

Lessons Learned? Heeding the Voices of First-Year Teachers in School, State, and National Contexts

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Introduction

In the Spring of 2006, in the midst of our second year of work, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) commissioned a nationally representative survey of new public school teachers in their first year of classroom teaching ($N = 641$). The TQ Center partnered with the nonprofit public opinion research firm Public Agenda to field this survey to better understand the strengths and sensibilities, attitudes, and expectations of the future U.S. teacher core—especially those working in at-risk schools.

We sought to conduct this work to advance two of the primary goals of the TQ Center: (1) to ensure a highly qualified teacher workforce by developing needs-based solutions and (2) to galvanize public and policymaker support to meet the demands of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act related to teacher quality. From the growing research on teacher quality and our own experiences, we knew that one key barrier to securing a highly qualified teacher workforce is what Richard Ingersoll calls “holes in the teacher supply bucket”—teacher attrition and mobility (Ingersoll, 2002). This attrition is highest among new teachers (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007); therefore, we wished to know more precisely the needs of first-year teachers to determine how best to meet them, thereby helping states to better understand this new generation of teachers and helping them to reduce unwanted attrition in their workforce. Finally, we sought to highlight new teachers’ voices to help build public and policymaker support for teachers and teacher quality.

In this paper, we explore some of the findings of this survey research more deeply than we have elsewhere (e.g., National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality & Public Agenda, 2007a; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality & Public Agenda, 2007b; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality & Public Agenda, 2008; Rochkind, Immerwahr, Ott, & Johnson, 2007) and place them in the larger context of the literature base and real-world practice. Although we realize that this research falls short of the standard of rigorous, scientifically validated research on teacher perceptions and resulting behaviors (see, for example, National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality & Public Agenda, 2007b, the limitations in the methodology section of the report), it constitutes more than simply a poll of public attitudes.¹ The findings, therefore, taken judiciously and placed in context, are useful to guide policy and practice. Finally, using Kimmelman’s (2006) knowledge framework for capacity building, we discuss the role of the TQ Center as a knowledge dissemination organization.

Finding 1: Variousy Committed?

Almost 25 percent of first-year public school teachers in high-needs schools believed that they would be classroom teachers for only the next five, or fewer, years.

This finding mirrors other teacher survey findings. In the 2006 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* ($N = 1,001$), for example, teachers teaching five years or fewer were asked, “Within the next five years, how likely is it that you will leave the teaching profession to go into some different occupation?” and 27 percent said they were either very likely or fairly likely to leave, 22 percent said they were not too likely, and 50 percent said they were not at all likely to leave (Markow, Moessner, & Horowitz, 2006). The Public Agenda/TQ Center survey found that 68 percent of first-year teachers say teaching is a lifelong career choice, 27 percent leave the classroom for another job in education, and 6 percent will change fields altogether. Actually, new teachers may be more optimistic than other teachers, for example, the National Center for Education Information survey (Feistritzer & Shankar, 2005) found that 4 in 10 public school teachers (overall) do not expect to be teaching in a K–12 school in five years ($N = 1,028$).

But how closely do new teachers’ beliefs about their future careers mirror their actual behavior? It is often cited that 50 percent of teachers leave within the first five years of teaching. However, emerging data show that this statistic is overblown. For example, in the state of Illinois, DeAngelis and Presley (2007) found that 27 percent of new teachers leave teaching in Illinois public schools and do not return. Overall, more than two out of five teachers leave their initial schools within their first two years, and 67 percent leave their initial school within five years. Most of these teachers, however, go to different schools within Illinois or take time off before eventually returning to the classroom. One third of teachers who leave during their first five years return to teaching in Illinois.

A recent analysis of the nationwide 2003–04 Schools and Staffing Teacher Follow-Up Survey found that, of the 3,214,900 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2003–04 school year, 84 percent remained at the same school, 8 percent moved to a different school, and 8 percent left the profession during the following year (Marvel et al, 2007). In high-needs schools (where 50 percent or more of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), 9.7 percent left teaching and 10 percent left the school. Among public school teachers under 30, these percentages were slightly higher—15 percent left their school, and 9 percent left teaching.

Survey research has also shed light on the reasons teachers leave. Of those teachers in the MetLife sample who had a mentor during their first year of teaching, 50 percent reported they were not too likely or not at all likely to leave, whereas 71 percent of those who did not have a mentor said they were either very or fairly likely to leave (Markow et al., 2006). The MetLife study did not examine the effect of school leadership or teachers’ perceptions of their preparation on their likelihood of leaving.

