

School-Level Factors Associated with Teacher Retention in South Carolina

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It has been very challenging to retain effective teachers in the United States. According to Garcia and Weiss (2019), teacher shortages were real, large, and growing, indicating that high-poverty schools suffered the most from the shortage of credentialed teachers. Sutchter et al. (2019) showed that the most important driving factor of teacher shortages was high teacher attrition. Attrition rates were much higher for new teachers (i.e., in their first year of practice) and teachers in high-poverty schools (Loeb et al., 2005). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) revealed that there was an overall turnover rate of about 16% in the U.S. The lowest overall turnover rates were in the Northeast (about 10%), and the highest overall turnover rates were in the South with about 16 to 17% in cities and suburbs and 14 to 15% in towns and rural areas.

This study focused on South Carolina and explored the school level factors associated with teacher retention. This study used school report card data (2018-2019), the school poverty index data, and the E-rate data for school location information. These data files are publicly available from the South Carolina Department of Education.

This study intended to address these research questions:

- What is the relationship between teacher retention and school level variables?
- How do teacher retention rates differ among elementary, middle, and high schools?
- How do teacher retention rates differ among schools of different poverty levels?
- How do teacher retention rates differ among schools with principals who have different years of experience at the school?
- How do teacher retention rates differ between urban schools and rural schools?

Key Findings

- The teacher retention rates had statistically significant relationships with many school level variables.
- Comparatively, teachers' satisfaction with school climate, teacher salary, and school poverty had relatively strong associations with teacher retention rates.
- Student teacher ratio, school safety measures, principals' years at the school, and total Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) had relatively weak associations with teacher retention rates.
- The average teacher retention rate (current year) at high schools was significantly higher than that in elementary and middle schools. However, the average teacher retention rate did not differ significantly between elementary schools and middle schools. The average teacher retention rate (three-year average) at middle schools was significantly lower than that in elementary and high schools. However, the average teacher retention rate did not differ significantly between elementary schools and high schools.
- The average teacher retention rate was significantly different among schools of different levels of poverty, with medium to large differences. The average teacher retention rate at high poverty schools was significantly lower than that in low poverty and medium poverty schools. However, the average teacher retention rate did not differ significantly between low poverty schools and medium poverty schools.
- The average teacher retention rate was significantly different among schools where principals had different years of experience at the school, with medium differences. The average teacher retention rate at the schools where principals had three or fewer years at the school was significantly lower than that at the schools with more experienced principals with more than three years of experience at the school.
- The average teacher retention rate did not differ significantly between urban schools and rural schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study contribute to the literature of teacher retention in general. It also provides a holistic picture of teacher retention and helps identify school level factors related to teacher retention in South Carolina. The findings could be used to inform policymaking in K-12 education, funding designation to schools, and developing strategies for school improvement and teacher retention. Based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, we provide the following suggestions that could contribute to ideas for teacher retention programs and educational policymaking in South Carolina.

- Schools should build a positive and welcoming climate with a strong professional community for teachers. This community should be built in a safe, healthy, and supportive school environments, and actively involve and engage family and community (Hughes, 2012).
- School type and poverty should be considered in policymaking regarding funding allocation, interventions, and programs. For example, high poverty middle schools need particular attention in reform efforts to retain teachers.
- Schools should develop supportive administrative leadership through various strategies such as supporting principals, retaining principals, and shared leadership (Podolsky et al., 2019).
- Schools should consider increasing teacher salaries and/or providing incentives to teachers because teachers with higher beginning salaries have been found to be associated with a greater likelihood to stay (Gray & Taie, 2015; Hughes, 2012).
- Schools should provide mentoring and certification opportunities for teachers. Teachers who were certified and mentored were less likely to leave their profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Gray & Taie, 2015), and well-operated induction and mentoring programs were the best method for increasing teacher retention (Brill & McCartney, 2008).
- There should be strong collaboration between higher education teacher preparation programs and teacher retention programs because hiring better prepared teachers resulted in lower attrition and higher levels of competence (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

ABOUT SC-TEACHER

The South Carolina Teacher Education Advancement Consortium through Higher Education Research (SC-TEACHER) is funded by the Commission on Higher Education as a Center for Excellence. SC-TEACHER will examine the broad landscape of teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention practices in South Carolina—and build and deploy a state-centric, longitudinal database system to understand statewide issues and best practices for establishing protocols and to maintain a data infrastructure necessary to answer key questions posed by policymakers and practitioners. SC-TEACHER's work will inform educator preparation programs, serve as an education research resource center, and provide evidence of effective teaching practices.

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