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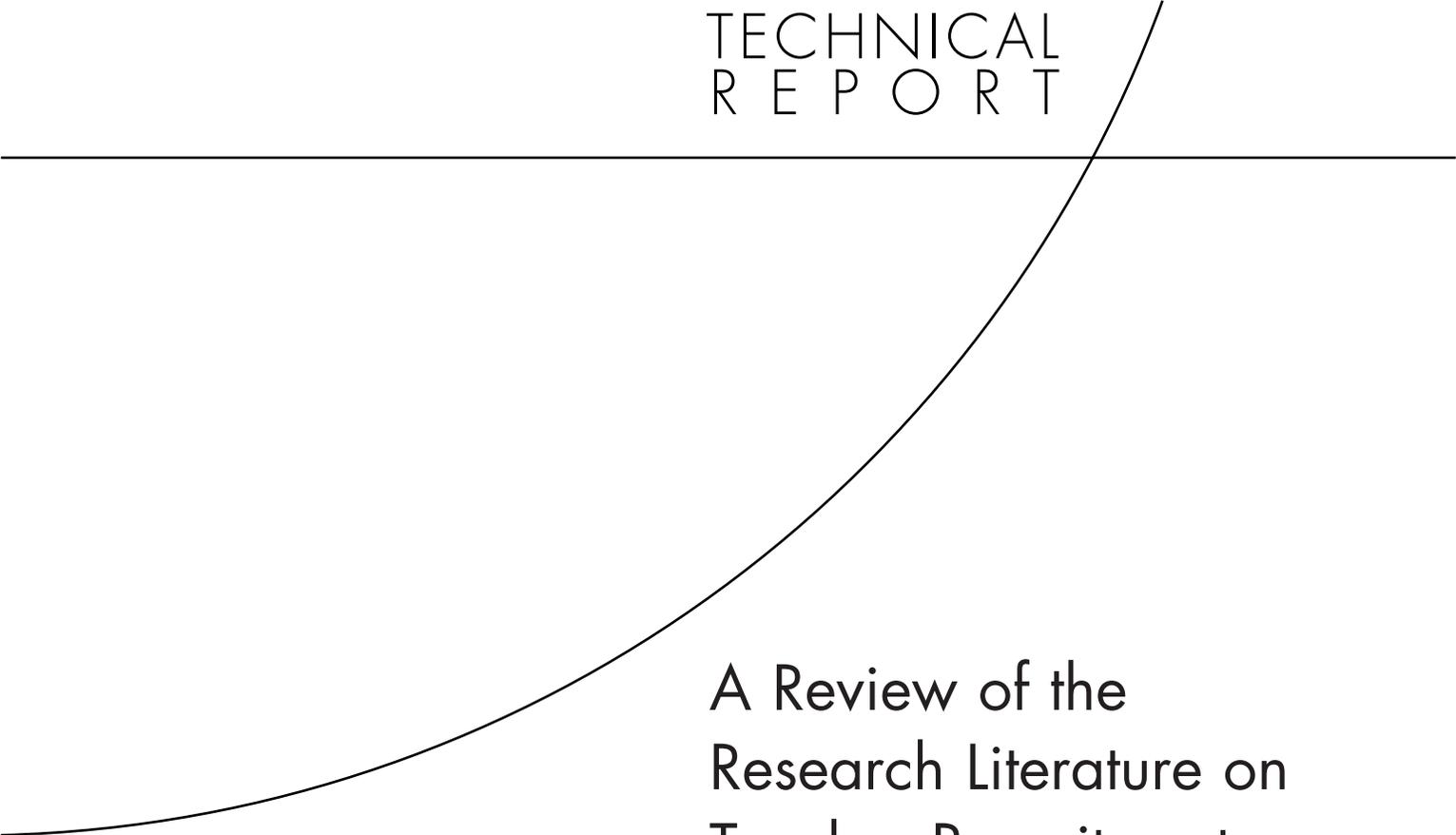
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A Review of the  
Research Literature on  
Teacher Recruitment  
and Retention

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This literature review provides a summary and critical evaluation of the research on the topic of teacher recruitment and retention. It focuses on empirical studies that were published between 1980 and the end of 2003. As a means of organizing the large body of research relating to this broad topic, we grouped the studies into the following categories: (1) studies that examined the characteristics of individuals who enter teaching, (2) studies that focused on the characteristics of individuals who remain in teaching, (3) studies that investigated the external characteristics of districts and schools that affect recruitment and retention, (4) studies of compensation policies that affected recruitment and retention, (5) studies of pre-service policies that affected recruitment and retention, and (6) studies of in-service policies that affected recruitment and retention.

The reviewed research offered several consistent findings. The strongest set of results were those relating to the influence of various factors on attrition due to the widespread availability of longitudinal datasets that track the employment of teachers. Below, we summarize the findings that emerged in the research literature.

