



GEORGIA TEACHER RETENTION STUDY SUMMARY REPORT

PHASE I REPORT

A Statewide Analysis of the Factors
That Lead to the Retention of Teachers
in Georgia's Public Schools

**Division for Educator Workforce
Research and Development**

Georgia Professional Standards Commission



GEORGIA
TEACHER
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STUDY:
PHASE I

SUMMARY
REPORT

**A STATEWIDE ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT
LEAD TO THE RETENTION OF TEACHERS IN
GEORGIA’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

DIVISION FOR EDUCATOR
WORKFORCE RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT

THE GEORGIA TEACHER RETENTION STUDY

A Statewide Analysis of the Factors That Lead to the Retention of Teachers in Georgia's Public Schools (Phase I)

The **Georgia Teacher Retention Study – Phase I** is reported by the **Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development** (formerly known as the Georgia Teaching Force Center), which is a division of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and a component of the Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant, a P-16 initiative of Georgians working together to improve education in Georgia public schools and institutions of higher education.

The Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development (EWRAD) has three primary functions:

1. To collect, analyze, and report educator workforce data and forecast trends related to:
 - a. the supply and demand of teachers by subject field, grade level, and geographic area
 - b. mentor teachers
 - c. population distribution of school-age children
 - d. HOPE scholarships
 - e. attrition rates of beginning teachers
 - f. funding issues;
2. To serve as a clearinghouse to school districts by identifying qualified applicants and available positions, and by articulating preparation and certification alternatives such as distance learning and part-time assignments through which teacher candidates may seek and enter public school employment; and
3. To market teaching as a viable profession to high school sophomores who score well on the PSAT and to individuals who are interested in pursuing teaching as a career, including those pursuing lateral professional moves, second careers, and alternative certification paths.

As a product to the first primary function, the Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development provides this report.

EWRAD acknowledges the roles of the following people in the development and implementation of this study: Cynthia E. Stephens (Director, EWRAD), Endya Stewart (Senior Research Associate, EWRAD), Peter Mather (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, EWRAD), Shirley Avera (Administrative Assistant, EWRAD), Barbara Kawulich (Assistant Professor, College of Education, Georgia State University), and John Neel (Associate Professor, College of Education, Georgia State University).

Most importantly, EWRAD thanks the Georgia teachers and school administrators for their participation in this study and for their desire to teach all students in Georgia.

The full report from which this summary is drawn will be distributed via a limited number of print copies. In addition, the **Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development** will publish a web-based version of the **Georgia Teacher Retention Study**.

Study findings presented as graphs in this summary report are presented in the full report as tables only.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Appreciation is given to the professionals in the Georgia Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development (EWRAD) and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) who assisted in the research and development of the EWRAD *Georgia Teacher Retention Study – Phase I*. These persons are:

F. D. Toth, Ph.D.	Executive Secretary PSC
Cynthia E. Stephens	Director EWRAD
Endya B. Stewart, Ph.D.	Senior Research Associate EWRAD
Peter Mather, Ph.D.	Research & Evaluation Coordinator EWRAD
Shirley Avera	Administrative Assistant EWRAD

Collaborative partnerships were formed with the following professionals who served as consultants to the *Georgia Teacher Retention Study – Phase I*:

John Neel, Ph.D.	Associate Professor College of Education Georgia State University
Barbara Kawulich, Ph.D.	Assistant Professor College of Education Georgia State University

Gratitude is expressed to the graduate assistants in the College of Education at Georgia State University who contributed to the *Georgia Teacher Retention Study – Phase I*.

We especially thank the Georgia teachers and school administrators for their participation in this study and for their desire to teach all students in Georgia. We look forward to continued relationships with these individuals.

F. D. Toth, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary
Georgia Professional Standards Commission

Cynthia E. Stephens
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RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS FOR GEORGIA'S SCHOOLS

...as many as 25-30% of beginning teachers leave the profession during the first few years in the classroom.