Ingersoll (2002) found that among teachers who left teaching the previous year because of job dissatisfaction (as opposed to personal reasons or retirement), 30 percent reported that they left because of a lack of administrative support. The Teaching Commission asked a sample of new

and veteran teachers why new teachers leave—nearly 50 percent said the pay was too low, and just as many (47 percent) said that new teachers do not get enough help and support (Learning Point Associates & Teaching Commission, 2005). Darling Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) found that among new teachers (with four or fewer years experience) surveyed in 1998 in New York City, 5 percent of those who reported feeling “poorly prepared” said they were planning to leave teaching as soon as possible, whereas only 2 percent of those who reported feeling “well-prepared” said they were planning to leave. In addition to teachers wanting better administrators, another finding is that teachers would like the necessary resources and the freedom to make instructional decisions, to have the needed materials to teach the curriculum, and administer assessments in a manner in which they deem appropriate for their students (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003).

In a profession that counts on routines and procedures in the classroom, and where continuity for students is valued and demand is high for teachers to improve student academic content knowledge, it is unfortunate and possibly detrimental that new teachers—whether its 30 or 50 percent, particularly in high-needs and hard-to-staff schools, and who have demonstrated their own academic skill—choose to leave the profession. What can be done now to alleviate the movement of skilled teachers out of hard-to-staff schools to more affluent, less minority-populated, schools?

Clearly, working conditions, an emerging area of renewed focus for policymakers and practitioners, are beginning to surface as the biggest issue for teachers and their reported levels of satisfaction with the job of teaching. Working conditions are not just school buildings, bathrooms, and books, but include larger cultural, structural, and political factors. Yes, students, teachers, aides, and principals prefer—and deserve—well-lit buildings that offer air conditioning and heat; with libraries and technology; with bathrooms that are clean and gymnasiums that allow for quality physical education; with band rooms, art rooms, and nurses; with psychologists and strong family support. But they also need leadership from an administrator or team of administrators that provides guidance to teachers, service providers, and volunteer parents and guardians who work to give instruction and support to students.

Administrators who can provide instructional guidance, work to create a community of learners, provide adequate and fair evaluation of performance, and offer relevant professional development opportunities that are useful to move the conditions of teaching and learning forward and result in improved student achievement are the hallmarks of what teachers are asking for in study after study (see Berry & Fuller, 2007; Coggshall, 2006a; Farkas et al., 2003; Viadero, 2008). The phrase *working conditions* ties up all these issues from clean buildings to instructional guidance into a neat package, but it is a complex package filled with issues that are difficult to resolve quickly. Clearly, how human capital is developed and supported is a key first step in unpacking the issues that point to why teachers are transferring from one school to another or leaving the teaching profession.

Policy Implications

How the educational system works to recruit and retain teachers—part of the human capital chain of issues to resolve—is key. What incentives are in place to attract seasoned teachers to low-socioeconomic-status schools? What supports are in place to ensure equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers across a district? Are new teachers being placed in hard-to-staff schools and expected to deliver high-quality instruction? Are special education teachers receiving the support they need to meet the highly qualified requirements of NCLB? Are high school teachers getting the differentiated support they need to work with adolescents and deal with content-specific pedagogy? Districts that have taken steps to improve how they hire, place, and support teachers have made dramatic growth in their retention data and have improved the number of highly qualified teachers in their classrooms (see Olson, 2008). How public schools treat their human capital, the teachers and principals, is, in fact, important if not paramount. Issues that fall into this discussion include how teachers are recruited and prepared. What incentives are in place that will entice bright, young college graduates or highly specialized (e.g., math, science, and vocational arts) career changers to choose an education path? How complex and arduous is the licensing process, and how transparent is the hiring process? All of these questions need to be addressed in a systematic and comprehensive manner if change is to occur and be sustainable in the current educational hiring process.

Those who want to become teachers often do not know where to go to get basic information on how to become a teacher. According to the *Quality Counts* 2008 report, only 20 states provide incentives to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools, and 16 provide incentives for teachers to work in shortage fields including mathematics and science. Thirty-eight states provide incentives for teachers to earn certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Seventeen states have incentives for teachers to assume leadership outside the classroom, and seven states have pay-for-performance programs (Education Week, 2008). This is not enough—more states need to take action and address the complexity of their state licensure systems, create transportable certification status, and offer incentives that make a difference in the caliber of teacher they are hiring and placing in hard-to-staff schools.

