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NCTQ Clears Up Latest “Crisis” in Teaching: An Accurate Look at Teacher Turnover Data

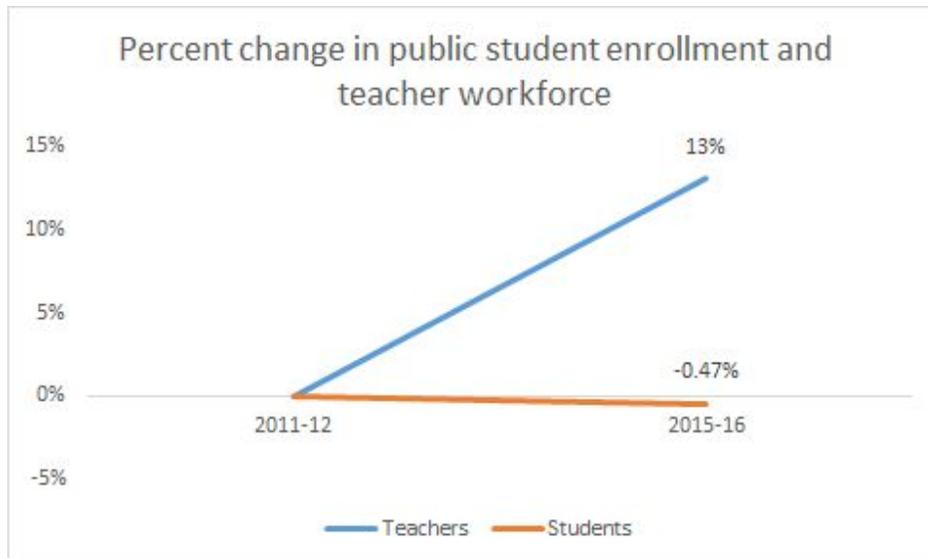
The buzz around a “national” teacher shortage has gained a lot of steam, despite some pretty compelling [national data](#) suggesting otherwise. Here NCTQ provides some information pertaining to teacher hiring and retention that may prove useful to you in your reporting.

In *some* places in America, there are shortages--some of them quite severe. In other places, there are not. The biggest problems the nation faces are chronic shortages of some kinds of teachers (e.g. STEM, special education). These shortages, for the most part, are not new, but have lasted now for decades. Teacher prep programs, school districts, and states have yet to enlist the solutions necessary to systematically reduce shortages in some subjects and in some schools--because most of the solutions require additional funds, tough decisions to steer teacher candidates towards high-demand subject areas, and paying teachers different salary amounts.

Absent the local data we so desperately need, here are some national figures:

Schools are hiring lots of teachers. New data from the US DoED show that the teacher workforce has grown by more than 400,000 teachers in just the last four years, while the student population has not.¹ It’s safe to say that such growth would not be achievable under shortage conditions.

¹ Taie, S., and Goldring, R. (2017). Characteristics of Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey First Look (NCES 2017-072). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 22 September 2017 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017072>.; 2011-12 teacher data from: National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). Table 209.20. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 22 September 2017 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_209.20.asp. 2011-12 student data from: Bitterman, A., Gray, L., and Goldring, R. (2013). Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results From the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES 2013–312). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 22 September 2017 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013312.pdf>. 2015-16 student data from: Taie, S., and Goldring, R. (2017). Characteristics of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey First Look (NCES 2017-071). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 22 September 2017 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017071>.



Turnover rates appear to be about the same as other professions, with little evidence that teachers are leaving because they are dissatisfied. There have been assertions that the current “teacher shortage crisis” is due to unacceptably high rates of teacher turnover. The narrative we are being asked to believe is that if our nation does not enact measures to address the large number of dissatisfied exiting teachers, the national teacher shortage will become an even greater crisis.

Using the most recent government data available,² the turnover rate for all teachers in the most recent year is 16 percent.

Half of this 16 percent aren’t leaving teaching, but are switching schools (and often staying within their same district). The other half *are* leaving teaching.³

Why is 8 percent of the teaching force leaving each year?⁴

- 38.3 percent are retiring.
- 29.3 percent are taking other education-related, non-teaching jobs in a school or school district.

Given these numbers, it is clear that most teachers who leave the classroom are not doing so because they want jobs that are far-removed from the field of education. Moreover, a sizeable

² Goldring, R., Taie, S., and Riddles, M. (2014). Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey (NCES 2014-077). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 22 September 2017 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf>

³ Goldring, R., Taie, S., and Riddles, M. (2014).

⁴ Goldring, R., Taie, S., and Riddles, M. (2014).

number of teachers who leave the classroom return at some point (a quarter to a third of them),⁵ --suggesting they weren't dissatisfied to the point of no return.

To view a more complete breakdown of the 8 percent who leave the teaching force, please visit Table 6 [here](#).

Don't those figures mask higher rates of turnover in some schools? According to NCES,⁶ the annual turnover for teachers is highest in rural areas:

- 8.4 percent in rural areas
- 6.4 percent in towns
- 7.3 percent in suburbs.
- 7.9 percent in cities

What about the commonly-heard statistic that 50 percent of all new teachers leave within the first five years?

That figure, though widely cited, was never based on solid data. The government released its first solid data on that point in 2015, finding that it was actually **17 percent** of all new teachers who leave within the first four years (the fifth year data has not yet been published).⁷

What's happening in schools with higher rates of poverty?

The proportion of all teachers leaving the profession is significantly higher in schools with higher rates of poverty (9.8 percent annually in schools in high poverty schools versus 6.9 percent in more affluent schools).⁸

How does the teaching turnover rate compare to other professions?

While about 16 percent of all teachers leave their current teaching job each year, this is comparable to the exit rate from nursing and half the exit rate for social workers.⁹

As the facts indicate, it is not so much a set of national solutions that are needed to fix a chronic, decades-old misalignment of supply and demand (for example, did you know that twice as many elementary teachers are prepared each year as are actually hired?). **Instead, local solutions are needed.** Treating this problem as a national shortage with solutions such as raising teacher pay across the board (which does nothing to make hard-to-fill jobs more desirable) or growing residency programs (which cost \$65,000 per candidate on average,

⁵ Grissom, J. A., & Reiningger, M. (2012). Who comes back? A longitudinal analysis of the reentry behavior of exiting teachers. *Education Finance and Policy*, 7(4), 425–454.

⁶ Goldring, R., Taie, S., and Riddles, M. (2014).

⁷ Gray, L., and Taie, S. (2015). *Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study* (NCES 2015-337). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 22 September 2017 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015337.pdf>

⁸ Goldring, R., Taie, S., and Riddles, M. (2014).

⁹ Grissom, J. A., & Reiningger, M. (2012).

exclusive of salary) in fact undermines the need to arrive at targeted, specific solutions addressing problems that are specific to an area.

The first step is better local data so that we can see through the fog of assertions and misinterpretation of the facts. Every state needs to collect better data on graduates from teacher prep programs as well as hiring and retention data from school districts. They need to use common definitions that permit comparisons across states (as many labor markets cross state boundaries), work which would fall to a convening organization like CCSSO.

We hope that you find this information useful.

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To schedule an interview with Kate Walsh, President of NCTQ, please contact Eric Duncan at (202) 393- 0020 ext. 130.

About the National Council on Teacher Quality:

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, www.nctq.org.