



Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Mobile, Alabama

***Educators on What It Will Take to Staff All
Classrooms with Quality Teachers***

by Eric Hirsch
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The Center for Teaching Quality improves student learning through developing teacher leadership, conducting practical research and engaging various communities. To accomplish this mission, the Center for Teaching Quality strives to shape policies that ensure:

- **Students**, no matter what their background or where they go to school, are ready to learn; with
- **Teachers** who are caring, qualified, and competent with vast content knowledge and the ability, through quality preparation and ongoing development and support, to ensure that all children can learn; in
- **Classrooms** that have adequate resources and provide environments conducive to student learning; in
- **Schools** that are designed to provide teachers with sufficient time to learn and work together in collaboration with a principal who respects and understands teaching; in
- **Districts** that have policies and programs that support the recruitment, retention and development of high quality teachers in every school; in
- **States** that have well-funded systems that include rigorous preparation and licensing with evaluation tools that ensure performance based standards are met; in a
- **Region** that works collaboratively, using common teaching quality definitions, sharing data, and working across state lines to recruit, retain and support high quality teachers; in a
- **Nation** that views teaching as a true profession and values teachers as one of its most important resources.

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Executive Summary

With No Child Left Behind's call for highly qualified teachers, the stakes for recruiting and retaining teachers have never been more important. Alabama, like other states, has struggled to develop policies and programs that effectively staff all classrooms with quality educators. The Center for Teaching Quality, with the support of SERVE, has surveyed approximately 4,200 educators in Mobile, Talladega and Hoover County Public Schools systems to inform the work of the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching. This report, with the support of the Public Education Network, looks specifically at the surveys of the 3,300 Mobile educators who completed the survey. By asking those whose opinions matter most on these critical issues—classroom teachers—policymakers can better gauge what incentives and school conditions are most essential in recruiting and retaining teachers for Mobile and all Alabama classrooms.

Survey respondents were positive about the teaching and learning conditions in their schools, reporting that leadership supports them, professional development provides the knowledge and skills they need to teach effectively, and that facilities and resources are adequate. This is important as educators noted that these conditions drive their future employment decisions. Educators who indicated that they are most likely to move schools or quit teaching have much more negative perceptions of teaching and learning conditions than those who want to remain in their school. Additionally, issues such as leadership, empowerment, and time (along with salary) were amongst the most important influences on teachers' decisions about whether to stay in their school. Leadership, in particular, was an important factor.

More than half of educators surveyed were undecided or at least somewhat willing to teach in a hard-to-staff school (57.0 percent). The most pressing concern about moving to a hard-to-staff school is being supported adequately by parents and the community. Survey respondents are clear about the incentives necessary to attract them to these schools.

- Financial incentives are important. State income tax credits as well as relocation and housing assistance are viewed as more important than signing or retention bonuses. If signing bonuses are to be offered, they should be in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 range to be most effective.
- Non-financial incentives are more important to educators than bonuses. Reduced teaching load or lower class size, additional support personnel for teachers and students, and guaranteed planning time can effectively recruit teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

Recommendations were offered to the district in two areas:

- *Teachers want great places to teach and learn:* ensure principals can be strong supportive leaders, analyze school level survey data on teaching and learning conditions and identify schools to learn from and those needing assistance, allocate a state funded position for each hard-to-staff school to allow for creative scheduling, etc.

- *One size does not fit all:* ensure local districts can target funds to best fit their particular context and encourage the use of non-financial incentives to attract teachers. Assess current recruitment and retention initiatives in light of the data provided by educators in the survey.

Ultimately, to recruit and retain quality teachers for all students in both Mobile and the state of Alabama, policymakers will need to put forth a coordinated effort to analyze and overhaul preparation, recruitment, induction and support policies. Money is important, but it will not be enough. Hard-to-staff schools must be transformed and staffed with leaders who create environments that do not require additional incentives to be attractive places for teachers to work.

Chapter One

Introduction

Across the nation, schools, districts and states struggle with the dilemma of recruiting and retaining quality teachers. The baby boom echo, leading to increases in enrollment, as well as state policies focused on reducing class size have all contributed to the challenge of staffing schools.¹ It has been estimated that two million new teachers will be needed over the next decade to deal with these changing contexts of America's educational system.² To further complicate matters, statistics also suggest that nearly half of the current teaching force will soon retire and approximately one in five new teachers will exit the profession within the first three years of employment.³

Teachers moving from school to school or district to district presents even greater problems, creating a “revolving door” effect in our nation's classrooms.⁴

Schools deemed as “hard-to-staff”—those with high concentrations of low-performing, low-income students, high teacher turnover, and relatively high numbers of teachers not fully certified—must constantly scramble simply to staff their classrooms, much less ensure high quality teachers. While about 16 percent of teachers leave their current positions annually, teachers in high-poverty areas are almost twice as likely to leave as their colleagues who work in low-poverty schools.⁵

Most states have not addressed the root causes of the teacher distribution problem. Instead, states have taken a “trickle down” approach, hoping that by adding more teachers to the supply pool they will create a sufficient number of applicants for all schools and districts. That strategy has not proven effective. Furthermore, many district issues—late hiring dates, transfer policies that encourage teachers to flee hard-to-staff schools, and inefficient and untargeted teacher hiring and assignment processes—work to the detriment of even the most aggressive state policy solutions.

Many states, particularly those in the southeast region, have raised salaries, but few states have created targeted financial incentives directed exclusively toward hard-to-staff schools. States are more likely to have broad programs that provide loans or scholarships for all prospective teachers than assistance exclusively for those teaching in hard-to-staff subjects or schools.⁶

Alabama has enacted policies to not only attract teachers to the state, but to hard-to-staff schools in particular.⁷ Programs such as the Mathematics and Science Scholarship/Loan Program for Alabama Teachers (MSSPAT) and Troops to Teachers have been utilized to recruit mid-career professionals to transition into education via alternative certification routes. The State Department of Education has also piloted a mentoring and induction program to increase teacher retention on two separate occasions, the last of which concluded in 2003. Legislation through the National Average Teacher Pay Bill has targeted budget dollars to increase teacher salaries during times of economic growth until they reach the national average. And most recently, \$725,000 was included in the Fiscal Year 2006 Education Trust Fund Budget to lure experienced teachers to hard-to-staff districts and schools.

