

Examining Teacher Turnover: The Role of School Leadership

Rekha BALU, Tara BÉTEILLE, Susanna LOEB

From a nation-wide perspective, the number of teachers leaving schools in the United States – frequently referred to as teacher turnover – is not very large. Between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, for instance, 83,5% of teachers stayed in the same school, while only 8,1% transferred

Rekha Balu is a PhD Candidate in the Economics of Education program at Stanford University. She studies school finance and teacher policies. Previously, she served as Associate Director of the Center for Universal Education in Washington DC, and as a legislative budget analyst for the Illinois State Senate. She also worked as a journalist for several years. Dr Tara Bêteille is a Post Doctoral Fellow at the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University. Her research interests range from school leadership in public schools in the United States to examining teacher accountability and local politics in India. Susanna Loeb is a Professor of Education at Stanford University and Director of the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice. She is co-director of Policy Analysis for California Education, president-elect of the American Education Finance Association, and co-editor of Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis.

between schools and 8,4% left teaching (Marvel *et al.*, 2007). However, averages rates hide the fact that some schools lose teachers frequently, particularly schools serving black and low-achieving students (Hanushek *et al.*, 2004; Boyd *et al.*, 2007) ¹. High rates of teacher turnover can destabilize the learning environment in schools, disrupting instructional continuity in classrooms and jeopardizing the educational experience of students, many of whom are already at a disadvantage (Shields *et al.*, 1999; Loeb *et al.*, 2005). Administrators may find it difficult to implement policies or make changes if the teaching force in a school is in constant flux. For instance, Useem *et al.* (1997) find that program implementation in schools is hurt by high rates of teacher turnover. Teacher turnover also has a financial cost. Barnes *et al.* (2007) estimate that the costs range from 4,366 dollars per teacher-leaver in a small rural district such as Jemez Valley, New Mexico to 17,872 dollars per teacher-leaver in a large district such as Chicago Public Schools. Turnover can also hurt schools if the replacement teacher is a new teacher, since new teachers tend to be less effective at improving student achievement than more experienced teachers ². For

1. In this discussion, the act of leaving a school, whether to teach in another school or leave the teaching profession altogether, is termed teacher turnover. Most cases of leaving are voluntary decisions made by teachers. In particular, teachers who have completed their probationary period and have earned due process rights, also referred to as tenure, are rarely dismissed. The due process rights are most often earned at the end of a teacher's third year, though the length of the probationary period varies across states. Teachers with due process rights have their contracts automatically renewed from year to year and can only be dismissed for specified reasons.

2. Throughout this paper, effectiveness is equated with raising student test scores, unless otherwise noted. Teacher effectiveness, as measured by their ability to improve student achievement on state tests, is clearly not a perfect measure of teacher effectiveness since there are many non-quantifiable components to effectiveness. Yet, effectiveness measured in terms of student test score gains is among the more objective quantitative measures and suffers from less measurement error and subjectivity-bias than observation-based or self-report measures. An alternative measure of teacher effectiveness could come from teacher qualifications, but the link between qualifications and student learning is relatively weak (Gordon *et al.*, 2006; Clotfelter *et al.*, 2007). For these reasons, we prefer measures of teacher effectiveness based on student learning outcomes.

example, Boyd *et al.* (2006) modeled student achievement as a function of teacher experience and found that first and second year teachers, on average, have students who gain significantly less in terms of both math and English language arts scores during the year than do teachers with three or more years of experience. The study controls for time-invariant contextual differences between schools, and hence the findings are not simply the result of newer teachers teaching in schools that are low-performing to begin with. Other studies on this topic find similar results (Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rockoff, 2004; Hanushek *et al.*, 2004). To the extent that schools lose experienced teachers and replace them with inexperienced ones, instructional quality may not decrease.

Yet, not all teacher turnover is bad for schools. There is growing evidence that teachers who are less effective at improving student test scores are more likely to leave than are teachers more effective at improving test scores. Hanushek & Rivkin (2006) find this in their sample of all public schools in a large urban school district in Texas, as do Boyd *et al.* (2007) in their study of New York City Public Schools and Goldhaber *et al.* (2007) in their study of all North Carolina elementary schoolteachers (grades 4-6). If schools are able to retain those teachers better at improving achievement, while losing the ineffective ones, they may be better off than they would have been if they had no teacher turnover at all. By understanding why some teachers leave and why some schools are better able to differentially retain their better teachers, school and district decision-makers can better target their resources to retain their best teachers, especially in the schools in which they are needed the most.