(1) The results that arose fairly consistently in research regarding the characteristics of individuals who enter the teaching profession were as follows:

- Females formed greater proportions of new teachers than males.
- Whites formed greater proportions of new teachers than minorities.
- College graduates with higher measured ability were less likely to enter teaching than other college graduates. It is possible, however, that these differences may be driven by the measured ability of elementary school teachers, who represent the majority of teachers.
- Reentrants to teaching formed a significant proportion of newly hired teachers in the 1980s. Science and math teachers were less likely to return than other teachers, whereas elementary teachers and teachers with more prior experience were more likely to return.
- A more tentative finding based on a small number of weaker studies is that an altruistic desire to serve society is one of the primary motivations for pursuing teaching.

(2) There were several findings that emerged with a strong degree of consistency in research regarding the characteristics of individuals who leave the teaching profession. They were as follows:

- The highest attrition rates seen for teachers occurred in their first years of teaching and after many years of teaching when they were near retirement, thus producing a U-shaped pattern of attrition with respect to age or experience.
- Minority teachers tended to have lower attrition rates than white teachers.
- Teachers in the fields of science and mathematics were more likely to leave teaching than teachers in other fields.

- Teachers with higher measured ability were more likely to leave teaching.
- Female teachers typically had higher attrition rates than male teachers.
- Family-related situations, such as marriage and children, were related to higher teacher attrition, particularly for women, although the data supporting these hypotheses are old.

(3) Regarding the external characteristics of schools and districts that are related to teacher recruitment and retention rates, the research provided the following fairly consistent findings:

- Schools with higher proportions of minority students, students in poverty, and low-performing students tended to have higher attrition rates.
- In most studies, urban school districts had higher attrition rates than suburban and rural districts.
- Teacher retention was generally found to be higher in public schools than in private schools.

(4) The following statements summarize the consistent research findings regarding compensation policies and their relationship to teacher retention:

- Higher salaries were associated with lower teacher attrition.
- Teachers were responsive to salaries outside their districts and outside of teaching.
- When asked their reasons for leaving teaching, teachers often cited low salaries as an important reason for job dissatisfaction.

(5) The studies we reviewed revealed the following findings regarding pre-service policies and teacher recruitment and retention:

- Nontraditional and alternative teacher education programs appeared to attract more diverse student populations, and their graduates appeared to have higher rates of entry into and retention in teaching than graduates of traditional programs.
- Minority representation in teaching appeared to be adversely affected by teacher-testing requirements.

(6) Findings from the research on in-service policies that affect teacher retention were as follows:

- Schools that provided mentoring and induction programs, particularly those related to collegial support, had lower rates of turnover among beginning teachers.
- Schools that provided teachers with more autonomy and administrative support had lower levels of teacher attrition and migration.
- Schools with fewer disciplinary problems or those that gave teachers discretion over setting disciplinary policies had lower levels of teacher attrition and dissatisfaction.
- In at least two states (Texas and New York), larger class sizes were associated with higher teacher attrition rates.

The entry, mobility, and attrition patterns summarized above indicate that teachers exhibit preferences for higher salaries, better working conditions, and greater intrinsic rewards and will tend to move to other teaching positions or jobs or activities outside of teaching that offer these characteristics

when possible. In particular, the finding that higher compensation is associated with increased retention is well established.

It is evident that urban schools and schools with high percentages of minority students are difficult to staff, and that teachers tend to leave these schools when more attractive opportunities present themselves. It is also evident, however, that factors that can be altered through policy can have an impact on the decisions of individuals to enter teaching and on teachers' decisions to migrate to other schools or quit teaching. The research findings support the notion that individual schools and districts can affect their attractiveness to current and prospective teachers relative to other opportunities available to these individuals. The research also offers information on the effectiveness of a number of different options in the areas of compensation, pre-service policies, and in-service policies, although rigorous research evaluating the latter two types of policies is relatively scarce.

Although reliable ongoing information on the labor market for teachers is vital to monitoring trends and averting movements toward a shortage in a productive and preemptive manner, our literature review highlights the absence of recent data on key indicators and the need for increased and improved data collection efforts. In particular, there is a noticeable lack of rigorous policy evaluation research. In addition to updated and more complete national and state data on the movements of teachers, more reliable data tied to specific policy interventions are needed. While the education literature abounds with articles and reports describing or advocating particular policies, very few of them contain empirical data and analysis, and even fewer contain analysis conducted in accordance with rigorous research quality standards. We believe that policy goals at every institutional level—school, district, state, and federal government—would be well served by committing the resources needed to ensure rigorous evaluations whenever new policies are put in place. In the end, this will be a cost-effective means of answering many questions currently unanswered in the research literature. Researchers have, for the most part, been fairly thorough in investigating issues relating to recruitment and retention when data are available. Answering the pressing questions regarding the recruitment and retention of effective teachers will require new quantitative and qualitative research based on improved data collection efforts, the further application of theoretical and methodological rigor to the study of teacher labor markets, the further subjection of theory to empirical testing at the state and local labor-market level, and a commitment on the part of policymakers at all levels to provide support for useful evaluation research when new policies are implemented.