How teachers are treated in the profession directly relates to the choices they make on whether or not to stay in the profession. The profession still typically offers summers off, good health benefits, and rewarding work, but these are not the reasons that high-quality professionals will continue teaching in America's classrooms. The education profession needs to model its structures and procedures for hiring, supporting, compensating, and retaining teachers upon those of other professions that are competing for the best and brightest college graduates. The education profession needs to find ways to build in teacher career tracks, pay for quality performance, place teachers appropriately in schools where they will be supported and materials will be provided, reduce the teaching loads for new teachers (only two states—North Carolina and South Carolina—currently offer this option [see Education Week, 2008]), provide useful and focused professional development, foster collegiality, and insist on administrators who can provide instructional leadership at the school site. Richard Ingersoll states that “all these things have to do with the way that places are managed and operated and run. . . . If we improved these kinds of things, we could dramatically reduce turnover” (Viadero, 2008, p. 35).

Finally, DeAngelis and Presley (2007) suggest a sensible approach to reducing high teacher turnover: States should avoid implementing broad and sweeping legislation following a “single-solution-for-all” model; instead, they should identify schools and districts with high levels of new teacher attrition and develop targeted intervention strategies to address those schools’ attrition problems. Better understanding human capital and how we develop and support it will be key to changing retention rates and even the overall status of teaching as a profession.

Induction. Across the long line of events in the life of a teacher, from deciding to become a teacher to teacher preparation to taking on one’s first teaching assignment to advancing into a leadership position, multiple opportunities exist for becoming discouraged or disenchanted with the profession of teaching. But there are some moments when teachers are more vulnerable to burning out and giving up. Teachers are particularly vulnerable in the first year of teaching. The antidote? Standards-based, state-funded induction programs.

Not just any induction program works. Key findings in Smith and Ingersoll (2004) can give administrators and those setting policy and determining funding resources, such as legislatures and state agencies, direction on how to implement more successful programs of induction. For example, they suggest in their report the following critical program components:

- Offer bundles or packages of supports (some choice for the beginning teacher on the types of support and professional development they can access).
- Provide a trained mentor from the same field (particularly for middle and high school teachers).
- Provide the opportunity to teachers to participate in group or collective planning and collaborative activities.

During the first years of teaching, beginning teachers are “laying down” their mental map of what it means to be a teacher and part of the larger educational community. Modeling how to be part of the community, how to coplan and teach not only within a grade level but across grade levels, providing lesser teaching loads and more opportunities for new teachers to observe veteran teachers, and requiring that teachers examine their own practice and reflect on how to continue to grow as a practitioner as part of the induction experience are opportunities that should not be missed. The authors encourage policymakers to seriously consider the impact that structured, standards-based induction programs have on attrition. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and others, assure us that induction matters.

Overall, the first-year teachers surveyed in this study seem to be relatively realistic about their potential to stay in the classroom, as compared to the history of new teacher attrition. Although some turnover is inevitable, losing so many new teachers is an untenable waste of resources. The following sections of this paper present three additional findings from the Public Agenda/TQ Center survey, and their links to new teacher attrition are discussed.

Finding 2: Variously Prepared?

Forty-four percent of new teachers consider themselves very prepared for their first year of teaching.

Roughly 4 out of 10 teachers believe themselves to be very prepared for their first year of teaching. This is both encouraging and cause for concern. It suggests that it is possible to provide enough training for teachers to feel fully prepared for the realities of the classroom; at the same time, 6 of 10 teachers felt that their preparation program, if they participated in one, somehow fell short.

Other surveys have illuminated the areas in which new teachers feel more or less prepared. For example, The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington conducted a fast-response survey using a scientific sample of Washington teachers and found that 52 percent of teachers with 0 to 4 years of experience felt they were very prepared to teach the official or intended curriculum; even fewer (17 percent) felt very prepared to ready their students for state assessments (Knapp, Elfers, & Plecki, 2004). In its survey of 800 teachers, MetLife (Markow & Martin, 2005) found that teachers teaching fewer than five years felt most prepared in terms of being able to teach the subject matter and to hold the attention of the class (see Table 1). Teachers felt least prepared to work with children with varying abilities, to get support, and to maintain order and discipline. Neither study disaggregated the findings between teachers taking different pathways to teaching.

Table 1. U.S. Teachers’ Perception of Their Preparedness

How prepared were you for the following aspects of your first teaching position?	Extremely or Very Prepared	Prepared	Not Too Prepared or Not At All Prepared”
To teach the subject matter	64%	31%	5%
To hold the attention of the class	55%	38%	8%
To maintain order and discipline	44%	41%	15%
To get the support you needed from your principal	46%	36%	18%
To get the support you needed from the other teachers in your school	50%	39%	10%
To get the resources and supplies you needed	38%	43%	18%
To work with children with varying abilities	35%	42%	22%
To select teaching materials	39%	44%	14%
To engage families in supporting their children’s education	32%	44%	23%

Source: Markow, D., & Martin, S. (2005). *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships*. New York: MetLife.

