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General questions/arrange interviews

More than half of CPS teachers leave their schools within five years; African-American schools hit hardest

Workforce conditions such as principal leadership, teacher collaboration, student safety influence stability

About 100 Chicago schools suffer from chronically high rates of teacher turnover, losing a quarter or more of their teaching staff every year, and many of these schools serve predominantly low-income African American children, according to a study released Monday by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

In the typical Chicago elementary school, 51 percent of the teachers working in 2002 had left four years later, by 2006, while the typical high school had seen 54 percent leave. These findings surface at a time when many principals are scrambling to find qualified teachers for hard-to-staff schools.

This study, *The Schools Teachers Leave: Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools*, reflects the Consortium's commitment to study education issues that are top priorities in Chicago and districts nationwide. It was funded by the Joyce Foundation, which works to close the achievement gap by improving the quality of teachers in schools that serve low-income and minority children.

While some teacher mobility is normal and expected, high turnover rates can produce a range of organizational problems at schools, such as discontinuity in professional development, shortages in key subjects, and loss of teacher leadership. Previous research also indicates that schools with high turnover are more likely to have inexperienced, ineffective teachers.

"This is particularly troubling because the vast majority of schools with chronically low stability struggle with very low levels of student achievement," wrote Elaine Allensworth, an interim executive director at the Consortium and the study's lead author. "These schools desperately need to show improvements in teaching and student learning, but year after year they struggle to hold on to teachers."

This report examined the factors associated with high mobility rates, including teachers' background characteristics, school structure, students' characteristics, and workplace conditions. The data includes personnel records from about 35,000 teachers in 538 elementary schools and 118 high schools from 2002-03 to 2006-07. It also reflects teacher and student survey responses, student achievement data, school demographics, crime statistics and block-level census data. The Consortium does not have access to personnel records of teachers in charter schools, so these schools and teachers are not included in the study.

The key findings include:

- Teacher mobility rates at schools with low teacher commitment are abysmal—67 percent in elementary schools leave within five years, and 76 percent turn over in the high schools. These are schools where teachers do not feel loyal to their schools, would not recommend their school to parents, and do not look forward to teaching every day.
- In the schools with the best workplace conditions, teacher turnover averages about 10 percent each year.
- Many of the teachers who leave their school each year go to other CPS schools; however, the percentage of teachers remaining in CPS has declined in recent years.
- Teachers of all races are most likely to leave predominantly African-American schools than mixed-minority, predominantly Latino or integrated schools -- although white and Latino teachers leave these schools at slightly higher rates. Systemwide, the mobility rates of white teachers have been increasing in recent years.
- In elementary schools, teachers' perceptions of parents as partners in students' education are strongly tied to stability; in high schools, teachers tend to leave schools with the highest rates of student misbehavior.
- First-year teachers are far more likely to leave their CPS schools after one year, especially in elementary schools, than their more experienced colleagues -- 33 percent of new teachers leave in one year, compared to 18 percent among those teaching two years or more. These one-year retention rates did not improve during the five years analyzed.
- Small schools have higher mobility than large schools, even when controlling for enrollment declines.
- Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they shared with their colleagues a strong sense of
 collective responsibility and innovation, and in schools where they trust their principals and view
 them as strong instructional leaders.

While the average CPS school does not lose many more teachers each year than the typical school in Illinois or across the nation, these losses add up over time and create obstacles for sustaining new initiatives and staff training, the study reveals. Moreover, the vast differences in teacher mobility across schools perpetuate inequities in hard-to-staff schools. High turnover forces principals to constantly devote vast amounts of time and energy for recruiting, hiring and mentoring staff – and this diverts attention from other vital school improvements.

"Many schools are likely stuck in a cycle of teacher loss that is hard to break – teachers leave because of poor school climate and low achievement, but these are hard to improve when there is a constant turnover of teachers each year," the authors wrote.

Founded in 1990, the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago conducts research of high technical quality that influences policy and practice in Chicago and nationwide.