

Sticky schools:

How to find and keep teachers in the classroom

To improve teacher recruitment, performance, and retention, education policymakers should consider five proven strategies.

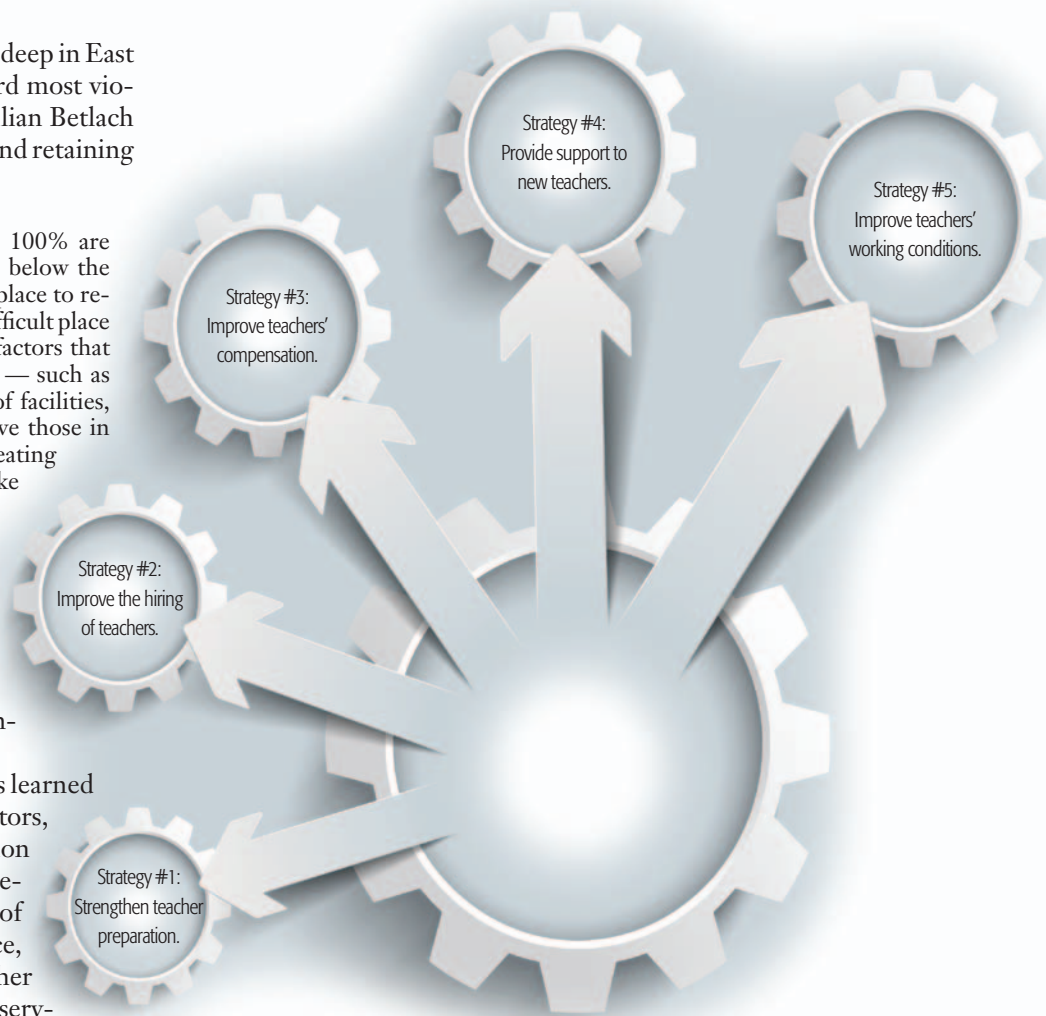
By Anne Podolsky, Tara Kini, Joseph Bishop, and Linda Darling-Hammond

Elmhurst Community Prep is located deep in East Oakland, Calif., where the first and third most violent police beats converge. Principal Kilian Betlach focuses much of his work on recruiting and retaining strong teachers. He explains:

We serve 375 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. 100% are young people of color, nearly 100% live below the poverty line. This makes ECP a difficult place to recruit teachers into. And perhaps a more difficult place to retain them . . . Most of the external factors that could contribute to longevity in a career — such as the extent of parental involvement, age of facilities, competitiveness of salary — we don't have those in our favor. So we have to compensate by creating a community, climate, and culture that make teachers feel valued and excited, and make the idea of leaving something they would never consider.