The MetLife survey findings (Markow & Martin, 2005) illustrate the interaction between teachers' feelings of preparedness and the conditions of their work. To wit: 18 percent of the new teachers did not feel prepared to get the support they needed from their principal. This suggests two things: Either they did not cover such a topic in their preparation, or they are not getting the support they need—or both. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that teachers' perceptions of preparedness were significantly correlated with their sense of efficacy about whether they are able to make a difference in student learning. Teachers who felt better prepared were significantly more likely to believe they could reach all of their students, handle problems in the classroom, teach all students to high levels, and make a difference in the lives of their students. In other studies, teachers' self-efficacy has been shown to be significantly related to student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Policy Implications

The vast majority of the classroom teachers in these surveys were successful graduates of preparation programs who had passed states' licensing exams. Thus, according to the program and the state, these teachers were considered sufficiently prepared. The disconnect between what teachers themselves say and what teacher preparation programs say ought to be better studied and thoughtfully addressed. (Administrators also say they wish teachers were better prepared [Markow et al., 2006].)

One way to more closely couple preparation with the reality of the classroom is the creation of teacher education programs that marry preparation with induction or, in other words, provide a seamless transition from preparation to induction. That is, the same faculty members who prepare teachers before the classroom continue to mentor them within their placement. This way, those faculty members stay closer to the schools and have a better understanding of the realities of the classroom. A high-quality induction program does not stop at mentorship, of course, so there would be other supports in place. The Teachers for a New Era project funded by the Carnegie Corporation with additional funds from the Ford and Annenberg Foundations is one promising clinical model of teacher preparation that is coupled with a two-year induction or residence period. According to the initiative's prospectus (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2001), there is close cooperation between colleges of education and actual practicing schools, and master teachers in the schools hold appropriate appointments as clinical faculty in the College of Education. Unfortunately, it is too soon to say whether the graduates of this initiative will feel better prepared than others.

As an effort to promote change among traditional preparation providers, the New York Comprehensive Center, in collaboration with the TQ Center, is working to bring together teacher preparation program officials and faculty, state education agency personnel, and other stakeholders for a series of working seminars. These seminars are intended to promote change from within these programs through ongoing collaboration and the free introduction of new ideas.

Finding 3: Various Supported?

Seventy-three percent of first-year teachers give their principals “excellent” or “good” ratings for providing instructional leadership and guidance.

On the surface, this finding is good news—almost three fourths of the sampled teachers gave high marks to their administration. (And the differences between teachers in high-needs schools² and non-high-needs schools were not statistically significant.) Yet it still raises a serious concern that as many as one in four teachers are not as satisfied. First-year teachers also were asked to rate the administration at their schools in terms of discipline and providing resources. See Table 2 for the results. Across all these dimensions of leadership practice, teachers in high-needs schools were slightly, though not significantly, less satisfied with their school administration.

Table 2. First-Year Teachers’ Perceptions of Administrator Leadership

Percentage of first-year teachers who give administrators good marks for supporting them on discipline and providing good resources and instructional guidance	Total	Non-High-Needs Schools	High-Needs Schools
Providing instructional leadership and guidance	73%	75%	68%
Supporting you in handling discipline problems	76%	79%	72%
Providing adequate resources like textbooks and well-equipped classrooms	79%	79%	76%

A MetLife survey (Markow & Scheer, 2003) had similar findings: 31 percent of teachers gave their principals either a fair or poor rating for respecting the staff in the school, and 36 percent gave the same ratings for principals’ support of teachers to be the “best they can be.” Analyses of the Schools and Staffing Teacher Follow-Up Survey found that 37 percent of those who moved to a different school indicated it was because of dissatisfaction with support from administrators (Marvel et al., 2007). Even more to the point, 53 percent of the respondents in the Public Agenda/TQ Center survey said the lack of support from administration is a drawback to the profession. These statistics raise important questions: Why do nearly three fourths of new teachers feel so positive about their administrators, and what is causing the others to feel so different?

The importance of school leadership should not be underestimated. “He once taught in a low-performing, high-poverty school and would do it again if the working conditions were right” (Viadero, 2008, p. 32). Those words describe William Ferriter, a National Board Certified middle school teacher who currently works in a relatively affluent school in North Carolina. Ferriter explained that if he could find a school where teachers had the administrative support, the resources, and the freedom needed to succeed, he would consider going back to a school that most education researchers and policymakers agree needs teachers with his background and credentials. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the support of administrators is among the top

reasons teachers left or intended to leave the profession (see DeAngelis, Peddle, Trott, & Bergeron, 2002; Johnson & Birkeland, 2002). The lack of strong administrative support detrimentally affects the ability to recruit, retain, and motivate a sufficient number of high-quality teachers.

