| My credential program coursework prepared me to be successful in this school.* | 70% (14) | 30% (6) |
| I have close professional relationships with other members of the staff. | 69% (185) | 31% (85) |
| The principal is a supportive and effective educational leader. | 67% (181) | 33% (89) |
| I am able to make an important difference in the lives of my students. | 66% (179) | 34% (91) |
| The staff as a whole works effectively as a team and relationships generally are strong. | 64% (174) | 36% (96) |
| I am assigned to classes that are appropriate given my credential and/or subject matter preparation. | 64% (174) | 36% (96) |
| There is positive morale among staff. | 62% (168) | 38% (102) |
| The district office provides reliable and appropriate administrative support. | 61% (164) | 39% (106) |
| My student teaching experiences prepared me to be successful in this school.* | 60% (12) | 40% (8) |
| The salary and benefits package is adequate. | 60% (161) | 40% (109) |
| I have close personal relationships with other members of the staff. | 59% (160) | 41% (110) |
| The school environment is clean, safe, and conducive to learning. | 59% (159) | 41% (111) |
| I receive adequate support for my special needs students. | 58% (157) | 42% (113) |
| Teachers are respected by parents and members of the local community. | 58% (156) | 42% (114) |
| The administration and teaching staff are given appropriate authority over curriculum, instruction strategies, school governance, and budgeting. | 58% (156) | 42% (114) |
| I have little difficulty dealing with parents of special education students. | 56% (112) | 44% (89) |
| I received adequate support and mentoring as a beginning teacher.* | 55% (11) | 45% (9) |
| There is adequate understanding from colleagues about special education challenges. | 54% (109) | 46% (92) |
| The educational mission and goals of the school are understood and widely shared by the administration and staff. | 54% (146) | 46% (124) |
| The school is reasonably close to where I live. | 53% (143) | 47% (127) |
| The size of my classes is manageable. | 53% (142) | 47% (128) |
| Teachers have an opportunity to choose the types of professional development activities they participate in. | 51% (138) | 49% (132) |
| The district, county, and state provide professional development that supports my teaching. | 49% (133) | 51% (137) |
| Students have access to appropriate textbooks and learning materials. | 48% (130) | 52% (140) |
| Students have adequate access to educational technology. | 45% (122) | 55% (148) |
| The curriculum is not too narrow or overly-scripted. | 45% (122) | 55% (148) |
| The school staff is committed and prepared to meet the instructional needs of English learners. | 41% (112) | 59% (158) |
| The school receives adequate resources to achieve its educational mission. | 39% (105) | 61% (165) |
| Enough time is available for planning and collaboration with colleagues. | 35% (94) | 65% (176) |
| The school receives adequate support from local agencies (child welfare, counseling, health). | 34% (91) | 66% (179) |
| Accountability pressures are not too great. | 33% (90) | 67% (180) |
| Most parents are involved in school activities and their child's education. | 33% (88) | 67% (182) |
| There are few bureaucratic impediments (e.g., paperwork, interruptions, unnecessary meetings) | 31% (85) | 69% (185) |
| IEP's and related paperwork are not overly complex or laborious. | 31% (62) | 69% (139) |
| I stay despite many of the challenging conditions | 27% (72) | 73% (198) |
| Housing is not too expensive near my school. | 22% (59) | 78% (211) |
| Standardized testing of students is productive. | 19% (51) | 81% (219) |
| The district or state agency provides a monetary incentive (such as a forgivable loan or a fellowship grant) to teach in this school. | 5% (14) | 95% (256) |

** Conditions marked with an asterisk were presented only to respondents who taught less than 5 years. The numbers and percentages shown for this condition represent the responses from this subset of respondents.*

## APPENDIX D. CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

**Exhibit 12: Survey Respondents by Sample Group**

| | Number of letters mailed | Number of letters returned as undeliverable | Number of teachers participating in survey | Response rate (participants/delivered letters) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sample A** | 6000 | 1447 | 875 | 19% |
| **Sample B** | 8000 | 248 | 1052 | 14% |

**Exhibit 13: Stayers and Leavers by Sample Group**

| | Sample A | | Sample B | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| **Stayers** | 295 | 56.9% | 453 | 69% |
| **Dissatisfied Leavers** | 223 | 43.1% | 206 | 31% |

**Exhibit 14: Stayers and Leavers by Sample Group and school poverty level**

| | Sample A | | | | Sample B | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Low Poverty Schs | | High Poverty Schs | | Low Poverty Schs | | High Poverty Schs | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| **Stayers** | 180 | 56% | 50 | 42% | 296 | 70% | 94 | 58% |
| **Diss. Leavers** | 143 | 44% | 70 | 58% | 125 | 30% | 69 | 42% |

*Note: The total number of Stayers and Leavers by school SES is less than the total for each population because the SES level of some schools could not be determined.*