Additionally, districts are being proactive in addressing their own needs. Mobile County Public Schools reconstituted five of its lowest-performing schools. The district used a combination of federal money from No Child Left Behind and tobacco settlement funds to offer teachers at

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The Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching has begun to examine the reform efforts that are needed to effectively recruit and retain good teachers for the state's schools.

those schools a \$4,000 annual supplement for five years as well as up to an additional \$4,000 performance bonus for meeting individual, group, and school performance objectives. Additional support services, such as a full-time coach in reading, writing, or mathematics, an achievement specialist, and extensive professional development training, were also funded for these hard-to-staff schools.

While these initiatives begin to address the challenge of staffing the state's classrooms with quality educators, further reform is necessary. Consequently, Governor Bob Riley announced the creation of a statewide task force in October 2005. Charged with the challenge of strengthening the teaching profession in Alabama, the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching has begun to examine the reform efforts that are needed to effectively recruit and retain good teachers for the state's schools. This collaborative group of teachers, school leaders, parents, and partners in the business community is being led by the 2003 Alabama and National Teacher of the Year, Dr. Betsy Rogers, to not only develop strategies for recruitment and retention but also work toward implementation during the next five years. Four subcommittees have been identified to grapple with the vexing issues of: 1) recruitment incentives, 2) pay-for-performance plans, 3) teacher preparation, and 4) professional development, working conditions, and teacher retention.

With the generous support of SERVE, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) was asked to conduct a survey of teachers in select Alabama school districts to help inform both the deliberations of the Commission and other state policy and program efforts. Additional support was provided by the Public Education Network, to conduct additional analyses and reporting on the more than 3,300 Mobile educators who responded to the survey.

Questions on the survey can help districts better understand teachers' perceptions of working conditions—shown in other research by CTQ to impact student achievement and teacher retention—teachers' future employment plans, and incentives that would most motivate teachers to work in a hard-to-staff school as well as stay in their current position.

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ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey on Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Alabama Schools was administered in three Alabama school districts: Hoover City Schools, Mobile County Schools, and Talladega County Schools. The findings and conclusions drawn in this report are based solely on the views of the 3,336 educators who responded in Mobile County (table 1).

CTQ designed a survey that included questions to assess perceptions of working conditions in schools as well as questions directed at employee intentions and incentives, including what it would take to bring teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Many of the questions were drawn from validated survey instruments such as CTQ's North and South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey and the National Center for Education Statistics' Schools and Staffing Survey.

The 25-question online survey was posted on Nov. 21, 2005, and the link was disseminated to the teachers in communications from the districts' central offices. All licensed, school-based personnel in the three districts were invited to participate. The survey remained open until Dec. 26, 2005.

Table 1. Recruitment and Retention Survey Response Rate	
Mobile County	
Licensed Personnel	4,431
Licensed Personnel Responding	3,336
Response Rate	76.8%

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

More than three-quarters of the over 4,000 licensed personnel responded in Mobile County Schools. Of these respondents:

- 2,849 teach a core subject or a special subject, 305 are school-based support staff, and 160 are other licensed personnel.
- More than three quarters (77 percent) were prepared at Alabama institutions of higher education, and fifty percent grew up within fifty miles of Mobile.
- The educators in Mobile County have more overall years of experience than the other districts, with about half (49 percent) of respondents reporting more than ten years experience. However, almost one-fifth have one to three years experience.
- About one-quarter (23 percent) of the educators have less than four years experience in district, while 18 percent have more than twenty years in the district.
- Forty-two percent of the educators have been at their school less than four years, and an additional 20 percent have been at their school less than seven years. Only 6 percent of teachers have been at their school for more than twenty years.

It is our hope that the information found in this report will assist the Mobile County Public Schools, educators, stakeholders and the public to make the most informed decisions possible about improving teacher recruitment and retention efforts.

The educators in Mobile County have more overall years of experience than other districts, with about half of respondents reporting more than ten years experience.

Chapter Two

Teaching and Learning in Mobile County Public Schools

Similar to respondents in other states, teachers' greatest concerns were in the areas of time and empowerment, while they were generally satisfied with facilities, leadership and professional development.

The online survey included a variety of questions to assess the current teaching and learning conditions in the three districts. In general, teachers were positive about school climate, with almost three-quarters (71.4 percent) agreeing that their school is a good place to work and learn. More than half of those agreeing strongly agree (43.2 percent). Similar to other states, teachers' greatest concerns were in the areas of time and empowerment, while they were generally satisfied with facilities, leadership and professional development.¹

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

While educators believe their time is used efficiently to maximize student learning (73.0 percent), they desire more time to plan and work collaboratively. Less than half (46.8 percent) agree that the non-instructional time they receive is sufficient to improve teaching. These concerns are exacerbated by concerns about class size (60.0 percent) and student composition (61.0 percent).

FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Educators in the three districts believe their schools are safe (81.6 percent) and well-maintained (78.0 percent). They agree that they have sufficient access to instructional materials and resources (80.9 percent), office equipment and technology (76.2 percent).

LEADERSHIP AND DECISIONMAKING

Educators were very positive about leadership, with three-quarters (75.6 percent) agreeing that school leadership is effective. Three-quarters (75.9 percent) of educators believe that their school leadership consistently supports them when they need it. And nearly three-quarters (72.7 percent) agree that school leaders are proficient in creating positive learning environments and efficient operations.

These positive perceptions of leadership translate into educators feeling empowered and involved in a positive school environment. Two-thirds (65.6 percent) believe that there is an atmosphere of trust and respect in their school.