To make ECP a school where teachers “stick,” says Betlach, he emphasizes effective hiring practices, on-the-job coaching, collaboration time for teachers, and a values-driven environment.

While Elmhurst Community Prep has learned how to attract and keep talented educators, schools and communities across the nation are experiencing shortages of well-prepared teachers, especially in the fields of special education, mathematics, science, and bilingual instruction. Further, teacher attrition tends to be highest in schools serv-



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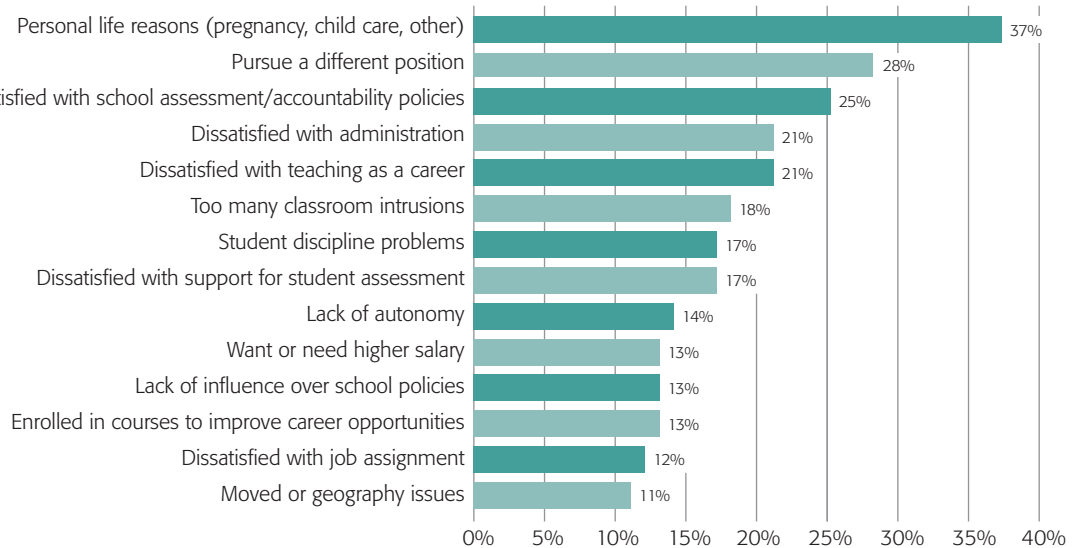
ing high concentrations of low-income students and students of color. In 2012-13, almost one in 10 teachers in high-poverty public schools left the profession; by contrast, fewer than one in 15 teachers in low-poverty schools did so (Goldring et al., 2014).

Overall, more than half of teachers voluntarily

leave the profession for reasons other than retirement (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016), which not only deprives students of experienced instructors but also comes at an enormous cost to taxpayers. Replacing such teachers has been estimated to cost large urban districts as much as \$20,000

FIGURE 1.
Why do teachers leave?

