

Factors Influencing Teacher Turnover in NC Rural Schools

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Audience: School & District Leaders; Educator Preparation Programs; Policy-Makers

Topic: Evidence about the factors influencing k-12 teacher turnover

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

1. What factors can rural school leaders influence that will retain teachers?
2. How did the pandemic affect teacher turnover in NC rural schools?

EVIDENCE

We recognize that school leaders and policymakers cannot influence all the factors, as one principal in a rural school said to us, *“I’m not in a position to offer teacher bonuses or incentives. Yet, a key message is that school leaders can influence some factors to reduce teacher turnover.”*

- Literature search on teacher turnover.
- Preliminary data from our study on workforce effectiveness in NC rural schools during the pandemic.
- External, teacher, and school factors that influence teacher turnover (see Figure 1).

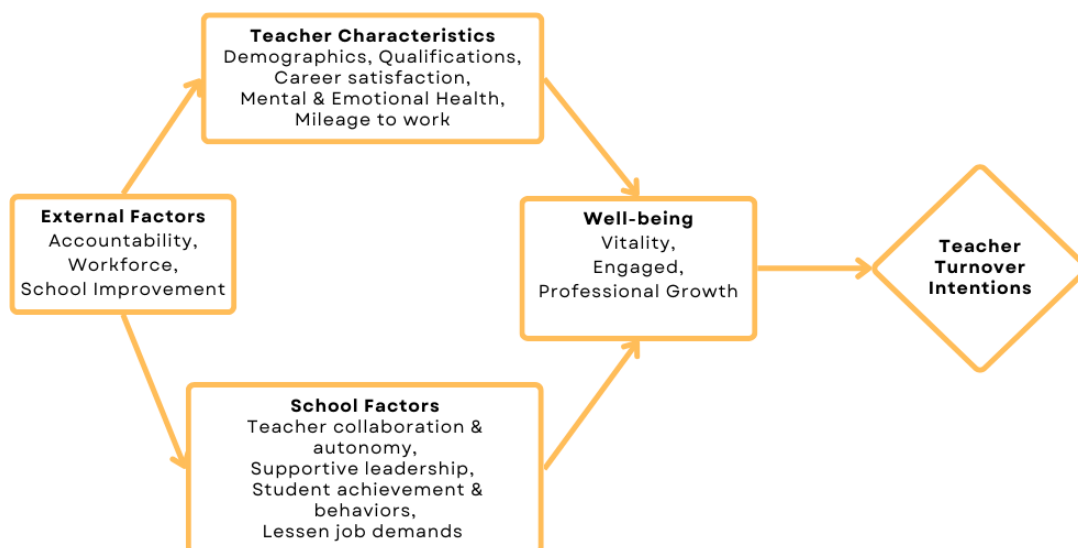


Figure 1. Factors influencing teacher turnover intentions. Adapted from Nguyen, T. D. & Springer, M.G. (2021) & Collie, 2023.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Pay attention to why teacher turnover was lower during the first year of the pandemic¹ – teachers appreciated their job security, but they could also really focus on teaching.

A teacher in our study said, *“There were so many people losing work and losing their jobs, and I did not fear that.”*

A reduction in an intense workload and in activities that many teachers found burdensome were reduced, which gave them more time to teach well.

Teachers in our study echoed this teacher’s sentiment, *“I mean it was kind of refreshing to just be able to teach and teach the ones that want to learn and show up....It was a restart button.”*

One high school teacher in our focus groups observed, *“we had more time...you eliminated all of the athletic sports duties, games, senior play, clubs, all that was eliminated, and we were just teaching. We were getting really good at what we were doing... I feel like I’m a better teacher because of it.”*

2. District leaders and principals should pay attention to the school improvement efforts and school characteristics by increasing job resources and reducing job demands.

An elementary school principal in our study demonstrates this influence by stating, *“One of the things our district did was hire an instructional coach, huge support. Another thing our district did was hire an interventionist...”*

A principal observed, *“the funding that we have received in the sense of ESSER funds have [enabled us] to hire more personnel... .So when students did return, we were able to have smaller class sizes. We were able to really start to target kids and try to make up for some of the learning loss that had occurred.”*

The question is about the sustainability of such efforts. The same person noted, *“we’re just really starting to see the impact of that [funding], and it’s huge, but that funding is ending. And so my fear is all the gains that we’ve made [will be lost].”*

Distributed leadership and a culture of inquiry reduces job stress on teachers and students (De Voto & Superfine, 2023).

3. Policymakers should make investments now to forestall an increase in turnover in 2023 on, due to increased student behavior problems and loss of learning due to the pandemic. School leaders should redeploy resources to minimize student disruptive behaviors.

As students returned to school, teachers observed, *“I think a lot of us were shocked...we had to sort of step back and realize that we aren’t going to be able to teach the things we need to be able to teach.... I feel like we are seeing more and more in this area, severe behavior, emotional problems.”*

Teachers dissatisfied with school communications, decisions, and supplies related to COVID-19 make them 1/3 more likely to think of leaving now as compared to pre-pandemic. Or, as one veteran elementary school teacher in our study shared *“it’s just been the first time in all my years I’ve thought about switching professions.”*

¹<https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2022/09/Teacher-and-Principal-Attrition-During-COVID-19.pdf>

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This project is supported by the North Carolina Collaboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with funding appropriated by the North Carolina General Assembly via the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (H.R. 1319) (federal award identification number SLFRP0129).