

Private School Teacher Turnover and Teacher Perceptions of School Organizational Characteristics

National studies have included both private and public school teachers in analyses of teacher turnover (Ingersoll 2001). These studies have shown that teacher turnover is associated with teacher perceptions of school organizational characteristics, including low levels of administrative support, little input into school decisions, student disciplinary problems, and insufficient salary (Ingersoll 2001). Private school teachers generally express less dissatisfaction with school organizational characteristics than do their public school counterparts (Ingersoll 2001; Holton 2003). However, teacher turnover rates are higher in private schools than in public schools; in 2000–01, 21 percent of private school teachers had switched schools or left the teaching force since the previous school year compared with 15 percent of public school teachers (Luekens, Lyter, and Fox 2004). Until recently, nationally representative data have not included sufficiently large sample sizes to allow for in-depth studies of teacher turnover in U.S. private schools.¹ Using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data file, this Issue Brief looks within the private sector to investigate teacher-perceived school organizational characteristics, and relationships between these characteristics and teacher turnover in Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian private schools.

The 1999–2000 SASS data file includes school principal or head reports on teacher turnover.² As part of the sample selection for the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), principals of elementary and secondary teachers in SASS schools in the year following SASS were asked to report whether the teachers had begun the 2000–01 school year in the same school, had moved to another school, or had left teaching entirely.³ For the purposes of the current analysis, a teacher was defined as a “stayer” if the principal reported at the start of the 2000–01 school year that the teacher stayed in the same school as a teacher between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, a “mover” if the principal reported the teacher had changed schools, and a “leaver” if the principal reported the teacher had left the profession.⁴ School organizational characteristics studied include teacher perceptions of administrative support, salary level, student discipline, and influence over classroom and school policies. Teachers were described as “low” on satisfaction if they scored among the 20 percent least satisfied with the organizational factor. Because low satisfaction was defined relatively, teachers who expressed satisfaction, but less satisfaction than others, may have been described as low on satisfaction. For example, because so few teachers reported serious student discipline problems, teachers who reported that dis-

cipline was a mild problem were described as having low satisfaction with student discipline.⁵ Results are presented separately for teachers in Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian private schools.⁶

Because SASS relies on principals for information regarding teacher turnover, a preliminary analysis compared principal and teacher reports on the teachers’ turnover status for the subset of private school SASS teachers who were included in the TFS sample.⁷ Agreement was sufficiently high to support use of the principal reports in the main analysis of the Issue Brief.⁸

Private School Type, School Organizational Characteristics, and Teacher Turnover

According to principal reports, between the 1999–2000 and 2000–01 school years, 19 percent of Catholic school teachers, 23 percent of other religious school teachers, and 21 percent of nonsectarian school teachers changed schools or left the teaching profession (not shown in tables). Table 1 presents the percentage of private school teachers who reported relatively low levels of administrative support and satisfaction with salary, relatively greater problems with student behavior at school, and relatively low levels of classroom and schoolwide influence by teachers’ private school type and turnover status. The teacher reports on organizational characteristics are from 1999–2000.

Consistent with prior research (Ingersoll 2001), private school teachers who were reported to have left their schools (movers and leavers) were more likely than stayers to report relatively low levels of administrative support, satisfaction with salary, student discipline, control over classroom policies, and input in school policies. These relationships held within each of the private school types. There were differences, however, across private school type in terms of the percentage of all teachers, stayers, and movers and leavers who reported relatively low levels of organizational characteristics examined in this Issue Brief.

Teachers in Catholic schools were more likely than others to report strong dissatisfaction regarding their salary (48 percent compared with 23 percent of other religious and 31 percent of nonsectarian school teachers). They also were more likely to report relatively low levels of input at the school level (23 percent in low category compared with 19 percent of other religious and 13 percent of nonsectarian school teachers).