It can be an interesting dilemma to ponder whether intuition or research provides the most sufficient answers to those questions. For example, when considering the importance of school leadership with teachers, many educators have concluded that next to teachers, principals are the most important ingredient for successful student achievement. That conclusion, however, is based on very little, if any, gold-standard research defining the type of leadership teachers will follow with passion and commitment. Yet, when schools have poor achievement results, much like what happens in sports, the leader is replaced.

More interesting is this: It is unclear what makes the leaders of successful sports teams consistent winners. The New England Patriots football team has had a highly successful run during the last few years under Coach Bill Belichick. The UCLA basketball team holds the record for most consecutive NCAA championships under Coach John Wooden. Intuition tells us that their leadership must have had some influence on the success of their teams. One does not need gold-standard research to understand that their success is unusual despite working with players of similar talent and background. It would seem intuitive to better understand how the coaches' leadership fit the needs of their followers and apply that knowledge to better understanding the contextual needs of a school staff and their alignment to the leadership practices used in the school.

For approximately 100 years, there has been considerable research on leadership that has resulted in numerous theories about what it takes to be an ideal leader. To date, there is no one single behavior, trait, gene, or practice that ensures leadership success. Instead, leadership seems to be more about aligning the goals and beliefs of the followers with those of the leader. And, because there can be no leadership without followers, it is critically important to ensure that alignment occurs. That can be a daunting challenge for a school principal working with a highly diverse staff that has differing beliefs about education ideology and pedagogy. Without that alignment, however, ineffective leadership will result in a fragmented staff and lower teacher performance—thus, lower student performance—in the school.

It comes as no surprise that our survey findings clearly indicate that teachers want principals who are effective leaders and provide the needed support for them to succeed in a complex and challenging profession. If teachers are given that support, the likelihood is greater that they will remain in teaching and that student achievement in that school will increase.

A limited number of other surveys provide clues as to just what aspects of leadership teachers wish for. Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, and Billingsley (1995) surveyed special educators regarding the support they received from central office and its impact on their job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave. The findings indicate the teachers perceived they were being managed from a distance and not getting proactive assistance, and there was a perceived dissonance on priorities and values between them and the central office administrators. Interestingly, the authors also noted that there was not a high correlation of teacher attitudes

between their perceptions of building and central office support. The teachers, however, stressed the importance of on-site, building-level support.

In the 2006 MetLife survey, education deans and chairpersons rated the importance of a variety of factors in fostering teachers who are highly satisfied with their teaching experiences. The nine factors and the percentages of deans or chairpersons considering them to be very important are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Education School Deans’ or Chairpersons’ Perceptions (N = 200)

How important are the following factors in fostering teachers who are highly satisfied with their teaching experience?	Very Important
The principal treating the teacher with respect	97%
The principal providing direction for the school	87%
Assigning or matching first-time teachers to a more experienced teacher as a mentor	83%
The principal showing appreciation for the teacher’s work	82%
The principal handling student discipline fairly	82%
The school or district providing adequate opportunities for training	80%
The principal acknowledging outstanding performance by teachers	72%
The local community treating teachers as professionals	69%
The principal making himself or herself accessible to staff during the day	58%

Source: Markow, D., Moessner, C., & Horowitz, H. (2006). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Expectations and Experiences*. New York: MetLife.

Of particular interest should be the deans’ and chairpersons’ perception that the principal’s accessibility during the day is far less important than the principal treating the teacher with respect. Also in MetLife’s survey, only 9 percent of teachers say their principals do not treat them with respect—although that is almost 1 in 10 teachers (which is nearly 400,000 people across the United States), and 13 percent of teachers say their principals are not accessible during the school day (Markow et al., 2006).

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) reviewed the vast research on the topic and identified seven key findings about successful school leadership:

- School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices—not the practices themselves—demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
- School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions.
- School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

- Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
- A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness. (p. 3)

Applying the factors noted by Leithwood et al. (2006) are likely to have a positive impact on school performance, but they do not necessarily assure a leader that everyone will be motivated to help achieve the goals that he or she sets. Motivation is one aspect of leadership that also must be incorporated in the leadership equation. Herzberg, a well-known researcher on the topic, noted that there are things that satisfy and motivate some workers but they are also different from those that make them dissatisfied. Factors that make workers dissatisfied, if corrected, merely prevent dissatisfaction but don't motivate them. Some examples of those things that lead to dissatisfaction are low salary, "stupid" work rules, and poor working conditions. On the other hand, he postulates that people are motivated by interesting work, challenges, and increasing responsibility (Herzberg, 2003). So, while teacher dissatisfaction might cause teachers to leave, teacher motivation—which school leaders greatly affect—may strongly influence teachers' effectiveness in the classroom.