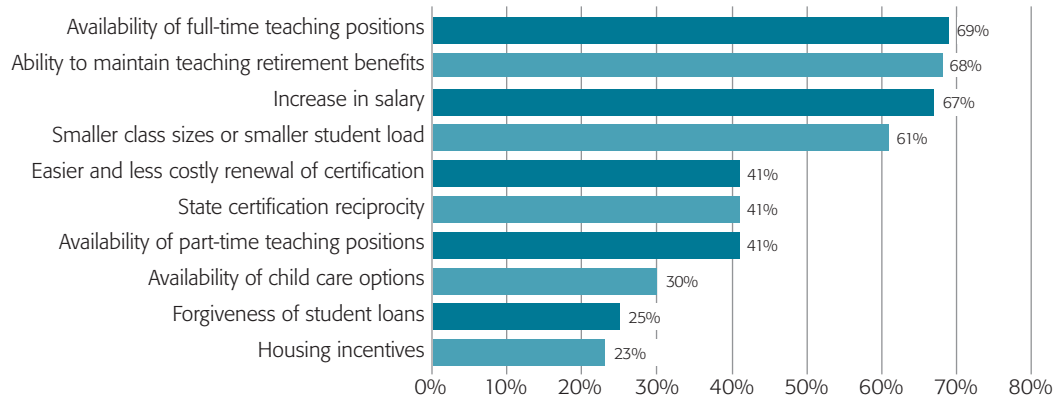
The percentage of voluntary leavers who rated the factor as extremely or very important in their decision to leave. Percentages do not add up to 100 because teachers can select multiple factors.



Source: LPI analysis of the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), 2013, from the Schools and Staffing Surveys, National Center for Education Statistics.

FIGURE 2.
What would bring the leavers back?

The percentage of leavers who rated the factor as extremely or very important in their decision to return. Percentages do not add up to 100 because teachers can select multiple factors.

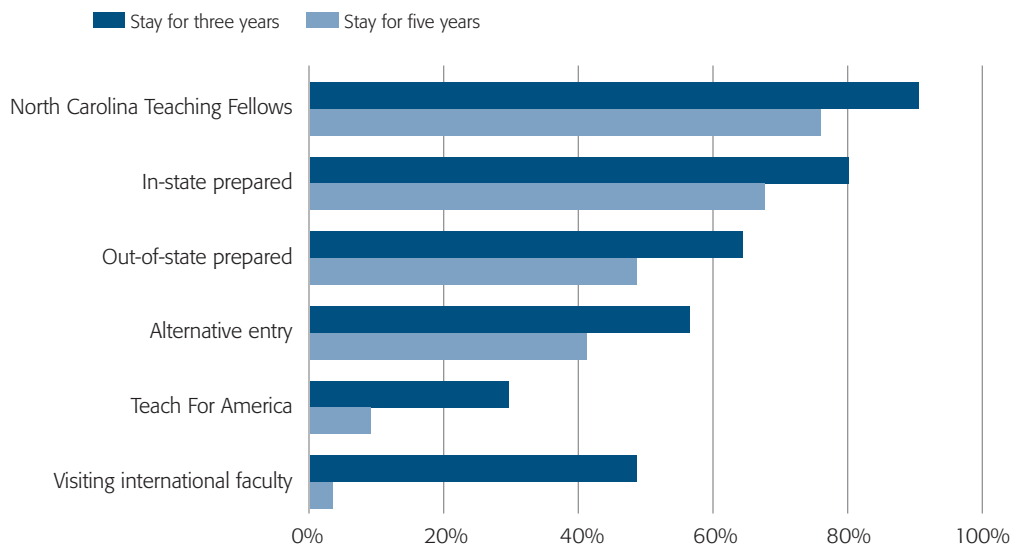


Note: The most frequently cited factor (the availability of full-time teaching positions) may have been related to the timing of the 2011-12 National Center for Education Statistics survey, which was conducted during a time of budget cuts and teacher layoffs, during the Great Recession.
Source: LPI analysis of the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), 2013, from the Schools and Staffing Surveys, National Center for Education Statistics.

FIGURE 3.

Percentage of teachers who remain teaching in North Carolina public schools

The percentage of teachers who return for a third and fifth year of teaching in North Carolina public schools for three cohorts of first-year teachers, regardless of subject taught, 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07.