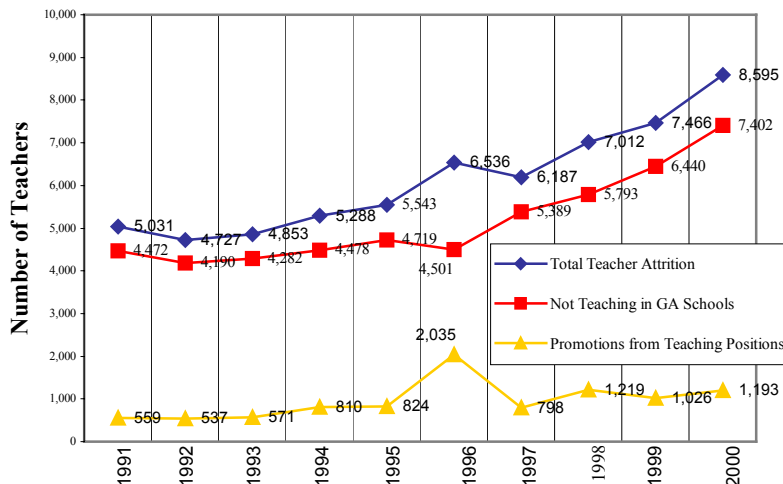
Why is teacher retention such a critical issue? National research has estimated that as many as 25-30% of beginning teachers leave the profession during the first few years in the classroom. In Georgia, the average three-year attrition rate during FY89-FY97 for new teachers with no experience was 25.55% (see Table A). During FY89-FY95, the average five-year attrition rate was 33.43%.

Table A. Attrition of New Teachers with Zero Experience, FY89-FY97

Base Year	Base Count	3-Year Attrition	5-Year Attrition
FY89	3,786	30%	35%
FY90	4,455	29%	35%
FY91	4,080	26%	34%
FY92	3,855	25%	36%
FY93	4,636	25%	3%
FY94	4,669	27%	31%
FY95	5,139	23%	30%
FY96	5,226	21%	
FY97	4,767	24%	

Furthermore, as Figure A illustrates, teacher attrition in Georgia has been increasing during this same period of time. As the figure show, a number of teachers were lost to attrition either due to promotion from teaching positions or because they left the Georgia workforce (and are not teaching in Georgia schools).

Figure A. Teacher Attrition in Georgia, 1991-2000

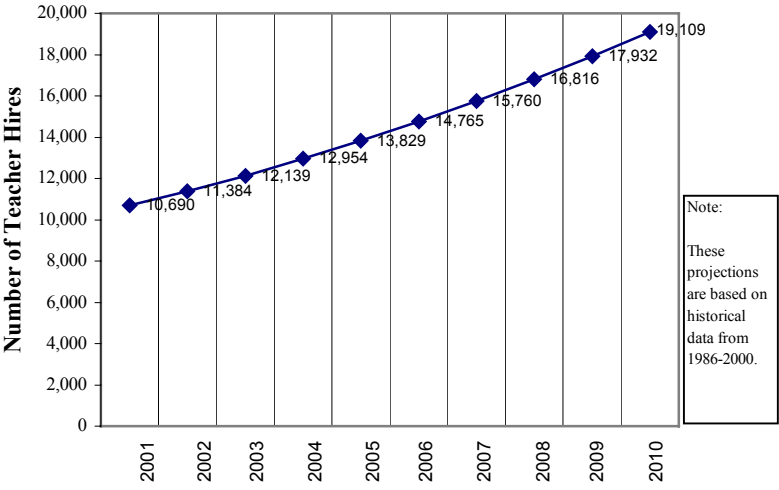


In Georgia, the projected number of new teacher hires continues to increase.

The annual recruitment and placement of new teachers is both costly and time consuming. Teacher attrition affects the number of vacancies within a school and the costs associated with filling these vacancies.

Accordingly, as the projected number of new teacher hires continues to increase (see Figure B), it becomes important to recruit teachers who are less likely to leave after three to five years and to retain teachers who are currently in the workforce.