This paper proceeds as follows. We first describe teacher turnover in the United States and review research on which teachers leave and why. For this analysis we draw upon the nationally representative Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS) and the related Teacher Follow-up Surveys (TFS), collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, as well as

prior studies of teachers' career decisions³. We describe differences in demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds and school attributes between teachers who stay in the same school, those who transfer across schools, and those who leave teaching altogether. In the second part of the paper, we focus on the role of school leadership in teacher turnover, since, in most school districts in the United States, principals play the central role in hiring of teachers and in evaluation and retention⁴. This section first draws upon prior studies on the importance of school leadership in teachers' career decisions. Thereafter, it uses recently-collected primary data from Milwaukee Public Schools to identify strategies principals use to influence teacher turnover.

TEACHER TURNOVER IN THE U.S.: NATIONAL TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1 describes teacher mobility in the United States from 1991-1992 until 2004-2005. It shows that while the percentage of teachers who move to another school, the "movers", has been fairly stable over the years, the percentage of those who stay on in a school, the "stayers", has been decreasing gradually and the percentage of those who leave the teaching profession altogether, the "leavers", has been rising steadily (Marvel *et al.*, 2007).

3. The School and Staffing Survey (SASS) is conducted by the United States Census Bureau and sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). It collects extensive data on U.S. public and private elementary and secondary schools, providing data on teacher supply and demand, qualifications of teachers and principals, and working conditions in schools. SASS has been conducted six times: 1987-1988, 1990-1991, 1993-1994, 1999-2000, 2003-2004 and 2007-2008. The most recent SASS, conducted in 2007-08, went out to 5,250 public school districts, 9,800 public schools, 9,800 public school principals, and 47,440 public school teachers. The Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) is a sample of the school teachers who participated in the previous year's SASS and is also conducted by NCES. The most recent TFS for which data are available, the 2004-2005 TFS, was completed by 7,429 current and former teachers. Of these, 2,864 were still teaching at the same school in 2004-2005 as in the previous year; 1,912 were still teaching, but in a different school; and 2,653 had left the teaching profession.

4. Other participants may include staff from the district office and/or members of the Board of Education.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Teacher "Stayers", "Movers" and "Leavers" in Public Schools

Year	Stayers (%)	Movers (%)	Leavers (%)
1991-92	87,6	7,3	5,1
1994-95	86,3	7,2	6,6
2000-01	84,9	7,7	7,4
2004-05	83,5	8,1	8,4

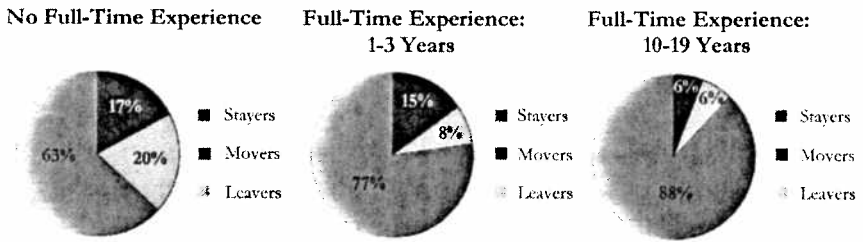
Source: Compiled from Marvel *et al.* (2007). Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2004-2005 Teacher Follow-up Survey.

Existing research suggests that teacher mobility patterns vary by teacher characteristics such as age, gender, race, teaching experience, certification type, teacher ability, as well as school attributes including salary, teaching assignment, region, community type, student body composition and school leadership. We look at the findings for each in turn.

Age. Younger teachers tend to leave a given school or teaching more frequently than older ones, with the exception of teachers nearing retirement age. Between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, for instance, 14,7% of teachers under the age of 30 years had moved to another school, while 9,0% had left teaching altogether. For teachers between the ages of 40-49 years, on the other hand, only 7,1% had moved to another school and 5,3% had left teaching altogether. The data for movements between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 suggest a similar pattern. Although new teachers were more likely to leave than more experienced ones, data on recent college graduates show that young workers tend to switch jobs more often, regardless of occupation.

Gender and race. The difference by gender is not striking. While a larger percentage of female teachers left teaching altogether between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 than men, a marginally larger percentage of male teachers switched schools over the same period. The difference between races is not statistically significant. On average, white teachers were less likely to move or leave than were African-American or Hispanic teachers both between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 and between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001.

Figure 1. Teacher Mobility (between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005) by Teacher Experience



Source: Marvel *et al.* (2007).

Teaching experience. As Figure 1 shows, between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, first year teachers were the most likely to move out of a school as well as leave teaching altogether. Teachers with one to three years of prior experience also were the most likely to move to another school and leave teaching than their more experienced colleagues. Most states grant teachers due process rights, also known as tenure, after three years of teaching experience (Loeb and Miller, 2007). The corresponding figures for teachers with more experience are lower; for instance, for teachers with 10 to 19 years of experience, 6,3% moved to another school, while 5,5% left teaching.