Herzberg's work on motivation has implications for school leadership. In a standards-based, assessment-driven school environment, the need to involve teachers in decision making and to offer them inspiring challenges is critically important. Douglas McGregor's (1960) Theory X model of motivation in organizations (which assumes people dislike work, are not ambitious, prefer leadership direction, avoid responsibility and must be threatened with punishment for not abiding by work rules) is not applicable to schools today. Instead, modern school leadership must be more closely aligned with McGregor's Theory Y model that says workers prefer self-direction, are self-motivated and creative, and seek responsibility. For principals, applying the Theory Y model to their staffs is very challenging but necessary if they want their schools to meet the requirements of policies such as the NCLB Act.

After years of leadership research and a number of theories of leadership including the trait, skills, style, and situational approaches, as well as contingency, path-goal, transformational, and team leadership, thinking about leadership has evolved to a contemporary approach that places more emphasis on the followers. Those in education would be well served to consider this newer body of thinking. For the most part, the "great man" theory has been the focal point of education leadership for a long time. Schools are often thought of as a bureaucratic hierarchies led by principals and superintendents. Yet, there is considerable discussion in education circles about distributed and teacher leadership. Those conceptions of leadership could be very important to the future success of schools. The key will be providing training to those who will lead and changing the culture in schools regarding who makes decisions and about what.

Blending the values and beliefs of school staffs with a unified vision of the leader is an incredibly difficult challenge. However, continuing to use old models of organizational and leadership theory will only continue to produce the same unacceptable results that have resulted in more intrusive state and federal policies requiring compliance.

Policy Implications

It is apparent that teachers believe attention must be paid to the preparation, recruitment, placement, induction, professional development, and compensation of school leaders. Twenty-five percent of teachers don't think their administration rates higher than fair. This clearly could make a significant difference when school leaders are recruiting, training, and trying to retain their best teachers. Many teachers want more contemporary organizational practices implemented in their schools that allow them more opportunities to participate in decision making, time to work collaboratively with their colleagues, and opportunities to be creative and to be respected.

Leaders need to recognize that the 21st century has brought about radical workplace changes. Generation Y teachers want to work in teams, collaborate on innovative and creative solutions to problems, and take responsibility for their work. The rigid hierarchical structure of school bureaucracies is a thing of the past, and it must be understood that leaders must work alongside teachers in establishing a shared vision for how the school can achieve success for all students.

As noted earlier, there may not be much gold-standard research on the importance of leadership and effective schools, but it is apparent to anyone who has been in a successful school and observed the leadership of a dynamic principal who has a good relationship with the staff, students, and community. In much the same way that Bill Belichick and John Wooden had considerable success leading their teams to remarkable records, leadership in schools and systems must be effective to address the challenges of a 21st century global environment.

Finding 4: Various Assigned?

One third of first-year teachers say they tend to have the “hardest-to-reach students” at their school.

According to the Public Agenda/TQ Center survey, 33 percent of all first-year teachers reported that they “tend to have the hardest-to-reach students.” First-year teachers in high-needs schools tend to feel this way at significantly higher rates than those in more affluent schools (42 percent versus 25 percent). In a more ideal world, novice teachers would perceive that their assignments are fair or even somewhat easier during a phased induction period, rather than one in three believing that they were assigned the toughest classes.

This finding, taken alone, does not explain why new teachers may feel this is the case. For example, it could be that they feel they have the hardest-to-reach students because they lack the skills to manage the classroom effectively. They also may feel this way because they are given the assignments, and assigned the students, that veteran teachers in the school do not want.

Finally, it is not certain what our respondents mean by *hardest to reach*. It could be that the students they have are apathetic or have an oppositional stance toward the dominant school culture. If we assume they are referring to students from underrepresented groups and those living in concentrated poverty areas, we can investigate empirically whether their perceptions are reality. For example, Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, and Wheeler (2007) looked at the differences between black and white students’ differential access to experienced teachers. Using a rich data set from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the researchers were able to link characteristics of teachers with the characteristics of their students for the entire state of North Carolina. They found that black seventh graders are more than half as likely (54 percent) to have a first-year teacher in math than white students, and 38 percent more likely in English. Moreover, almost two thirds of this inequitable distribution reflects patterns within districts rather than between them.