- Two-thirds (66.6 percent) agree that they are centrally involved in decision making, with 71.0 percent feeling trusted to make sound professional decisions.
- 66.8 percent agree that the faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems, leading almost three-quarters (73.6 percent) to believe that their school takes steps to solve problems.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Educators in the district were positive about the professional development they receive. More than three-quarters (78.6 percent) agree that it provides them with the knowledge and skills to

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teach effectively. They believe it is aligned with standards (86.7 percent), driven by student learning needs (84.8 percent), and that sufficient resources are provided to allow teachers to take advantage of opportunities offered (81.4 percent).

These findings are particularly important given national research that indicates that teachers' future employment plans are driven predominantly by many of these working conditions. Analyses of teachers' reasons for leaving consistently demonstrate that issues such as administrative support, teacher autonomy, and time to teach are rated as the most important factors in whether or not to remain teaching at a school.² These conditions have also been shown to impact student achievement.³

These teaching and learning conditions are critical to success in Mobile as well. As can be seen in table 2, teachers were more likely to rate these conditions highly in schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (2004-05).

Teaching and Learning Condition	Met AYP	Did Not Meet AYP
Organization/Management	3.97	3.69
Facilities and Resources	4.22	3.92
Leadership	4.00	3.67
Professional Development	4.41	4.08

* Average response of schools on all questions in that section of the survey. All questions on 1 to 5 rating scale with 1 being lowest and 5 being highest.

While overall teaching and learning conditions are positive in Mobile, there is tremendous variation in those conditions school to school. Several factors consistently influenced teachers' perceptions of working conditions.

- Schools serving a higher proportion of poorer students were more likely to perceive teaching and learning conditions negatively, particularly in the areas of school leadership.
- Schools with a lower proportion of highly qualified teachers had lower ratings of teaching in learning conditions.
- Schools with lower student teacher pupil ratios had higher perceptions of teaching and learning conditions, particularly in the organization and management area, particularly related to time.

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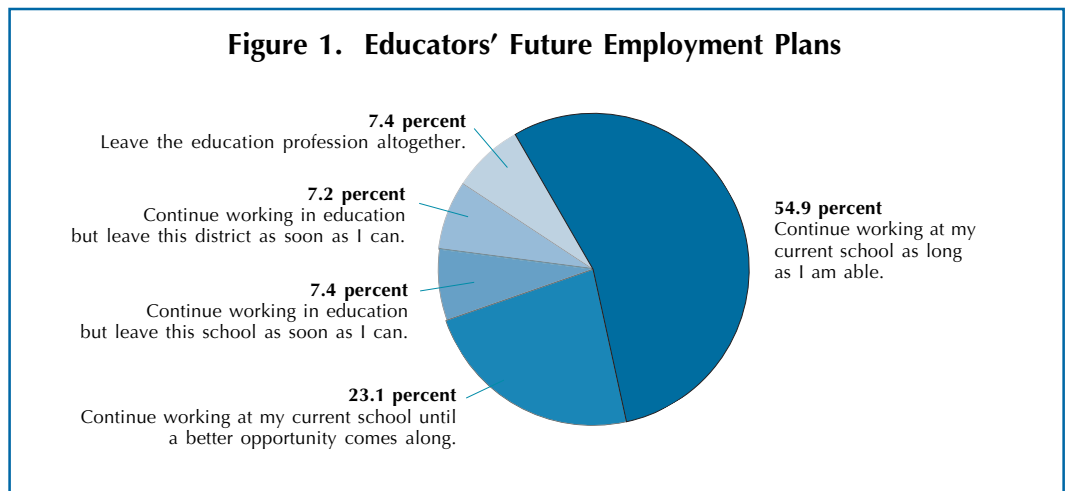
Chapter Three

Why Teachers Leave

Given the generally positive response to questions about the quality of teaching and learning conditions in the district, a significant proportion of educators plan to remain working in their current school (Figure 1).

A significant proportion of educators plan to remain working in their current school.

Over half of the approximately 3,300 teachers responding to the survey indicated that they would continue to work at their current school as long as they could (54.9 percent). An additional 23.1 percent are not planning to leave, but would if a more attractive opportunity were presented. Collectively, about three-quarters (78.0 percent) have been deemed “stayers,” educators who will remain at their current school site. An additional 7.4 percent have been categorized as “movers,” those who want to remain in Mobile County Schools, but are looking to leave their current school. Finally, 14.6 percent of respondents indicated that they plan to leave the district or to quit teaching altogether. This group is referred to as “leavers.”



When looking at future employment plans more closely, a few other trends emerged:

Teachers between their seventh and tenth year of working were most at risk for leaving their school, either to teach elsewhere or find another profession.

- Years of experience had an impact on employment decisions, but not as clearly as other research would indicate (which finds that newer teachers and more veteran educators are most likely to quit) (Table 3). Teachers between their seventh and tenth year of working were most at risk for leaving the district, either to teach elsewhere or find another profession. This may be explained by the particular set of respondents who filled out the survey, as well as the fact that many dissatisfied newer teachers may have already quit the profession and therefore did not fill out the survey. Teachers in their first ten years were all equally likely to look to move schools within MCPSS. Regardless, the finding shows that retention issues are not exclusively an issue of keeping new teachers.

Years of Experience	Movers	Leavers
1-3 years of experience	9.6%	10.8%
4-6 years of experience	9.5%	14.0%
7-10 years of experience	9.2%	19.1%
11-19 years of experience	6.3%	13.9%
20+ years of experience	4.7%	15.1%

- There was little variation across subject area related to future employment intentions. Both math and science teachers were slightly more likely to indicate that they would leave the profession (16.2 percent and 16.7 percent versus an average of 14.5 percent) or move (10.2 percent and 9.1 percent versus an average of 12.5 percent). While this trend is somewhat concerning given that these subjects are traditionally hard-to-staff, on a positive note, special education teachers were the second least likely to indicate that they would leave teaching (14.5 percent), and with social studies, teachers of this subject were most likely to indicate that they would stay.

When asked about influences that would keep educators in their current position, several factors were rated as important in employment considerations (Table 4). Many of the teaching and learning conditions explored previously were rated highly, particularly leadership, but also empowerment and time available to teach.