Figure B. Projected Number of New Teacher Hires, 2001-2010



Also of concern in the teacher retention discussion is the issue of student and school performance. According to Fetler (1997)¹, “higher retention rates of qualified teachers would result in the establishment of a more stable, satisfied, and highly competent workforce” that would, in turn, create significant increases in student performance.

An understanding of factors contributing to teacher attrition can assist education policy makers and public school administrators in designing strategies to minimize the attrition

¹ Fetler, M. (1997). Where have all the teachers gone? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 5(2). [On-line]. Available: <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm/BRIEF6.HTM>

The question at hand: “What factors influence teachers’ decisions to stay in teaching?”

of qualified teachers. Therefore, it was important to develop and implement a teacher study based on the following question—“What factors influence teachers’ decisions to stay in teaching?”

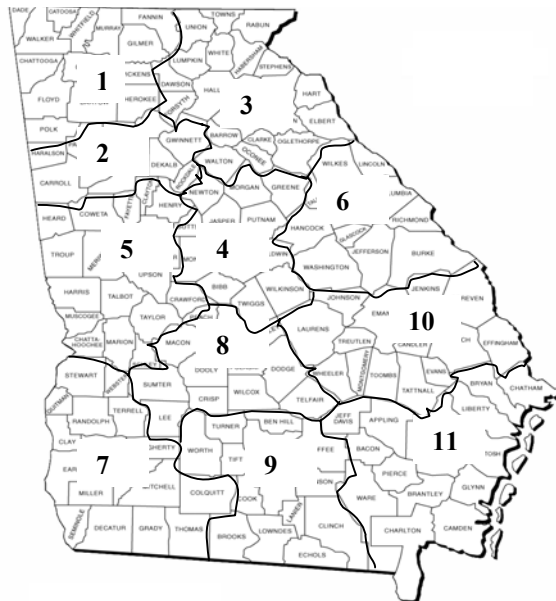
THE GEORGIA EDUCATOR RETENTION STUDY

The purpose of Phase I of the Georgia Educator Retention Study was to determine the factors that cause teachers across the state of Georgia to make the decision to resign from the classroom or from teaching in Georgia. Central to the purpose of this study was the idea of obtaining teachers’ personal thoughts regarding attrition and retention in the state of Georgia.

THE SAMPLE

One objective of the Georgia Educator Retention Study was to obtain a representative sample of all Georgia teachers in grades Pre-K – 12. To accomplish this objective, eleven sites were selected across the state of Georgia (see Figure C). These eleven sites were

Figure C. Data Collection Session Locations



153 teachers participated in the study and shared their personal thoughts and experiences.

purposely selected to represent the geographic distribution of teachers throughout the state.

Using the FY01 Certified Personnel Information (CPI) report², 209 individuals representing 46 school systems were selected to participate in the focus group sessions. These 209 individuals were chosen using the following process. First, all school-level personnel were separated by systems. Second, within each system, the personnel were divided into the following categories: Principals, Assistant Principals, Other central office personnel, Elementary School teachers, Middle School teachers, High School teachers, Special Education teachers, and National Board Certified teachers. After these separate categories were formed, individuals were selected from each category. To encourage greater participation by teachers, the decision was made to exclude administrative personnel (in particular, Principals and Assistant Principals) from the final selections. The assumption was made that by taking this action the teachers would feel free to speak without fear of retaliation or retribution from administrators. The final selections were formed into clusters (i.e., the eleven focus group session locations) and were checked for diversity in respect to ethnicity, gender, age, grade level, experience level, content area, and school. Of the 209 individuals selected to attend, 153 accepted the invitation to attend the data collection sessions. This resulted in a participation rate of 73.21%. Characteristics of the participants are displayed in Table B.

Factors under analysis in Phase I of the study included the work environment, incentives, compensation, and out-of-field teaching. Phase II of the study will examine real-time teaching. Phase III will examine the impact of administrative support, professional development, and mentor and peer support on teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the teaching profession. These studies are slated to begin in Fall, 2001.