Certification type. Teachers have to be certified in order to teach in traditional public schools in the United States, but there are different types of certification, including full, probationary, provisional, and temporary. States determine the criteria for certification and thus the requirements for each type may vary ⁵. A probationary certificate is issued after an individual completes all the regular state certification requirements except the completion of the probationary period. A provisional certificate is issued to individuals who

5. School education in the United States is mainly provided by the public sector with control and funding coming from three levels of government: federal, state and local. Throughout this paper, federal government refers to the national government. States and state government refer to the 50 states, such as California and New York. District refers to local school districts within states.

are still participating in alternative certification programs and have not completed all the requirements. Temporary certification is a waiver to the certification requirements and no longer acceptable under the federal No Child Left Behind Act⁶. Each of the above types of certification can be obtained by pursuing traditional programs or alternative route programs. Traditional teacher preparation programs are run by a university or college and include an undergraduate or graduate degree for individuals wishing to become teachers. Alternative programs, such as Teach for America⁷, usually expedite the preparation process for individuals who already have a bachelor's degree. In many alternative programs, participants teach concurrent to their training (see Grossman and Loeb, 2008).

Between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, teachers with regular or standard certification were the least likely to move to another school or leave teaching altogether. In contrast, those with provisional or temporary certification were the most likely to move, while those with none of the common types of certification were the most likely to leave. As Figure 2 shows, 7,2% of teachers with a regular or standard certification type had switched schools between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, while 8,2% of them left teaching. In contrast, 14,4% of teachers with no certification switched schools, while 17,7% left.

6. In 2001, the federal government initiated the No Child Left Behind Act. The Act requires states to develop standardized assessments to monitor school performance and progress in improving academic achievement in order to receive federal funding. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, every child is expected to be taught by a highly qualified teacher. A highly qualified teacher is defined as a fully state-certified teacher, who holds a bachelor's degree and demonstrates competency in the core academic subject or subjects he or she teaches.

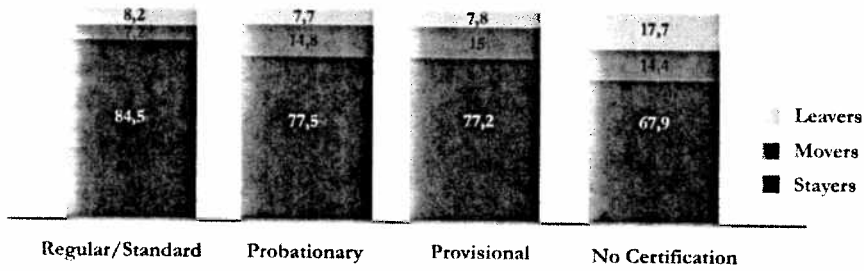
7. Teach for America is a U.S.-based non-profit that recruits recent college graduates and professionals to teach for two years in some of the most poorly-performing schools across the United States. Applicants to the program do not need to be certified to teach prior to entering the program as they receive intensive training and alternative certification while completing the program. Teach for America is a highly competitive program, typically receiving 7-8 times the number of applications relative to vacancies. For more, see: <http://www.teachforamerica.org>

Teachers' academic qualifications. Better qualified teachers (though not necessarily more effective teachers in terms of improving student achievement) are also more likely to leave teaching (Murnane and Olsen, 1989; Podgursky *et al.*, 2004). In New York City, for example, there were considerable differences between teachers who stayed at a school from one year to the next and those who transferred across schools or left teaching. Those who stayed were more than twice as likely to have failed their general-knowledge, teacher-certification exam on their first attempt than those who transferred to a school in another district. Similarly, the latter were twice as likely to have attended a highly competitive college for their undergraduate degree. New York City teachers who quit teaching in New York State were also substantially more qualified than those who remained in terms of their teacher certification test scores (Boyd *et al.*, 2005).

Salary and teaching assignment. Salary is also related to teacher transition behavior⁸. A substantial research literature shows that teachers respond to wages (e.g., Murnane *et al.*, 1991). Salaries, however, may not be the most important factor in teachers' decisions to move. While 16,5% of teachers rated salaries as being a very important factor in their decision to switch schools in the 2004-2005 TFS, over a third reported opportunity for a better teaching assignment as being very important in their decision to move and an equal percent said the same for school administration.