The perceived overemphasis on testing and accountability was indicated by more than three-quarters of educators (75.8 percent), ranking as highest in influencing the decision to leave a school. When comparing the influences marked as “extremely important” in their decision to leave their current school, overemphasis on testing (58.4 percent), student disciplinary problems (57.7 percent) and salary (56.4 percent), were followed by leadership (55.4 percent).

When asked about influences that would keep educators in their current position, many of the teaching and learning conditions explored previously were rated highly, particularly leadership, but also empowerment and time available to teach.

If you plan to make changes in your employment or leave the profession, please indicate the importance of the following in influencing your decision	Percentage indicating an important influence
Too much focus on testing and accountability	75.8%
Student disciplinary problems	73.5%
Inadequate salary	71.1%
Inadequate support from school leadership	70.0%
Teaching assignment (class size, subject, students)	67.0%
Lack of empowerment to make decisions that affect my school and/or classroom	64.2%
Insufficient time during the work day	62.7%
Lack of comfort or effectiveness with the students I teach	60.8%
Personal reasons (health, family, etc.)	51.5%
Lack of collegiality	51.2%
Inadequate facilities or resources	49.2%
Eligible for retirement	46.7%

The prominence of the overemphasis on testing and student discipline issues was surprising. Most surveys of educators indicate that leadership and empowerment issues, along with salary are the most critical issues for educators in deciding to leave their school.²

Teaching to the Test

“A good teacher is creative and uses a multitude of materials to teach the variety of learners in a classroom. When teaching becomes confining it also becomes stifling. I have been very lucky not to have been given such a curriculum or I would already be gone.”

—*Veteran Mobile Teacher*
E-mail Comment Regarding Survey

Overemphasis on accountability and testing was particularly important to leavers.

Overemphasis on accountability and testing was particularly important to leavers. More than four-fifths of leavers (86.3 percent) said that too great a focus on testing was an important influence in their future employment plans, compared to salary (73.9 percent), student discipline (66.8 percent) and insufficient time (64.3 percent). Inadequate leadership support was far less likely to be deemed important by this critical group (46.5 percent). Movers, however, responded like the entire group, with the four top factors weighing most prominently on employment decisions.

Student Discipline

“Our students who want to learn and try their best on a daily basis are missing out on quality instructional time while teachers are busy completing the paperwork needed to correct an ongoing discipline issue.”

—*Mobile Special Education Teacher*
E-mail Comment Regarding Survey

While most teachers were positive about the teaching and learning conditions in their school, those perceptions were not uniform across all survey respondents.

Further analyses of the data yielded the following findings about keeping teachers in this district.

TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS ARE CRITICAL

While most teachers were positive about the teaching and learning conditions in their school, those perceptions were not uniform across all survey respondents. A significant proportion of educators were more negative, and those educators were far more likely to indicate that they would leave their current teaching position (Table 5).

Almost three-quarters or more of stayers responded positively to critical school climate and working conditions questions about leadership, empowerment and decisionmaking. Movers were the most negative, particularly around issues related to trust. About one-third of movers feel that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their school and that they were comfortable raising important issues and concerns, compared to three-quarters of stayers. Teachers who were more negative about these two issues were more likely than other teachers to be leavers.³

Table 5. Differences in Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Conditions of Stayers, Movers and Leavers

Teaching and Learning Survey Question	Percent of Teachers Who Agree		
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
In my school, teachers are centrally involved in decision-making about important education issues.	73.1%	38.0%	52.3%
I am recognized as an educational expert and am trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	77.8%	43.2%	50.6%
Useful information is readily available to me so I can make informed decisions.	82.4%	54.1%	63.9%
In my school, we take steps to solve problems; we don't just talk about them.	79.1%	47.0%	61.0%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	72.8%	39.9%	51.9%
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in my school.	72.6%	32.8%	49.0%
I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me.	73.5%	36.4%	47.3%
School leaders are proficient in establishing positive learning environments and efficient operations.	79.4%	42.4%	54.4%
My school leadership consistently supports me when I need it.	82.1%	45.1%	61.0%
My school leadership communicates clear expectations to students, teachers, and parents.	82.9%	55.3%	68.9%
Overall, the leadership in my school is effective.	82.0%	43.9%	61.8%

* All differences between groups significantly significant at the $p < .05$ level using one-way ANOVA

Interestingly, leavers were more positive than movers about teaching and learning conditions in their school. While it may seem intuitive that those looking to leave teaching altogether would be the most negative, this finding makes sense when considering survey respondents. As discussed earlier, the most disgruntled leavers likely already left teaching. As a result, they were not able to fill out the survey. The most negative movers are still in education, but are looking for better conditions in another school.

LEADERSHIP MATTERS MOST

When asked to choose the most important factor in the decision about whether to stay in their current position—as opposed to table 4 which allowed them to rank as many influences as they wanted as important—educators overwhelmingly cited the need for supportive school leadership (Table 6).

Table 6. The Most Important Factor When Considering Staying

Which of the following is <i>most</i> important to you in considering whether to stay in your current position	Percentage of educators
Supportive school leadership	39.5
Salary and benefits	24.6
Sufficient time to plan and teach	16.6
Quality of facilities and resources	5.2
Community environment where I live	4.0
Involvement in decisions about important education issues	4.0
Collegial atmosphere	3.6
Professional development opportunities	1.2
Cost of living	1.0

Issues such as community environment, empowerment, and collegial atmosphere may matter, but when forced to choose the thing that matters most—leadership is key.

Over 39 percent of teachers reported that having supportive school leadership was the most important issue for them when considering whether to keep teaching in their school, far exceeding all other influences. Salary and benefits, as well as having sufficient time to plan and teach, were also frequently noted, but far less than leadership. Issues such as community environment, empowerment, and collegial atmosphere may matter, but when forced to choose the thing that matters most—leadership is key.

Supportive school leadership manifests itself in several ways for these teachers according to statistical modeling of different leadership factors and their connection to teachers’ willingness to stay in the profession. Teachers who strongly agreed that the leadership in their school is effective, that they communicate clear expectations and that they can bring up issues in a trusting atmosphere were 50 percent less likely than other teachers in Mobile to state their intentions to leave the district.