**Exhibit 15: Average number of years teaching in any school**

| | | | Average Years |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sample A** | Stayers | Low Poverty Schools | 13.9 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 11.6 |
| | Dissatisfied Leavers | Low Poverty Schools | 10.1 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 6.6 |
| **Sample B** | Stayers | Low Poverty Schools | 14.6 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 14.2 |
| | Dissatisfied Leavers | Low Poverty Schools | 12.2 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 15.0 |

*Note: The average number of years teaching for all survey respondents was 12.6. According to the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS), the average number of years teaching for all K-12 public school teachers in 2004-05 was 13.4 (California Department of Education (CDE) Educational Demographics Unit, 2005b).*

**Exhibit 16: Average number of years teaching in current (or last) school**

| | | | Average Years |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sample A | Stayers | Low Poverty Schools | 7.5 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 8.1 |
| | Dissatisfied Leavers | Low Poverty Schools | 5.1 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 4.3 |
| Sample B | Stayers | Low Poverty Schools | 7.3 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 7.9 |
| | Dissatisfied Leavers | Low Poverty Schools | 5.6 |
| | | High Poverty Schools | 6.2 |

**Exhibit 17: Race/Ethnicity of Respondents**

| | Sample A | | Sample B | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Low-Poverty Schools | High-Poverty Schools | Low-Poverty Schools | High-Poverty Schools |
| American Indian | 2.9% (8) | 2.2% (2) | 3.0% (12) | 3.3% (5) |
| Chinese | 1.8% (5) | 3.2% (3) | .5% (2) | .7% N(1) |
| Japanese | 1.8% (5) | 0% (0) | 2.5% (10) | .7% (1) |
| Korean | 1.1% (3) | 3.2% (3) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Vietnamese | 0% (0) | 1.1% (1) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Asian Indian | 1.1% (3) | 0% (0) | 1% (4) | 0% (0) |
| Laotian | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Cambodian | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Other Asian | .4% (1) | 2.2% (2) | .8% (3) | 0% (0) |
| Hawaiian | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| Guamanian | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Samoan | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Other Pac. Islander | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | .3% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Filipino | 2.2% (6) | 1.1% (1) | 1.3% (5) | .7% (1) |
| Hispanic/Latino | 10.2% (28) | 12.9% (12) | 6.0% (24) | 6.6% (10) |
| African American | .7% (2) | 7.5% (7) | 2.8% (11) | 2.6% (4) |
| White | 84.7% (232) | 73.1% (68) | 88.7% (353) | 92.1% (139) |

*Note: Respondents were allowed to select more than one race/ethnicity designation. The same designations are used by the California Department of Education to classify K-12 public school students.*

**Exhibit 18: Age of Respondents**

| Age range | Sample A | | | | Sample B | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stayers | | Dissatisfied Leavers | | Stayers | | Dissatisfied Leavers | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| **20 – 25** | 7 | 2.4% | 5 | 2.3% | 2 | .5% | 1 | .5% |
| **26 – 30** | 32 | 10.9% | 29 | 13.6% | 14 | 3.2% | 12 | 6.0% |
| **31 – 35** | 42 | 14.3% | 32 | 15.0% | 38 | 8.6% | 19 | 9.5% |
| **36 – 40** | 27 | 9.2% | 36 | 16.8% | 36 | 8.2% | 16 | 8.0% |
| **41 – 45** | 46 | 15.7% | 33 | 15.4% | 52 | 11.8% | 19 | 9.5% |
| **46 – 50** | 42 | 14.3% | 21 | 9.8% | 93 | 21.1% | 34 | 17.1% |
| **51 – 55** | 54 | 18.4% | 25 | 11.7% | 105 | 23.9% | 31 | 15.6% |
| **56 – 60** | 31 | 10.6% | 24 | 11.2% | 78 | 17.7% | 43 | 21.6% |
| **61 – 65** | 10 | 3.4% | 7 | 3.3% | 18 | 4.1% | 15 | 7.5% |
| **Above 65** | 2 | .7% | 2 | .9% | 4 | .9% | 9 | 4.5% |

**Exhibit 19: Gender of Respondents**

| Gender | Sample A | | | | Sample B | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stayers | | Dissatisfied Leavers | | Stayers | | Dissatisfied Leavers | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| **Female** | 205 | 70.4% | 145 | 67.4% | 340 | 76.4% | 153 | 76.5% |
| **Male** | 86 | 29.6% | 70 | 32.6% | 105 | 23.6% | 47 | 23.5% |

*Note: According to the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS), the overall percentage of male teachers in 2004-05 working in public K-12 schools was 28.1. The overall percentage of female teachers was 71.9 (California Department of Education (CDE) Educational Demographics Unit, 2005b).*

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