8. In the 2007-2008 school year, the average teacher base salary in the United States was 33,600 dollars for a teacher with a bachelor's degree but no teaching experience; 43,000 dollars for a teacher with a bachelor's degree and ten years of teaching experience; 36,700 dollars for a teacher with a master's degree but no teaching experience; 47,500 dollars for a teacher with a master's degree and ten years of teaching experience; and 62,200 dollars was the average highest possible step on the salary schedule. There is considerable variation across states in each of these categories. For instance, in Arkansas, on average, a teacher with a Bachelor's degree and ten years of teaching experience would expect to earn 36,400 dollars per year, but in Connecticut, a teacher with similar qualifications would expect to earn 54,600 dollars per year (SASS 2007-2008). The differences reflect differences in local taxes of the average school districts in these states and differences in cost of living.

Figure 2. Teacher Mobility by Certification Type

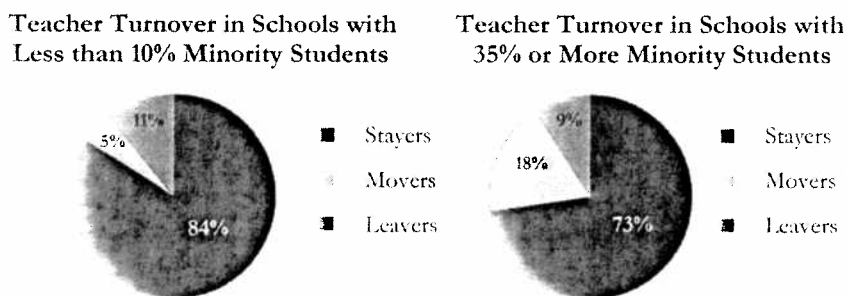


Source: Marvel *et al.* (2007).

Region and community type. Teacher mobility also varies by geographical region and community type. Turnover rates in the Northeast region of the country have been lower than in other regions, and larger schools have faced fewer turnovers than smaller schools (Loeb & Reininger, 2004). Urban areas, typically characterized by high poverty pockets, tend to have a slightly higher turnover rate than suburban areas in general, but there are certain urban areas where turnover is particularly bad. For example, in New York City, approximately 62% of teachers left their school within five years compared to 54% in the suburbs. Similarly, 35% of New York City teachers left teaching within five years, compared with 25% of teachers in the suburbs.

Student body composition. Turnover rates in schools with higher proportions of African American and Hispanic students are higher than in schools that are predominantly white. As Figure 3 shows, between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, for instance, teachers in schools with less than 10% minority student enrollment were less likely to move to other schools than those in schools where minority enrollment exceeded 10% (Marvel *et al.*, 2007). Using data from Georgia elementary teachers, Scafidi *et al.* (2003) find that teachers are more likely to move from schools with higher proportions of minority students. Specifically, they find that a one standard deviation increase in the proportion of black students in a school increases the probability that a “median type” teacher will exit a particular school in a particular year by more than

Figure 3. Teacher Turnover in Schools between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005



Source: Marvel et al., 2007.

20% (Scafidi *et al.*, 2003). Studies using Texas data and New York City data also find a strong relationship between student body racial composition and teacher turnover (Boyd *et al.*, 2005; Hanushek *et al.*, 2004). Student academic performance also matters: a study of new teachers in New York City schools finds that teachers of low-performing students are more likely to leave their current school during their first two years of teaching than are teachers of high-performing students (Boyd *et al.*, 2007). The literature also emphasizes the role that supportive parents play in reducing turnover (Rosenholtz, 1989; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

School Leadership. Research suggests that school leadership plays a vital role in teacher retention. For example, in responding to the 2004-2005 TFS, over a third of public school teachers listed dissatisfaction with support from administrators as a very important or extremely important reason for leaving their school (Marvel *et al.*, 2007). In a recent study, Boyd *et al.* (2009) combined administrative data with data from a survey administered to all first-year teachers in New York City Public Schools in spring 2005 and 2006 to understand what factors influence teacher retention decisions. The survey responses were used to create six factors: teacher influence, administration, staff relations, students, facilities, and safety. Of all these factors, teachers' perceptions of the school administration have by far the greatest influence on teacher-retention decisions. The effect of administration was

consistent for both the first-year teachers surveyed and for the full sample of New York City teachers in the administrative data.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN TEACHER TURNOVER

The research literature suggests that good principals employ several strategies to keep teacher satisfaction high. These strategies include the appropriate assignment of teachers to grades and subjects; scheduling time for planning; strong social and relational trust building and encouraging collaboration among teachers; involving teachers in hiring decisions and inducting new teachers; involving teachers in budget, discipline, and curriculum decisions; supporting teachers in disciplinary matters; and feedback and praise (Louis *et al.*, 1996; Ingersoll, 2003; Blase and Blase, 2004; Johnson *et al.*, 2005)⁹. As noted in the introduction, teacher retention need not always be good, and not all forms of attrition need be bad¹⁰. This finding suggests that effective school leaders are likely those who *strategically* retain teachers – that is, motivate effective teachers to stay and remove ineffective ones. Using administrative data from Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Bêteille, Kalogrides and Loeb (2009) find that principals at more effective schools, as measured by their value-added to student achievement, are more likely to retain more-effective teachers, as well as remove less-effective ones.