TIME AND MONEY KEEP TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

Leadership was even more critical for movers (Table 7). More than one-third (39.7 percent) of movers and over 40 percent of stayers indicated that supportive school leadership was the most important factor. Salary and benefits ranked first among leavers (39.4 percent) and second among stayers and leavers (23.6 percent and 19.1 percent). Educators ranked sufficient time as the third most important factor influencing their decision to stay, move or leave.

Teachers who plan to leave the profession do so because of the salary and benefits they receive and the amount of time they have to plan and teach.

The factors that influence the almost 7 percent of survey respondents who say they are going to leave teaching altogether appear to be far different than those indicated by stayers and movers (Table 7).

Leadership was important, but not critical to leavers, as previously discussed. Teachers who plan to leave the profession do so because of the salary and benefits they receive and the amount of time they have to plan and teach. According to these survey respondents, teachers stay or seek a job teaching at another school because of leadership support, but they do not necessarily leave teaching because of it.

Table 7. The Most Important Factor When Considering Future Employment for Stayers, Movers and Leavers

Which of the following is <i>most</i> important to you in considering whether to stay in your current position	Percent in Agreement		
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
Quality of facilities and resources	5.8%	4.2%	1.7%
Supportive school leadership	40.9%	39.7%	17.4%
Sufficient time to plan and teach	14.8%	18.1%	25.7%
Involvement in decisions about important education issues	3.1%	6.7%	7.4%
Professional development opportunities	1.2%	0.6%	1.2%
Collegial atmosphere	3.3%	5.6%	1.2%
Salary and benefits	23.6%	19.1%	39.4%
Community environment where I love to live	4.2%	4.0%	1.7%
Cost of living of the community in which my school is located	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%

Given that the leaver group was not made up predominantly of new educators, as might have been expected, but disproportionately of those between 4-10 years experience, it is not just a matter of newer teachers making lower salaries. Leavers are more likely to view salary as the most important consideration in employment. Yet of the professional issues that matter to leavers, time to teach and the focus on testing (as previously discussed) appear to be more important than leadership issues.

Leavers are more likely to view salary as the most important consideration in employment.

Chapter Four

What It Will Take to Recruit and Retain Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools

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When looking at whether or not to teach in a school—either hard-to-staff or not—educators again voiced their desire for strong, supportive school leadership (Table 8). Leadership is critical when teachers look at school settings. Virtually all educators said it was important (94.7 percent), and more than four-fifths (84.0 percent) indicated that it was “extremely” important. The finding is not surprising: teachers—particularly movers—would look for the same things in a new school that influence their decision to leave where they currently work.

While all factors but type of students served were noted as important by a majority of educators, several other teaching and learning conditions were critical. Class size, the ability to make important decisions, supports, planning time and instructional approach were important to more than three-quarters of educators and extremely important to about half. Salary was also important to more than four-fifths (83.7 percent) of educators when deciding where to work.

Table 8. Factors Noted by Teachers as Important When Deciding Whether to Work in a School

Please rate the importance of the following in influencing your decision about whether to work in a school	Teachers Indicating Important	Teachers Indicating Extremely Important
A strong, supportive leader	94.7%	84.0%
Class size/teaching load	87.5%	66.3%
Salary and other compensation issues	83.7%	60.7%
A commitment to shared decision making	80.6%	53.6%
Supports for teachers (assistants, coaches, specialists, etc.)	80.5%	54.5%
Curriculum and instructional approach	79.7%	48.4%
Amount of planning time	78.8%	52.6%
Supports for students	74.2%	46.4%
Like-minded educators	72.5%	45.2%
Experienced educators	66.6%	39.2%
Professional development opportunities	63.6%	35.2%
Performance of the school on tests and accountability measures	57.7%	28.9%
Proximity to home	54.7%	31.5%
Type of students served	43.8%	24.5%

Student performance and type of students served were rated as two of the least important factors by survey respondents. Proximity to home also ranked among the conditions that least affected a teacher’s decision to work in a school.

WHO WILL TEACH IN HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS?

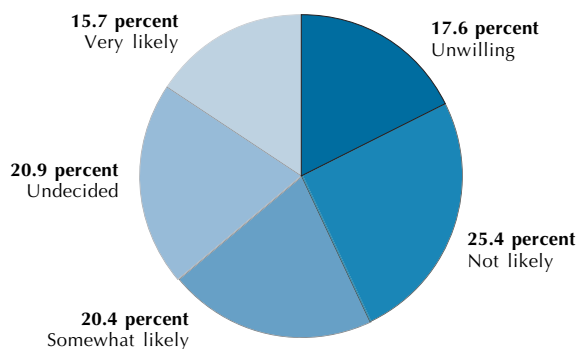
Getting teachers to consider these factors in hard-to-staff schools presents its own challenges in the district, across Alabama and the nation. Not all schools and districts are successful in staffing all their classrooms with quality teachers. Poor children and children of color are far more likely to be taught by inexperienced, under-prepared, and less-effective teachers.¹ Getting not only highly qualified, but high quality educators to work in hard-to-staff schools is essential to close the achievement gap and ensure that opportunities for all students to learn are maximized.

Unfortunately, most district and state policies have not addressed the root causes of the teacher distribution problem but instead have taken a trickle-down approach, hoping that by adding more teachers to the supply they will create a sufficient number of applicants for all teaching positions.²

The good news for Mobile County Public School System is that many of the more than 3,300 teachers surveyed are willing to work in hard-to-staff schools, defined in the survey as schools with large proportion of at-risk, low-achieving students and a high rate of teacher turnover (Figure 2).³

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Figure 2. Educators’ Willingness to Teach in a Hard-to-Staff School



Only 17.6 percent have ruled out teaching in a hard-to-staff school, and about one-quarter (25.4 percent) consider it unlikely. About an equal proportion indicate that they are very likely (15.7 percent) or somewhat likely (20.4 percent) to teach in such a school. So, over one-third (36.1 percent) indicate a willingness to consider working in a hard-to-staff school and another 20.9 percent are undecided. With the right incentives and school conditions, more than half of those teachers surveyed would consider teaching in these schools.