Table 1. Percentage of private school teachers reporting relatively low levels of administrative support, satisfaction with salary, student discipline, and teacher input in classroom and school decisions, by turnover status and private school type: 1999–2000 to 2000–01

Private school type and teacher perceptions of school organizational factors	All teachers	Stayers	Movers and leavers
All private sector			
Low administrative support ¹	20.0	17.9	28.2
Low salary ²	34.0	32.5	39.9
Poor student discipline ³	21.1	20.0	25.6
Low teacher input in classroom decisions ⁴	18.1	16.3	25.3
Low teacher input in school decisions ⁵	18.9	17.6	24.2
Catholic			
Low administrative support ¹	21.5	19.8	29.9
Low salary ²	47.5	45.7	56.1
Poor student discipline ³	20.7	19.9	24.3
Low teacher input in classroom decisions ⁴	16.6	15.2	22.9
Low teacher input in school decisions ⁵	23.0	21.9	28.6
Other religious			
Low administrative support ¹	16.3	13.9	24.6
Low salary ²	23.1	21.9	27.4
Poor student discipline ³	17.8	16.5	22.3
Low teacher input in classroom decisions ⁴	21.7	20.2	27.0
Low teacher input in school decisions ⁵	19.0	17.6	24.0
Nonsectarian			
Low administrative support ¹	23.3	21.2	32.3
Low salary ²	30.8	28.5	40.3
Poor student discipline ³	26.8	25.2	33.4
Low teacher input in classroom decisions ⁴	14.8	12.3	25.4
Low teacher input in school decisions ⁵	12.6	11.2	18.3

¹ Teachers were described as reporting low administrative support if their mean response (on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*) was below the cut-off score closest to the 20th percentile for private school teachers with respect to the statements: the principal lets staff members know what is expected of them; the school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging; my principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it; the principal knows what kind of school he/she wants and has communicated it to the staff; and in this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done. The cut-off score was 3.0 out of 4.0. To put this in context, the average score was 3.4 for private school teachers and 3.2 for public school teachers.

² Teachers were described as reporting low salary if their response (on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*) was at or below the cut-off score closest to the 20th percentile for private school teachers on the statement: I am satisfied with my salary. The cut-off score was 1.0 out of 4.0. To put this in context, the average score was 2.8 for private school teachers and 2.9 for public school teachers.

³ Teachers were coded as reporting poor student discipline in their school if their mean response (on a scale from 1 = *serious problem* to 4 = *not a problem*) was below the cut-off score closest to the 20th percentile for private school teachers on a list of potential school problems: students cutting class; physical conflicts among students; robbery or theft; vandalism of school property; student possession of weapons; and student disrespect for teachers. The cut-off score was 3.5 out of 4.0. To put this in context, the average score was 3.6 for private school teachers and 3.2 for public school teachers.

⁴ Teachers were described as reporting low classroom input if their mean response (on a scale from 1 = *no control* to 5 = *complete control*) was below the cut-off score closest to the 20th percentile for private school teachers on a set of questions concerning control over their job: selecting textbooks and other instructional materials; selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught; selecting teaching techniques; evaluating and grading students; disciplining students; and determining the amount of homework to be assigned. The cut-off score was 3.83 out of 5.0. To put this in context, the average score was 4.3 for private school teachers and 4.0 for public school teachers.

⁵ Teachers were described as reporting low schoolwide input if their mean response (on a scale from 1 = *no influence* to 5 = *a great deal of influence*) was below the cut-off score closest to the 20th percentile for private school teachers on a set of questions concerning their influence: setting performance standards for students of this school; establishing curriculum; determining the content of in-service professional development programs; evaluating teachers; hiring new full-time teachers; setting discipline policy; and deciding how the school budget will be spent. The cut-off score was 2.14 out of 5.0. To put this in context, the average score was 2.8 for private school teachers and 2.5 for public school teachers.

NOTE: Not all apparent differences in this table are statistically significant. Standard errors are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005061>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Private Teacher Questionnaire, 1999–2000."

A greater percentage of teachers at private schools designated as "other religious schools" reported relatively low levels of classroom input (22 percent) than did those teaching in nonsectarian (15 percent) or Catholic (17 percent) schools. They were less likely than others to report relatively low administrative support (16 percent compared with 22 percent of Catholic and 23 percent of nonsectarian school teachers), satisfaction with salary, and student discipline (18 percent compared with 21 percent of Catholic and 27 percent of nonsectarian school teachers).

Teachers in nonsectarian schools were more likely to report relatively low levels of student discipline than teachers in other private schools. They were also less likely than teachers in other types of private schools to report relatively low levels of input schoolwide and less likely than teachers in other religious schools to report relatively low levels of input in their own classrooms.