When it comes to removing less-effective teachers, prior studies suggest principals face a range of barriers. First, such teachers may not always be easy to identify since districts frequently provide imprecise definitions and set unclear standards of what constitutes teacher incompetence (Painter, 2000). Further, it is often a challenge to distinguish between a teacher who is likely to improve with mentorship and a teacher who is unfit for the profession altogether (Ehrgott, 1993). Even

9. Effectiveness is measured primarily in terms of teacher satisfaction in this literature.

10. Attrition refers to a teacher leaving a given school.

if a principal is able to identify weak teachers, he or she does not necessarily work toward dismissing those teachers (Bridges, 1986; Tucker, 1997). For instance, based on survey results from 112 principals in Virginia, Tucker finds that principals, on average, identified 1,5% of tenured teachers and 5% of all their teachers as “incompetent”, but documented only 2,7% for dismissal (Tucker, 1997). Other papers suggest that the difficulty in distinguishing among weak teachers who could improve and those unlikely to improve stems from incomplete observation and evaluation of teachers. The New Teacher Project finds that principals or other school leaders spend less than 80 minutes evaluating a teacher for the entire academic year, and that novice teachers receive just two observations per year, on average, in the ten districts they studied (Weisberg *et al.*, 2009). In her longitudinal case study of an urban school district in California, Goldstein finds that late or insufficiently documented teacher evaluations may have delayed interventions for weak teachers such as peer coaching (Goldstein, 2007). Recently, some organizations and states have focused on improving the evaluation of new teachers *before* they receive tenure in the hope that weak teachers can be remediated or dismissed earlier. For instance, Connecticut has a pre-tenure support program that offers new teachers intensive professional development during the first three years, that is, prior to tenure, but conditions their certification on performance (Little, 2009).

Even if a principal is prompt with evaluations and willing to dismiss an ineffective teacher, she is likely to encounter several systemic challenges, including contract or union protection, bureaucracy, and time-consuming processes for dismissal (Painter, 2000; Johnson *et al.*, 2007). Some local union presidents, for instance, acknowledge that they do not always counsel ineffective teachers to leave the district or the profession, and they sometimes protect ineffective teachers (Johnson *et al.*, 2007)¹¹. Even external peer review processes for weak teachers, designed partly to relieve principals of the

11. Local union presidents interviewed in this study supported peer assistance and review programs for weak teachers, but wanted principals to offer more frequent and detailed advice on improvement.

burden of teacher improvement or removal, present their own barriers. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, based on a qualitative study of seven peer-review districts, finds that principals view the external review process as tedious enough that they delay or decline to refer teachers to the program (Munger *et al.*, 2009)¹². In these districts, principals report encouraging teachers to transfer away from their school rather than referring such teachers for peer review and evaluation. This movement of poor teachers from one school to another is referred to as the “dance of the lemons”. Many of these ineffective teachers end up in schools with least savvy school leaders, often schools serving the lowest achieving students. Despite the many barriers faced by principals in remediating and dismissing teachers, some schools are able to maintain a high quality teaching force, while others are not. Similarly, some schools are able to keep their best teachers, while others are not. In the following section, we use primary interview data to take a closer look at strategic retention. Our data come from the Milwaukee Public Schools district, and tell us what principals report doing to remove ineffective teachers and motivate effective ones, and the barriers they face in each of these realms.

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE PRACTICE AND CONSTRAINTS TO STRATEGIC RETENTION

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) offers an interesting setting for examining school leadership and teacher retention. It is the largest school district in Wisconsin and the 31st largest school district in the United States by enrollment. However, like a number of urban school districts in the country, it suffers from declining student enrollment. During the 2008-2009 school year, it had an enrollment of 85,369, the lowest in forty years. Principals at declining-enrollment schools often have to adjust staffing before or during the school year,

12. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers is an ongoing research group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education focused on policy issues pertaining to the future of the U.S. teaching force. For more, see: http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/about_the_project.htm.