When considering the school conditions discussed in Figure 2, those willing (responding that they are somewhat or very likely) to move to a hard-to-staff school view the same factors as critical that those unwilling do—leadership, class size, salary, time, support, etc. Two significant differences, however, were found.

- Those willing to work in a hard-to-staff school were less likely to say working close to home was important than those who were unwilling (23.7 percent versus 55.1 percent). These teachers appear more willing to work in schools further from where they live.

Those respondents willing to move to a hard-to-staff school view the same factors as critical that those unwilling do—leadership, class size, salary, time, support, etc. Two significant differences, however, were found.

The fact that those willing to work in a hard-to-staff school were less concerned about the students that tend to populate those schools was also found when teachers shared their concerns about working in these schools.

- While more than half (54.5 percent) of those unwilling to work in a hard-to-staff school said the type of students served was an important influence in where they would work, less than one-quarter (21.8 percent) of those willing felt it was important.

The fact that those willing to work in a hard-to-staff school were less concerned about the students that tend to populate those schools was also found when teachers shared their concerns about working in these schools (Table 9). Those willing to teach in a hard-to-staff school were less likely to worry about being sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of and be effective with students in these schools.

Concern about Teaching in a Hard-to-Staff School	Willing	Undecided	Unwilling
I do not believe that I will be adequately supported by parents and the community	50.8%	46.5%	54.6%
I do not believe that I will be adequately supported by school leadership	33.8%	27.2%	33.9%
I do not feel the working conditions will enable me to be successful	22.9%	29.4%	47.1%
No hard-to-staff schools are proximate to where I live	15.8%	19.6%	23.1%
I would not feel safe in a hard-to-staff school	14.5%	23.8%	39.5%
I do not feel sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of students who traditionally populate hard-to-staff schools	13.1%	20.1%	20.8%
I do not feel sufficiently prepared to be effective in a hard-to-staff school	12.8%	18.4%	20.6%

The most pressing concern of all educators—willing, unwilling or undecided—was that they would not be supported by parents and the community in hard-to-staff schools. About half of teachers in all three categories expressed these concerns.

The largest differences, however, were related to working conditions and safety. Those unwilling to go to hard-to-staff schools are far more likely to be concerned about the working conditions (a 24.4 percent differential).

Safety appears to be not only to be a greater concern for those less likely to teach in hard-to-staff schools (35 percent differential), but for white educators. When looking at the survey results in Mobile and the other two districts that participated in the initiative statewide, about one-third (31.3 percent) of white educators indicated that safety in a hard-to-staff school was a concern, while one-fifth (18.3 percent) of non-white educators expressed similar reservations.

In marketing hard-to-staff schools to educators, overcoming perceptions of weak parental and community support will be the biggest hurdle for principals and superintendents who are recruiting. Those willing to go to hard-to-staff schools feel confident in their ability to be successful in a supportive environment. The same cannot be said of those who are less likely. If policies and/or outreach efforts are intended to convince the undecided or get a new pool of

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educators who would not otherwise teach in hard-to-staff schools, they will need to confront concerns about working conditions, particularly safety.

WHAT INCENTIVES WORK FOR HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS?

Survey respondents were asked to rate how effective financial and non-financial incentives would be in deciding whether to work in a hard-to-staff school. More than 17 options were presented to respondents. Additionally, an open-ended question about the size of a one-time signing bonus was presented to better assess the amount that would need to be offered to be an enticement, particularly to the group of educators who expressed a willingness to work in a hard-to-staff school.

Financial Incentives

Educators who responded to the survey rated several financial incentives as having an important influence on their decision about whether to work in a hard-to-staff school (Table 10). More than half of educators noted that a financial incentive—income tax credit, relocation, housing and/or signing or retention bonus—would influence their decision to go to a hard-to-staff school.

Somewhat surprisingly, signing bonuses ranked fourth on the list. Teachers were most likely to list a state income tax credit as important, perhaps reflecting the fear that a significant portion of a signing bonus would be lost to taxes (versus a credit). While a state income tax credit has been discussed and proposed in legislation in the past few years (most notably in California), policies have not passed, largely due to the fear of other occupations that often experience shortages (nursing, fire and police, etc.) expecting similar benefits.

Educators who responded to the survey rated several financial incentives as having an important influence on their decision about whether to work in a hard-to-staff school.

Table 10. Importance of Select Financial Incentives on Decisions to Teach in a Hard-to-Staff School

Financial Incentive	Teachers Indicating Important	Teachers Indicating Extremely Important
State income tax credits	71.1%	56.5%
Relocation reimbursement	58.9%	43.5%
Housing assistance	57.4%	46.2%
Signing bonus	53.4%	42.7%
Retention bonus	51.8%	39.7%
Loan forgiveness, scholarship, or tuition assistance for advanced degree	44.9%	31.9%
Early retirement incentives/additional years of service for each year taught	39.9%	28.0%
Bonus pay for high-demand subjects (e.g., mathematics, science, special education)	38.6%	27.6%
Bonus based on student performance of individual teachers	28.7%	18.5%
Bonus based on student performance at the school	25.2%	15.5%

Relocation and housing assistance was listed as more popular than signing or retention bonuses. This was particularly true of housing with new educators.

Relocation and housing assistance was also listed as more popular than signing or retention bonuses. This was particularly true of housing with new educators. More than three-fourths of teachers (77.0 percent) with one to three years experience listed housing assistance as at least a somewhat important financial incentive (versus an average of 56.3 percent and less than half of teachers with 11 years experience or more). This was the most frequently cited incentive of new teachers. Housing incentives were also popular for those with four to ten years experience, with over two-thirds (67.9 percent) listing it as at least a somewhat important incentive. Relocation reimbursements were equally important to teachers, regardless of their years of experience. Additionally,

- New teachers were far more receptive to bonuses for high-demand subjects. While 54.5 percent of teachers with one to three years experience said it was at least somewhat important (and 45.4 percent of those with four to six years experience), less than one-third (29.6 percent) of those with twenty years experience or more indicated its importance.
- New teachers were also more receptive to bonuses based on individual or school level performance compared to more veteran educators. Over one-third of teachers with one to three years' experience said bonuses based on school- (36.2 percent) or teacher-based (38.5 percent) performance were at least somewhat important, compared with less than 20 percent of educators with 11 or more years' experience for school-based performance and less than one-quarter for teacher-based performance.
- As would be expected, loan forgiveness was more popular with new educators.
- State income tax credits, signing and retention bonuses were perceived as important relatively uniformly across all experience groups, with about two-thirds indicating it would be at least a somewhat important incentive.