Source: Henry, G.T., Bastian, K.C., & Smith, A.A. (2012). Scholarships to recruit the 'best and brightest' into teaching: Who is recruited, where do they teach, how effective are they, and how long do they stay? *Educational Researcher*, 41 (3), 83-92.

per teacher (in current dollars) — nationally, the price tag is around \$8.5 billion per year (Carroll, 2007).

Fortunately, decades of research provide a road map for how federal, state, and local policymakers can ensure that competent and committed teachers stick in their schools. Research points to five major strategies and related policies that can positively influence teachers' decisions to enter and remain in the teaching profession:

1. Strengthen preparation.
2. Improve hiring.
3. Increase compensation.
4. Provide support for new teachers.
5. Improve working conditions (with particular attention to school leadership, professional collaboration and shared decision making, accountability systems, and resources for teaching and learning).

As Figures 1 and 2 suggest, these factors capture many of the reasons teachers say they leave, as well as the conditions under which teachers who have left the profession say they would consider returning to the classroom.

Strategy #1: Strengthen teacher preparation.

Teachers who have strong preparation experiences are more likely to feel effective in the classroom,

which is associated with improved student outcomes, and to remain in the profession over time. Characteristics of strong teacher preparation include having opportunities to observe others teaching, having a full semester or more of student teaching, receiving feedback on those early teaching experiences, and taking courses in teaching methods, learning theory, and the selection of instructional materials (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014).

In spite of the benefits of high-quality teacher preparation, growing numbers of people are entering the profession before having completed — or sometimes even begun — their training. Given the rising costs of higher education and limited access to financial aid, prospective teachers have strong incentives to pursue emergency credentials and other alternative routes to a salaried position, often bypassing university-based training altogether. However, while this may offer a relatively inexpensive way to start one's career, underprepared teachers tend to struggle in the classroom and exit the profession quickly.

Fortunately, there are ways to offer prospective teachers high-quality preparation without asking them to take on large student loans. First, the federal or state government can provide service scholarships or loan forgiveness programs to attract prospective teachers to the fields and locations where they are needed most. The North Carolina Teaching Fel-

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lows Program, for example, recruited talented high school graduates and provided them an enhanced teacher preparation program in exchange for a commitment to teach in the state for at least four years. The scholarship recipients not only had higher rates of retention, but they also proved to be more effective educators than their peer teachers, as measured by the test score gains of their students (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). As shown in Figure 3, about 90% of scholarship recipients returned for a third year, and 75% returned for a fifth year, as compared to other in-state prepared teachers (80% and 68% respectively).

Similarly, school districts can invest in high school career pathways, grow-your-own models, and other local efforts to recruit talented individuals from the community and award them scholarships or stipends to offset the cost of teacher preparation at a nearby university. Such programs tend to be especially effective in urban and rural communities because teachers often prefer to teach near where they grew up and attended high school.

Induction programs can provide a significant return on investment.

Teacher residencies — another proven grow-your-own model — offer another effective and affordable means of entering the profession. Modeled after medical residencies, these programs allow talented teacher candidates to work as paid apprentices alongside expert teachers, giving them a way to earn income and gain valuable experience while completing their credential. In return, they commit to teach for several years in the partnering high-need school district. (For more information about teacher residencies, see the article by Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond in this issue, pp. 31-37.)

Strategy #2: Improve the hiring of teachers.

School districts are not always organized to support timely and efficient hiring practices. Many factors affect a district's ability to attract, hire, and keep high-quality teachers. Perhaps most important are the timing and quality of the hiring process as well as the ease with which teachers are able to transfer to a new district.