making optimal teacher assignment and teacher retention difficult¹³. In 2008-2009, MPS employed 5,928 full-time teachers and approximately 200 substitute teachers¹⁴ across its 213 schools. Schools in the district vary over a number of dimensions such as size, grade-level of students, leadership structure and curricular and instructional approaches. While urban districts generally have a higher proportion of students who are low-income and racial or ethnic minorities, the proportion of such students in MPS is notably high. In 2008-2009, almost 85% of the students were non-white and about 80% were eligible for federal free or reduced-price lunch subsidies¹⁵. African-Americans made up half or more of the students in 70% of the district's schools. As reported on district-administered school climate surveys, nearly 13% of students did not feel their school was safe, mirroring a student discipline and safety concern expressed by a number of the school principals in our sample. Academic achievement is a serious concern for the district. MPS is a District Identified for Improvement (DIFI) under the federal government's No Child Left Behind program. DIFI is a categorization determined by whether a district has missed its targets for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on student exam performance for at least two consecutive years¹⁶. Although MPS has met its AYP target in the components of test participation and in graduation rates, it missed AYP in both mathematics and reading achievement for four consecutive years. In addition to these characteristics, Milwaukee offers an interesting hiring and teacher evaluation context because the district adopted a school-based hiring process in 1999, a departure from the previous seniority-

13. Schools receive funding from the state on a per-pupil basis. When the number of students declines, the school loses the funds associated with that student.

14. Substitute teachers are temporary teachers who teach class on days when the regular teacher is absent.

15. U.S. education researchers often use such eligibility as a proxy for socioeconomic status.

16. Adequate Yearly Progress refers to progress in ensuring that approximately 95% of students in the district are proficient in key subjects such as reading and math. Because MPS has a high proportion of low-income students, it receives certain federal funds as support. As a result, the federal government monitors the district's progress.

based teacher assignment system run by the district. The goal of this reform is to provide more flexibility so that schools (principals and other school leaders) can choose teachers who best meet their needs. Hiring occurs in multiple cycles during the year, and incumbent teachers can request a transfer to a different school without notifying their current principal. The district screens applicants initially for licensing qualifications and then allows schools to choose whom to hire. The pool of teachers available to a school comprises teachers who have expressed a preference for that specific school. However, since schools have different pools of potential teachers, some schools can be more selective in their hiring than others. In terms of teacher improvement or dismissal, Milwaukee is one of more than twenty mid-sized U.S. school districts that have begun an independent peer review process for weak teachers. In the 1990s, the district and teachers' union jointly established a peer teacher review program, Teacher Evaluation and Mentoring (TEAM). The program is for veteran and new teachers. Through this program, principals can refer poorly performing teachers to an external panel of teacher evaluators for intensive coaching and counseling. The goal of such counseling is to either help a competent, but struggling, teacher improve, or to remove an incompetent teacher from the profession by making him or her aware of his or her unsuitability for the job. Through this process, the principal, the teachers' union, and the district collectively decide which teachers will be discharged. Outside this process, principals typically initiate the process for removing a teacher.

During October and November of 2008, our team conducted interviews with principals at schools in Milwaukee that serve students in sixth grade or above. This group of 113 schools includes schools with kindergarten through eighth grade students, schools with kindergarten through twelfth grade students, traditional middle schools¹⁷, and high schools¹⁸. From this sample, we exclude eleven teacher-led schools in our

17. Traditional middle schools cover grades 6-8.

18. This sample does not include K-5 schools nor some contract or alternative schools.

analysis, because of our focus on principals. We also exclude seventeen schools from the formal analyses because the interview was not properly recorded and thus could not be transcribed for analysis. The principals of the seventeen schools we dropped are not systematically different on observable demographic characteristics from the rest of the sample (discussed below). Our final sample size is eighty-five principals, which represents 75% of our intended MPS principals, a sizable and representative interview sample. We used a semi-structured interview protocol which included asking principals specific questions about perceived primary role; hiring strategies; retention strategies; and ways to deal with ineffective teachers, including counseling out and dismissal. If a principal discussed a strategy once or more, we coded that principal as using that strategy. We present quotes from some principals to illuminate specific strategies. If a principal did not mention a strategy, it could be because he or she did not think about it and we did not ask directly or because he or she did not use the strategy. Thus, the results tell us about the strategies that principals discussed in the interviews, not ones that we probed for directly in our questions. Based on our agreement with the district to ensure interviewees' anonymity, we do not associate quotes with the respective principal's characteristics. We have included quotes from a variety of schools, and avoid repeatedly quoting any one principal. Summary statistics for our interview sample indicate a diverse and experienced group of principals: 56% are black, 58% are female; total experience as a principal is 16,4 years on average, while experience in their current school is 4,1 years on average. Our sample includes principals in their first year as well as principals who have served up to twenty years in the same school. It should be noted that principals are hired by the district, often after years of teaching and serving as an assistant principal. However, many begin to consider the principalship as teachers, based on encouragement from their principal and colleagues at that time (Loeb & Horng, 2009).