Teachers who had indicated a willingness to move to hard-to-staff schools responded that every single financial incentive was more important to them than to those who were undecided or unwilling to move.

Teachers who had indicated a willingness to move to hard-to-staff schools responded that every single financial incentive was more important to them than to those who were undecided or unwilling to move. The order of preference of financial incentives for those who said they were willing or undecided about working in a hard-to-staff school closely matched the data in Table 12. State income tax credits were by far the most attractive option, followed by housing and relocation assistance, then signing and retention bonuses.

In considering signing bonuses and other one-time incentives for teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools (such as the \$725,000 appropriated for this fiscal year in the Education Trust Fund), the amount of these incentives appears to be crucial (Table 11). All survey respondents were asked in an open-ended question to list the whole dollar amount necessary for them to consider working in a hard-to-staff school. The range was from zero to one billion dollars (neither of which would be advocated for the use of hard-to-staff resources in the Education Trust Fund).

Table 11. Amount of a One-Time Signing Bonus to Be Effective in Recruiting Teachers to Hard-to-Staff Schools

Amount of a One-Time Signing Bonus Necessary to Consider Working in a Hard-to-Staff School	Those Willing to Teach in a Hard-to-Staff School
Less than \$1,000	2.3%
\$1,000 to \$4,999	9.0%
\$5,000 to \$7,500	42.4%
\$7,501 to \$10,000	32.2%
\$10,001 to \$20,000	7.1%
\$20,001 to \$50,000	5.2%
More than \$50,000	1.7%

Only about 10 percent of educators put an amount that was less than \$5,000. Most educators answered in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 range, with those willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools putting somewhat lower amounts. Most teachers do not appear to expect, nor demand more than \$10,000.

If these bonuses are to be effective in luring teachers, it appears that they need to be at least \$5,000 but do not need to exceed \$10,000. While these bonuses are important, they were cited less than other financial incentives. This may indicate a need for a policy that does not offer bonuses alone, but provides dollars to local districts to offer a variety of incentives—from housing and relocation, to bonuses or other rewards—depending on their applicant pool and local context.

Non-Financial Incentives

Teachers were also asked to respond to a list of non-financial incentives that would be an important influence in their decision to work in a hard-to-staff school. Many of these non-financial incentives were cited as important more frequently than financial incentives (Table 12).

Providing a reduced teaching load or guaranteeing lower class sizes was particularly popular (and more popular than state income tax credits or any of the financial incentives), with almost three-quarters (71.7 percent) saying it would be an important influence on their decision and more than half (57.7 percent) saying it would be extremely important.

Other incentives that would help ensure high quality teaching and learning conditions in hard-to-staff schools were also rated highly by teachers. More than two-thirds of educators listed additional support—for themselves or their students—and guaranteed planning time as an important incentive. At least half of all educators rated every non-financial incentive as important in their decision making. All were rated as important with greater frequency than providing a signing bonus.

These findings are not surprising given previous discussions about the importance of critical teaching and learning conditions in teachers’ decisions about whether to stay where they currently work and many educators’ apprehension about the leadership and working conditions in hard-to-staff schools.

If bonuses are to be effective in luring teachers, it appears that they need to be at least \$5,000 but do not need to exceed \$10,000.

At least half of all educators rated every non-financial incentive as important in their decision making. All were rated as important with about the same or greater frequency than providing a signing bonus.

Table 12. Importance of Select Non-Financial Incentives on Decision to Teach in a Hard-to-Staff School

Non-Financial Incentive	Teachers Indicating Important	Teachers Indicating Extremely Important
Reduced teaching load/class size	71.7%	57.7%
Additional support personnel for teachers (assistants, coaches, achievement specialists, etc.)	69.2%	50.6%
At least five hours of planning time per week	68.2%	51.9%
Additional support personnel for students (counselors, social services, health, etc.)	65.7%	46.5%
Recruitment with a group of like-minded teachers	58.3%	36.3%
Opportunities for an active role in school decision making (hiring, budget, discipline, etc.)	57.2%	36.7%
Additional, targeted professional development opportunities	54.6%	34.6%

Unlike financial incentives, non-financial incentives did not vary much based on years of experience. While new educators were slightly more likely to view targeted professional development opportunities as important, all educators felt similarly about these incentives.

Similar to financial incentives, those indicating a willingness to work in a hard-to-staff school were much more positive about all of these non-financial incentives than those who were unwilling to move. The order of preference of non-financial incentives for those who said they were willing or undecided about working in a hard-to-staff school was similar to the data in Table 11. Reduced teaching load was most important to these educators, followed closely by guaranteed planning time, additional support for teachers and additional support for students.

Those indicating a willingness to work in a hard-to-staff school were much more positive about all non-financial incentives than those who were unwilling to move.

Chapter Five

Recommendations

As the Mobile County Public School System considers policies and practices that will ensure all Alabama children have access to high quality teachers, the input of the more than 3,300 educators on this survey provides a valuable perspective.

The following recommendations are offered as the district conducts its deliberations.

TEACHERS WANT GREAT PLACES TO TEACH AND LEARN

Teaching and learning conditions in schools that many district policymakers and stakeholders may consider hard-to-staff are viewed positively by the educators who work there. Teachers believe that leadership is strong, that they have sufficient resources and that the professional development opportunities available to them enhance their knowledge and skills.

This is critical as these same conditions, particularly strong supportive leadership, are viewed as the most important factors in whether or not they will continue to work in their school and remain in teaching. Money matters. But leadership, time available to teach, and the ability to participate in important educational decisions matters most.