Clotfelter and his colleagues (2007) posit that the reason for these inequities is not simply racial prejudice but pressures stemming from parents who have more options for their children’s education and prefer their children to have non-novice teachers, as well as teacher preferences for assignments with “easier-to-educate” (the authors’ words) students. A study conducted more than two decades ago also suggests that teachers negotiate the local institutional context to procure the teaching assignments they prefer (Finley, 1984). Through interviews with 19 teachers in a comprehensive high school’s English department, Finley found that teachers employed a number of strategies to avoid teaching assignments in lower tracked classes. Teachers created new courses and electives and advertised them selectively; they curried favor with administrators by actively participating in professional activities and built reputations with students and counselors as being too hard on particular groups of students or pleasantly soft on others. Those savviest at this system got the higher tracked assignments, which carried with them higher status (a valued reward, Finley [1984] argues, in a school structure of isolated classrooms where relationships with students become the sole professional incentive).

Talbert and Ennis (1990) found quantitative evidence for this sort of teacher tracking. They found that more than one third of U.S. teachers are tracked into primarily high or primarily low tracked classes. Using data from the 1982–84 High School and Beyond study, they also found that (1) teacher tracking was more likely to occur in schools with a student body of low socioeconomic status, and (2) in a typical high school in the 1980s, roughly 14 percent of the faculty dealt with primarily high-achieving students all day while 24 percent of the teaching staffs dealt with low-achieving students all day. Although they did not include any measures of teacher qualifications or quality to determine which types of teachers were tracked, they did find that teachers in lower track classes had less access to professional growth activities, had less control over school policy, and felt less efficacious. Raudenbusch, Rowan, and Cheong (1992) also found that teachers assigned to lower track classes feel they cannot do much to influence student learning, but the direction of causation is yet to be well established.

There have been few studies that investigate the internal dynamics of teacher assignment in schools that may result in less than ideal assignments. In 1991, DeLany and his colleagues studied how students get matched to classes and found that local administrators sometimes assigned teachers out of field in part because of teacher turnover (DeLany, 1991). Indeed, they found that the loss of a single teacher could affect roughly 150 student schedules unless an exact replacement—a teacher with the same qualifications—could be found. As a result, school schedulers in each of the schools studied reduced the number of course titles to accommodate shifting staff expertise or “shoehorned” teachers into out-of-field assignments. DeLany (1991) quotes an interviewee, a school scheduler who talks about having to assign teachers out of field: “You ‘shoehorn’ person A into slot B. ‘Shoehorning’ means the person is going to be put in there and may fit but probably will hurt and chafe like hell, but he’ll fit and we’ll survive yet another year” (p. 189).

Case studies of high schools in Maryland revealed that administrators may be beginning to change this practice (Cogshall, 2006b). As a result of increased pressure due to outcomes-based accountability, and to a lesser extent NCLB’s highly qualified teacher requirements, administrators are beginning to change their assignment calculus. That is, those involved in teacher assignment report that they are now attempting to place the teachers they believe will be the most effective in the classes that are assessed via state exams, as well as working to distribute all their teachers—both new and veteran, strong and weak—to course sections in every track level. No longer do teachers with more seniority get the “pick” of the most preferred classes. A five-year veteran teacher at one case study high school in a rural area said:

It used to be that it was kind of the longer you were around—it was almost like the pecking order type deal. If you’ve been teaching for 30 years you get the upper level classes, and the new kid on the block gets the lowest level. ... So that’s kind of how it was when I started. I came in with lower level classes and I kind of worked my way up. (p. 74)

This seems to be changing. The principal at that school reported that he says to his teachers, “You’re going to get some upper, you’re going to get some lower, but you should be able to teach all kids” (Cogshall, 2006b, p. 75). He said that there is a lot of “grumbling” about this change, but that teachers were getting used to it.

The principal at a suburban high school interviewed for the same study (Coggshall, 2006b) said that he takes into account teachers’ “loves and hates” as well as their certification areas and special affinities, but ultimately he will place the “strongest runners” in the assessed classes. He said:

You can’t just put anybody in those [assessed] classes; that is a big difference because before, an English teacher was an English teacher and a social studies teacher was a social studies teacher. Now you must assign the very best performing teachers. (p. 76)

Administrators at only one of the four case study schools reported that teachers are being assigned as they always had been. Although these case studies are limited in scope and generalizability, they do suggest that change in the assignment of novice teachers is perhaps underway. More research looking at both the macro and micro processes and outcomes of teacher assignment is clearly necessary to fully understand how new teachers are assigned to classes. Such practices have vast implications for the equitable distribution of teacher quality, and such research will illuminate the barriers and supports for equity—not just for the teachers’ sake but for the students’ as well.

Policy Implications

That such high percentages of new teachers in high-needs schools perceive that they have some of the toughest assignments is important because of the implications for teachers’ efficacy—at the point in their careers when teachers’ efficacy is vulnerable—and, in turn, for retention (especially in high-needs schools). This, in turn, has implications for the equitable distribution of highly qualified and experienced teachers.