To recapitulate, strategic retention is based on utilizing mechanisms to keep more effective teachers and remove or "counsel out" less effective ones. In theory, principals can simultaneously focus on both of these strategies, though

certain obstacles appear to stymie principals' efforts and success at doing so. In this sub-section, we first describe the strategies principals reported using to retain effective teachers, and the barriers to implementing these strategies. We then present similar results for the strategies and barriers faced in the removal of less effective teachers.

The principals in our study who discuss retention tend to motivate and reward promising and highly effective teachers. Some of the strategies they report using are relatively low-cost while others are higher cost. Low-cost strategies often involve giving well-performing teachers recognition in staff meetings. Principals also report providing promising teachers opportunities to take on new roles, and giving them leadership responsibilities. For example, one principal stated: "I encourage them to push for leadership... [for example] my math lead teacher... I see the qualities in them that they don't see in themselves... I just ask them to do certain things and put them in leadership positions, and they usually see their gifts and are able to move up". Another principal said: "I really feel like I'm one of those people that tries to look for leadership people, to give them as much as I can give them as far as opportunities to do above and beyond just their classroom duties". But recognition can also require more school resources. Strong, innovative teachers sometimes propose learning projects that are engaging but costly. Principals focused on retention say they want to encourage such motivated teachers to keep investing time and ideas in their school. "Keep the good ones happy", is how one principal summed up her retention strategy. Occasionally, motivation means that principals provide teachers with funds and resources – for example, providing funding for a field trip or a school-wide recycling program integrated with science class. As one principal explained, when teachers come and ask him to support such activities, he generally tells them, "You try and collect some money and the school will meet you half-way". Other costs include paying for special professional development opportunities, such as seminars focused on working with refugee students,

which benefit the teacher and the school. Principals report several barriers to retaining star performers. Uncertain or insufficient funds, due to fluctuations in enrollment or revenues, is one commonly cited barrier¹⁹. For instance, many of the principals say that they would like to be able to pay for more instructional aides to assist students in class and to monitor students at lunch so that teachers can plan lessons during that time, but are constrained by funds²⁰. Another barrier relates to a lack of autonomy for principals. Some principals reported preferring to keep two lead teachers than hire an assistant principal, but think that the district will not permit them that flexibility. A few principals – mostly at schools with low academic performance – also said that the district curriculum prescriptions make it difficult to respond to innovative teaching suggestions that may keep a strong teacher in their school.

Counseling out weak teachers is particularly complex and challenging. In general, principals must first be able to accurately distinguish effective teachers from ineffective teachers. Second, they must be able to distinguish those who would be served well by “remediation” that is, processes designed to correct areas of deficiency, versus those who are unlikely to improve and should be removed from the profession. Third, even when they identify teachers to be counseled out, the process to do so may be difficult and professionally risky for principals, especially with tenured teachers²¹. Unlike in the previous literature, principals in our sample did not

19. Changes in student enrollment from year to year mean changes in the amount of per-pupil funding available to the school.

20. Aides may be uncertified teachers who assist a teacher or principal.

21. Most states in the U.S. require K-12 teachers to work for a probationary period before receiving tenure. In MPS, public school teachers are typically granted tenure after three years. Tenure indicates a teacher has completed their induction and not engaged in severe misconduct. Few teachers do not receive tenure status. Tenure allows teachers to participate in the union’s collective bargaining process and receive the protections in the union contract negotiated with the district. It does not refer to a lengthy review process along the lines of what university faculty experience.

report having trouble distinguishing between effective and ineffective teachers²². Many principals assessed a teacher's pedagogic knowledge based on their understanding and application of Bloom's Taxonomy, a widely-used classification of the different learning objectives that educators set for students, and one of the assessment measures prescribed by the district²³. For instance when asked how he identifies an ineffective teacher, one principal said, "...at the end of the day I might call a teacher and say, you know I was in your classroom... explain to me what level of Bloom's were you addressing?" Another principal explained that if teachers did not change their teaching practices after feedback, they could be identified as ineffective. This finding suggests principals can be aware of teaching standards set by the district and may use them for evaluating teachers. It also suggests that principals use teachers' response to feedback as a measure of teachers' ability to learn and their potential effectiveness. Principals also identify ineffective teachers by listening to concerns expressed by parents. As one principal said, "I had two parents coming to me about a sixth grade science teacher, both of them demanding that their children be removed from that class and placed into a different class, and both parents having similar concerns about the disorganization and ineffective teaching of that sixth grade science teacher". In response, the principal reported observing and meeting with the teacher, and focusing on improving the teacher's instruction and classroom management. Once principals identify which teachers need help, many report working intensively with them outside the classroom to review lesson plans and instructional approaches, and more regularly observing and assessing the teacher's classroom instruction. In addition, TEAM, the peer assessment and counseling program described earlier, is explicitly designed as a process for referring struggling teachers for external evaluation and

22. This refers to principal's perception of their ability to distinguish between teachers, not their actual ability to do so accurately.