These conditions can also serve as critical incentives to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Non-financial incentives such as reduced teaching loads/class size, guaranteed planning time and additional support for teachers and students can provide the impetus to get qualified educators into hard-to-staff schools.

The district should consider the following:

- Ensure that principals can be the strong supportive leaders that keep teachers and attract new ones to hard-to-staff schools. Develop high-quality professional development for principals, particularly new ones, on supporting teachers and creating distributed leadership models. The district can use this data to identify principals in schools where leadership is rated highly by educators and use them to help develop and deliver the professional development and lead conversations amongst principals.
- This survey provides school-level data on teaching and learning conditions to facilitate school, district and state improvement planning and reform. The data should be analyzed so promising practices in schools with positive conditions can be documented and shared and schools needing assistance in reforming these critical aspects of learning can be improved.
- Study the use of time in school to better assess the availability of non-instructional time for teachers to plan and work collaboratively, and document and disseminate best practices. Consider incentives or regulations that would ensure sufficient time for teachers.
- Allocate at least one additional licensed educator to each hard-to-staff school for the purpose of allowing creative scheduling and providing time to collaborate and plan.

Non-financial incentives such as reduced teaching loads/class size, guaranteed planning time and additional support for teachers and students can provide the impetus to get qualified educators into hard-to-staff schools.

- Invest in strategies that eliminate the stigma of working in a hard-to-staff school, sending targeted messages to dispel preconceived notions of these schools; communicate to teachers that these schools have positive working conditions, dedicated, supportive leaders, and communities that are active partners in ensuring all children learn. Mobile has gone a long way in doing so for its transformation schools and needs to use this data to promote positive working conditions, particularly in schools serving a high proportion of poor and minority children.
- Ensure that universities preparing teachers in MCPSS are including hard-to-staff schools in their clinical placement and that faculty who must spend time in K-12 schools are doing so in hard-to-staff schools, helping to provide needed professional development and support in these schools.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

When considering incentives to recruit teachers, particularly to hard-to-staff schools, offer a flexible package of incentives to meet different local needs. While several incentives seemed to be viewed as important universally—guaranteed planning time, relocation and housing assistance, bonuses, additional support, etc.—others were more likely to resonate with a select group of teachers. New educators, for example, viewed housing assistance as more critical than veteran educators and rated it higher than signing bonuses.

The district should consider the following:

- Use funds currently appropriated, to offer other financial and non-financial incentives, not just bonuses. For example, create funds for hard-to-staff schools, available by a Request for Proposal, to be used to assist schools in creating more positive teaching and learning conditions (additional support personnel, customized professional development, etc.).
- Provide hard-to-staff schools with funds delivered as “block grants” that they can use to fund any of a package of predetermined incentives that they determine will be most effective in their context with their applicant pool. These incentives should be aligned with district priorities and help improve learning (such as providing academic coaches, achievement specialists), etc.
- Ensure programs that provide bonuses and other financial incentives offer sufficient funds to be effective. Bonuses should be between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

Ultimately, to recruit and retain quality teachers for all Mobile students, the district will need to put forth a coordinated effort to analyze and overhaul preparation, recruitment, induction and support policies. Money is important, but it will not be enough. Hard-to-staff schools must be transformed and staffed with leaders who create environments that do not require additional incentives to be attractive places for teachers to work.

When considering incentives to recruit teachers across the state, particularly to hard-to-staff schools, offer a flexible package of incentives to meet different local needs.

Notes

CHAPTER ONE—INTRODUCTION

1. Johnson, S. M. & Birkeland, S. E. (2003a). “Pursuing a ‘Sense of Success’: New Teachers Explain their Career Decisions.” *American Educational Research Journal*, 40 (3), 581-617.

2. The Teaching Commission (2004). *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action*. New York: Reinventing America’s Schools.

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4. Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools*.

5. Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). “Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: An Organizational Analysis,” *American Educational Research Journal*, 38 (3), 499-534.

6. Berry, B. and Hirsch, E. “Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools.” *NGA Center for Best Practices Issue Brief*. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association. Oct. 27, 2005.

7. Wong, K. K. & Guthrie, J. W. 2005. *Alabama Education Policy Primer: A Guide to Understanding K-12 Schools*.

CHAPTER TWO—TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THREE ALABAMA DISTRICTS

1. Hirsch, E. *Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions: A Report to Governor Mike Easley on the 2004 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for Teaching Quality, February 2004. and Hirsch, E. *Listening to the Experts: A Report on the South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for Teaching Quality, February 2004.

2. Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Who Controls Teachers’ Work? Power and Accountability in America’s Schools*. Harvard University Press.

3. Hirsch, E. *Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions: A Report to Governor Mike Easley on the 2004 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for Teaching Quality, February 2004. and Hirsch, E. *Listening to the Experts: A Report on the South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for Teaching Quality, February 2004.

CHAPTER THREE—WHY TEACHERS LEAVE

1. Difference amongst movers for rural and urban is statistically significant at the $p > .001$ level.

2. See both Ingersoll, R. M. (2001) *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools* and Ingersoll, R. M. (2001) *Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: An Organizational Analysis*.

3. Results from logistic regression modeling drawing various working conditions questions and provided demographic data from survey respondents relative to the dependent variable of state intention to leave. Finding is significant at the $p < .001$ level.

CHAPTER FOUR—RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS IN HARD-TO-SERVE SCHOOLS

1. Clotfelter, C. M., Ladd, H., Vigdor, J. L. and Diaz R. A. (2003). “Do School Accountability Systems Make It More Difficult for Low Performing Schools to Attract and Retain High Quality Teachers?” Paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Economic Association, Washington, D.C.

2. Berry, B. and Hirsch, E. “Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools.” NGA Center for Best Practices Issue Brief. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association. Oct. 27, 2005.

3. It is difficult to gauge how applicable the proportion of teachers expressing a willingness to work in a hard-to-staff school is beyond the sample population to the state. Many would argue that every one of the survey respondents work in a hard-to-staff school as the are predominantly urban or rural given the three participating districts.