In some cases, differences among the private school types were such that stayers in one private school type were at least as

likely as movers and leavers in another private school type to express relatively low levels of certain organizational factors. For example, a higher percentage of Catholic school stayers reported strong dissatisfaction with salary (46 percent) than did movers or leavers from other religious schools (27 percent), and there was no statistically significant difference between Catholic school stayers and nonsectarian school movers and leavers (40 percent). Nonsectarian stayers (29 percent) were not significantly different from other religious school movers and leavers (27 percent) in reports of strong dissatisfaction with salary. Similarly, nonsectarian stayers were not significantly different from movers and leavers in Catholic and other religious schools in their likelihood of reporting relatively low student discipline (25 percent of nonsectarian stayers compared with 24 percent of Catholic and 22 percent of other religious movers and leavers).

Conclusion

In a study of teacher turnover in U.S. private schools between the 1999–2000 and 2000–01 school years, within each private school type (i.e., Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian), teachers who left their school or the profession (movers and leavers) were more likely to report relatively low levels of administrative support, satisfaction with salary, student discipline, and teacher input in classroom and school decisions than were those who remained in the same school (stayers). The percentage of all teachers, stayers, and movers and leavers who reported relatively low levels of organizational characteristics varied across private school type.

By employing principal reports, this Issue Brief's analysis of teacher turnover took advantage of the large 1999–2000 SASS sample, which allowed for analysis of teachers by private school type.

Endnotes

¹ For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), a nationally representative survey often used to study teacher turnover, included about 1,600 private school teachers in 2001. This Issue Brief uses the NCES 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) dataset, which included, for the first time, teacher turnover between the 1999–2000 and 2000–01 school years, as reported by school principals. This dataset included approximately 7,000 private school teachers.

² The analyses in this Issue Brief are based on a sample of 7,057 teachers who completed the SASS Private School Teacher

Questionnaire. When weighted using the TFNLWGT weighting variable, this sample is representative of U.S. private elementary and secondary school teachers during the 1999–2000 school year.

³ This information was used to develop the sample for the 2001 TFS. Principals may have been new to the school in 2000–01.

⁴ Teachers whose status was listed as unknown, deceased, or living outside the United States were not included. Altogether there were 41 such teachers. Teachers who moved to administrative positions were considered leavers.

⁵ Detailed descriptions of the school organization variables used in the analysis are included in the notes to table 1. Because of the distribution of teachers' scores on the variables, not all the variables included exactly 20 percent of all teachers; the range was between 18 and 34 percent. On tests of internal reliability, the standardized Cronbach's Alpha was 0.86 for the composite measure of satisfaction with administrative support, 0.84 for schoolwide influence, 0.78 for classroom influence, and 0.77 for student discipline.

⁶ All findings presented in this Issue Brief are descriptive in nature. All differences discussed are statistically significant at the .05 level as measured by two-tailed Student's *t* tests.

⁷ This analysis was based on a sample of 1,631 teachers who participated in both the SASS and TFS and whose SASS school principal reported the teacher as a stayer, mover, or leaver at the start of the 2000–01 school year.

⁸ In 97 percent of the cases in which private school principals reported teachers had stayed in the same school across the 1999–2000 and 2000–01 school years, teachers also reported they had stayed. When principals reported teachers as being in the mover or leaver category, 92 percent of teachers agreed. A second way of assessing principals' accuracy is to look at teacher reports and see how often principal reports agreed. In 98 percent of the cases in which teachers reported they had stayed, principals had also reported the teachers stayed. In 87 percent of the cases in which teachers reported they had moved or left, principals had also reported the teachers moved or left.

References

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The Issue Brief series presents information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error. For more information on the Schools and Staffing Survey, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass>.

This Issue Brief was authored by Daniel J. McGrath and Daniel Princiotta of the Education Statistics Services Institute (ESSI). This Issue Brief was formatted by Carol Rohr of Pinkerton Computer Consultants, Inc. For further information, contact Edith McArthur, NCES, at 202-502-7393 or edith.mcarthur@ed.gov. To order additional copies of this Issue Brief or other NCES publications, call 1-877-4ED-PUBS or visit <http://www.edpubs.org>. NCES publications are also available on the Internet at <http://nces.ed.gov>.