The equitable distribution clause of the NCLB Act (2002) requires states to take steps to:

ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers, and the measures that the State educational agency will use to evaluate and publicly report the progress of the State educational agency with respect to such steps. (Title I, Part A, Section 1111[b]8[C])

Thus, closer attention to the assignment of new teachers to classes is a critically important but overlooked step in efforts to improve the equitable distribution of teachers.

One reason for this is that teacher assignment has traditionally been under the purview of the local school, with only minimal oversight by district offices (Coggshall, 2006b). NCLB has shown a spotlight on out-of-field teaching and the distribution of inexperienced teachers, but states only have to report the overall equity across schools. Thus, intervening on assignment practices can only be done by providing guidance and information.

To assist a state in understanding the factors behind the distribution of its teachers, the TQ Center has been involved in the development of a series of data-collection tools in collaboration with the Delaware Department of Education, REL Mid-Atlantic, and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center. The impetus behind this work came from the *Delaware State Plan to Ensure All Students Are Taught by Experienced Highly Qualified Teachers* (Delaware Department of Education, 2006). The TQ Center is helping design and validate a survey to be

administered to teachers in a purposeful sample of schools that will explore the factors that may lead to the more-or-less equitable distribution of teachers. The TQ Center is also developing two interview protocols to be administered to principals and school district officials that will further probe teacher hiring and assignment processes, as well as student assignment processes. The results of this data-collection effort will be valuable information that the Delaware Department of Education can use to successfully implement its state plan, as well as inform future policy decisions.

The interorganizational team members are working together to conduct the study and prepare a final report. The TQ Center will continue to offer technical assistance on the use of these protocols to other interested regional comprehensive centers and states that also want to study staffing patterns and teacher mobility. A workshop on these tools was offered at the TQ Center's March Issue Forum, and additional states and regional comprehensive centers have indicated their interest in using these tools in different ways.

Concluding Discussion

We have come to realize over the course of the first few years of the existence of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality that this field suffers, quite paradoxically, from both a lack of knowledge of teacher quality as well as from an overload of information. Our state and regional clients tell us that they struggle to find research that gives them valid and appropriate direction for their work, but at the same time they confess that they simply do not have the time or resources to sift through all the existing research and reports to make good decisions. The mission of the TQ Center is to be the premier resource to help states learn and make use of the research and practices that do exist to build their capacity to improve and support America's teacher workforce.

Kimmelman (2006) argues that the key to capacity building consists of three components: knowledge acquisition, knowledge management, and knowledge implementation. Although he was primarily writing at the individual school-improvement level, the framework is instructive for states and the federal comprehensive center system as well. The TQ Center's realm of responsibility lies primarily at the management and implementation stages (although we routinely encourage states to invest in better teacher data systems to help them acquire the knowledge they need). We also undertook this survey work and disseminated the findings to help our clients and others develop solutions based on the needs and perceived experiences of new teachers across the United States.

As the discussion of the survey findings has demonstrated in this report, the questions we asked and the responses we received both confirm and challenge the findings in the literature. Policymakers and implementers can take away the following lessons:

- This cohort of new teachers is both mobile and committed, and holds high expectations for their careers. High-quality induction programs seem to hold the greatest promise to reduce unwanted attrition.
- Preparing teachers well while meeting the needs of both candidates and schools is a massive challenge that needs greater investment, new thinking, and tight coordination between schools and schools of education.
- School leaders must address the needs of this new generation of teachers in a new way—through innovative efforts at collaboration.
- Greater attention should be paid to how new teachers are assigned to classes and to what extent they are assigned classes that are appropriate to their experience and expertise, and guidance should be given to those making assignment decisions.

The TQ Center is dedicated to helping states find their own research-based strategies to improving teacher quality. The voices of today's first-year teachers illuminated by this survey research, coupled with the literature and placed in context, provide some clear signals for the most promising directions for better human management that states can take. Unfortunately, some paths to improvement remain dim. Keep listening.

Endnotes

¹ Nevertheless, public opinion does have an influence on policy. In his studies of the health care and transportation policy spheres, Kingdon (1995) observed that mass public opinion influences what problems are likely to be on the policy agenda (e.g., the inequitable access to health care, or in education, the inequitable distribution of high-quality teachers); however, it is generally too diffuse to significantly influence the set of policy solutions eventually adopted (e.g., particular FDA regulations, or state highly qualified teacher reporting requirements).

² The designation of *high-needs* was derived from whether teachers reported that more than 50 percent of their students were eligible for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program.

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