Districts and schools can strengthen their hiring practices by ensuring that decisions are made as early as possible, based on projections of future need. Some high-performing schools and districts also allocate significant time for a multistep hiring process that allows them to assess the candidate's fit, based on extensive information that includes school visits, in which the candidate teaches a demonstration les-

son and meets with other teachers and staff. States and districts also can revise timelines for voluntary transfers or resignations so hiring can occur as early as possible, ideally in the spring of the prior school year. Further, the timely passage of state budgets can enable districts to begin planning earlier. In 2010, for example, California voters enacted incentives to encourage the state legislature to pass the budget on time, including denying legislators their pay for each day that the budget is not passed after the budget deadline.

States and districts also can reduce unnecessary barriers to entry for veteran teachers moving from other areas. For example, districts can remove salary caps for years of experience so veteran teachers don't have to take a pay cut when they transfer into a new district. States, for their part, can create cross-state pensions for teachers — many current benefit plans are not portable across states, which creates a disincentive for teachers to stay in the profession when they relocate. Portable plans, such as the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund's model for college faculty, could be explored for preschool to secondary teachers, or states could develop reciprocity agreements with other states. They also might consider investing in the design and implementation of online hiring platforms so teachers can easily identify vacancies and get information about the hiring process in other parts of the country.

Strategy #3: Improve teachers' compensation.

While few enter teaching with expectations of becoming wealthy, teachers do expect to earn a salary that allows them to live a middle-class lifestyle in the community where they teach. Teacher compensation affects the supply of teachers, including the distribution of teachers across districts, as well as the quantity and quality of individuals preparing to be teachers. Salaries also appear to influence teacher attrition: Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages (Hendricks, 2014).

Although salaries vary by state, teacher salaries in the U.S. are generally lower than those offered to other college graduates. Even after adjusting for the shorter work year in teaching, beginning teachers nationally earn about 20% less than individuals with college degrees in other fields, a wage gap that can widen to 30% by midcareer (Baker, Sciarra, & Farrie, 2015). Moreover, the difference between teacher compensation and that of other workers with a college degree has grown larger over time. In 1994, public school teachers' earnings (including salary, health benefits, and pension) were similar to those of other workers with a college degree after adjusting for the shorter work year in teaching; by

2015, teachers earned 11% less in total compensation (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). This research also found a similar salary gap for teachers with master's degrees. In addition, great inequities in teacher salaries among districts within the same labor market leave some high-need, under-resourced districts at a strong hiring disadvantage. For example, an analysis found that the best-paid teachers in low-poverty schools earned 35% more than their counterparts in high-poverty schools (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011).

Teachers' career decisions are closely related to their opportunities for professional collaboration, shared decision making, and participation in teams that work toward common goals.

The federal government, states, and districts all have a role to play in promoting policies to increase teachers' compensation. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes levers to provide low-income schools and districts with additional resources to attract and retain high-quality teachers. In addition, states can target state investments to strengthen the quality of their teacher workforce. For example, between 1986 and 1991, Connecticut was able to eliminate its teacher shortages by increasing teachers' salaries in combination with other strategic initiatives to bring high-quality candidates into the state's classrooms. Connecticut raised minimum teacher salaries to a state-recommended level and provided state equalization aid to incentivize districts to voluntarily raise their salaries to the minimum. This allowed districts in less wealthy communities to compete for qualified teachers, as opposed to having their talented educators poached by wealthier districts (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

States and districts also can offer career advancement opportunities that provide teachers with increased compensation, responsibility, and recognition. For example, in 1986 Missouri established a career ladder program in which teachers could assume leadership roles and share expertise as they moved through their career. Teachers in the career ladder program were significantly less likely to leave their district than teachers in noncareer ladder districts, even when controlling for district characteristics, such as their wealth, size, or level of urbanization (Booker & Glazerman, 2009). Teachers in career ladder districts were also less likely to leave the profession overall and reported increased job satisfaction due to their participation in the program.

Finally, districts — with support from state policymakers — also can take a broader look at compensation, considering whether other types of financial support, such as housing incentives or child care options, might meet the needs of teachers in their community.


Strategy #4: Provide support to new teachers.