23. Bloom developed a structure for organizing instructional objectives to develop higher-order thinking skills. A variety of school districts develop their teacher evaluation rubric based on this structure. The idea was originally proposed in Benjamin S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956).

remediation. Teachers may see referral to TEAM either as much-needed help or as a warning or prelude to counseling out. One principal described the circumstances leading to a referral, “We had a teacher who was a kindergarten teacher and he was with us for about five years and... he started to be less effective. Part of it was on our end, the expectations rose as to what kindergarten really needed to be able to do – the kids started to read in kindergarten and... you really have to be very careful to structure the environment so kids are learning higher level skills... and that you are really tracking the kids’ practice, kid by kid and skill by skill. So he didn’t keep up on the one hand with the higher demands and on the other hand went through all sorts of stuff in his personal life... [eventually he was] referred to TEAM”.

While it is theoretically possible for principals to dismiss ineffective teachers outright, no principal reported doing so on a regular basis. The most common strategy principals reported for removing teachers involves informing the teacher of her or his unsuitability for the job, and hoping the teacher decides to leave on his or her own. One principal described an indirect version of this approach: “You know, I haven’t ever really had to overtly encourage anyone to leave. However, I also haven’t encouraged two teachers to stay. I think it was their interpersonal relations and teaching styles that caused them to perform poorly”. Another described more direct suggestions: “If I consistently hear [the teacher say] that ‘I’m not happy here’... then I’m going to [say] ‘there is a provision in your contract that allows you to transfer voluntarily out of our building’... In some cases when it’s extreme, I will look to coaching people out of the profession altogether”. In keeping with the literature, principals in our study cited difficult documentation and hearing processes, as well as the time taken to conduct such processes, as deterrents to teacher dismissal. As one principal said of the process, “It is very cumbersome. It is time-consuming. It is hard to find time to remove a staff member”. Another explained they only had time to manage the dismissal of one to two teachers at a time. “The paperwork is just so extensive... there are required observations, meeting with [the review panel], mentor(ing)

that teacher... And that's hard... to manage it for more than one person". While, in theory, detailed evaluations through the TEAM process could help in dismissal, principals reported that it has made an already tedious process even longer. For example, the principals now need to compare their own documentation on teachers with peer evaluators' assessments. In addition to the difficulty of the process, the simple act of counseling out can be difficult for principals who, like most people, prefer to avoid conflict. Some principals prefer to avoid dealing with a weak teacher altogether; the barriers discussed above may feel too daunting to overcome, and the interpersonal negotiation so delicate, that principals may steer clear of any potential conflict. For example, one principal said, "That's just a part of the job that I don't look forward to ever having to do". Another principal explained, "I deal with [ineffective teachers] in a round-about way. I have a hard time being real straightforward with people".

To conclude, the magnitude of teacher turnover in the United States is not high. Yet, nationwide averages hide the fact that some schools experience far higher turnover than other schools, and these schools are more likely to serve low-achieving, poor and non-white students. The literature emphasizes the role of principals in motivating teachers and retaining them. In this paper, we argued that effective principals engage in *strategic retention* – that is, the differential retention of high-quality teachers and removal of low-quality ones. Strategic retention is a complex task requiring principals to motivate some teachers while taking a tough stand with others, without building up resentment in the school or creating factions. Based on principal interviews in Milwaukee, we find that some principals report actions aimed at differentially retaining effective teachers, such as providing leadership opportunities, but most report little satisfaction with their ability to remove ineffective teachers. They attempt to counsel out weak, inexperienced teachers, but rarely use the formal mechanism for counseling out, TEAM, or target ineffective veteran teachers as much as may be needed. Our data and prior literature point to barriers to strategic retention, particularly in the removal of ineffective

teachers. The unpleasantness of the job of remediating or removing a poorly-performing teacher coupled with excessive documentation and hearing processes, make counseling out unappealing to most principals. Our findings, backed by related literature, suggest that districts may need to simplify remediation and dismissal processes considerably before principals feel motivated to use them.

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