Providing mentorship and support for new teachers (sometimes referred to as induction) can significantly increase the likelihood that educators stay in the classroom (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The most effective induction programs include mentoring, coaching, and feedback from experienced teachers in the same subject area or grade level as the novice teacher; the opportunity to observe expert teachers; orientation sessions, retreats, and seminars; and reduced workloads and extra classroom assistance.

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Further, induction programs can provide a significant return on investment. A 2007 analysis of a California school district found that after five years, the \$13,000 cost of its comprehensive, two-year induction program brought \$21,500 in benefits, or about a 65% return on investment (Villar & Strong, 2007), mainly due to the increased effectiveness of beginning teachers who had gone through the program. In fact, the study found that these teachers were as effective as more highly paid fourth-year teachers who had not experienced induction. Another benefit of the two-year induction program included lower attrition and, therefore, lower recruiting costs.

The quality of support from administrators is often the main factor that teachers identify as their reason for staying in or leaving the profession.

Given the benefits of induction for retention and effectiveness, states and districts should consider investing in these programs to make them available to all new teachers. Federal funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act can also be leveraged to support research-based induction programs for novice teachers.

Strategy #5: Improve teachers' working conditions.

Teacher working conditions — which might also be described as student learning conditions — are a strong predictor of teacher decisions about where to teach and whether to stay. Working conditions are a broad term to capture all the school environment factors that affect student and adult learning, including leadership, opportunities for collaboration, accountability systems, class sizes, facilities, and instructional resources such as books and access to technology. Teaching and learning conditions are often much worse in high-poverty than in low-poverty schools and contribute to high rates of teacher turnover (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

To improve teacher working conditions, the federal government, states, and districts should consider adopting policies that address three issues in particular: school leadership and administrative support, resources for teaching and learning, and opportunities for professional collaboration and shared decision making.

The first, the quality of support from administrators (principals, in particular), is often the main factor that teachers identify as their reason for staying in or leaving the profession (NCES, 2013). States can invest in the development of high-quality principals

by establishing strong preparation standards for administrators and investing in principals' capacity to foster positive school cultures, especially by including teachers in decision making. ESSA allows states, for the first time, to set aside an additional 3% of their Title II, Part A funds to invest specifically in strengthening school leaders.

Teacher effectiveness and retention rates also tend to be higher at schools that have sufficient instructional materials and supplies, safe and clean facilities, reasonable student-to-teacher ratios, and adequate support personnel (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The reverse is also true: Inadequate resources are associated with higher teacher turnover and lower student achievement (Buckley et al., 2004; Theobald, 1990). States and districts can survey teachers to assess the quality of the teaching and learning environment and to guide improvements. For example, the well-known Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey, which has been used in at least 18 states, includes questions — about a school's culture, a principal's leadership, and relationships among colleagues — that are known to be strong predictors of teacher job satisfaction and career plans (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

Finally, teachers' career decisions are closely related to their opportunities for professional collaboration, shared decision making, and participation in teams that work toward common goals — all of which have been found to improve teacher efficacy and retention (NCES, 2013; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). However, to encourage such practices, most schools will have to make significant changes in scheduling and resource allocation, giving teachers the time they need to work together productively. For example, New Jersey supported improving professional collaboration by enacting a series of regulations that required 100 hours of professional learning for teachers annually, along with mentoring and induction for beginning teachers. The state has also supported schools to create professional learning communities and has offered training to principals that focuses on how to create productive, collaborative school environments that foster continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Betlach's focus on attracting and supporting talented educators at Elmhurst Community Prep using evidence-based practices has paid off. Six years ago, he had to replace six out of 20 teachers in the school. Last year, he only had to replace one. This school is a reminder of the importance of ensuring that all schools adopt evidence-based practices to find and keep talented educators. In fact, we owe it to students to ensure that they are taught by well-prepared, com-

mitted educators. To do this, policymakers and professionals will need to develop policies and practices that attract talented educators and make sure that they stick in their schools. ■

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