THE COMPONENTS OF RETENTION AND ATTRITION

An extensive review of the literature presented in the larger report suggests that demographic, work environment, and compensation factors, such as age, ethnicity,

²The Certified Personnel Information (CPI) report is created from a database maintained by the Georgia Department of Education. This database contains information on certified educators, such as demographic and experience information, as well as job, subject, and school assignments.

...demographic, work environment, and compensation factors... contribute to teacher retention.

Table B. Characteristics of Data Collection Session Participants

	NUMBER	PERCENT
GENDER		
Female	104	67.97
Male	49	32.03
ETHNICITY		
American Indian	8	5.23
White	93	60.78
Hispanic	9	5.88
African American	36	23.53
Asian	7	4.58
EXPERIENCE (YEARS OF)		
Average	10.67	
Minimum	0	
Maximum	33	
AGE		
Average	41	
Minimum	24	
Maximum	67	
CONTENT FIELD		
Pre-K/Preschool	3	1.96
Kindergarten	9	5.88
K-5	6	3.92
Elementary Grades	3	1.96
1 st Grade	2	1.31
2 nd Grade	9	5.88
3 rd Grade	3	1.96
4 th Grade	5	3.27
5 th Grade	6	3.92
Middle Grades	11	7.19
6 th Grade	11	7.19
7 th Grade	10	6.54
8 th Grade	9	5.88
12 th Grade	2	1.31
High School	44	28.76
EIP	1	1.31
Special Education	14	9.15
Math/Gifted Math	2	1.31
Music	3	1.96

teacher certification, gender, administrative support, classroom autonomy, collegiality, mentoring, salaries and benefits, contribute to teacher retention. The reward structure and extent of opportunities for teacher development and promotion, the degree of teamwork or conflict among school staff, the level of support provided to teachers by administrators, and the degree of teacher input into and influence over classroom and school policies are all central to the literature on teacher retention. These kinds of conditions are important largely because they promote a stable and satisfied workforce.

Across the state, positive aspects of teaching include the interaction with students and a collegial work environment.

Negative aspects of the work environment included the paperwork load and the general lack of support for teachers.

ACCORDING TO THE FINDINGS...

The teachers who participated in this study readily shared their ideas about the positive and negative aspects of Georgia's education system and their ideas for improving it. They indicated on both surveys and in focus groups that the positive aspects of teaching were the interaction with students; a collegial work environment that is conducive to teamwork; strong, consistent administrative support; and the opportunity to make a difference in children's lives. Both survey results and focus groups discussions pinpointed the negative aspects of teaching as being overbearing paperwork; non-teaching duties that take away from real-time teaching; student apathy, lack of motivation, and lack of preparedness; lack of parental and community support; poor salaries and expensive benefits; lack of respect for teachers; and the high incidence of discipline problems. Other aspects that teachers saw in need of change included increased classroom assistance and support staff; and a shared responsibility and accountability for student achievement.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Teachers repeatedly expressed that they are not *solely* responsible for the marginal testing results and graduation rate of Georgia's students. The teachers felt that the students themselves must be held accountable for their learning. Additionally, parents and/or guardians must serve as primary supports to students to reinforce learning outside of the classroom. Student apathy, lack of motivation to learn, lack of willingness to do homework, discipline problems, and lack of preparedness were noted as aspects of education in need of change (see Figure D). Also, survey results indicated that student apathy and lack of preparation were highly ranked negative aspects of teaching and were rated as a cause for teacher burnout. Student attitude toward learning was also mentioned on the surveys as one of the aspects of education in need of change and as a challenge for Georgia's educational system and workforce. Interestingly, it was teachers' desire to help students and to be involved with young people that encouraged participants to pursue a career in education (see Figure E). Unfortunately, these same students serve as a source of burnout for teachers.

Figure D. Unsatisfactory Aspects of the Teaching Profession

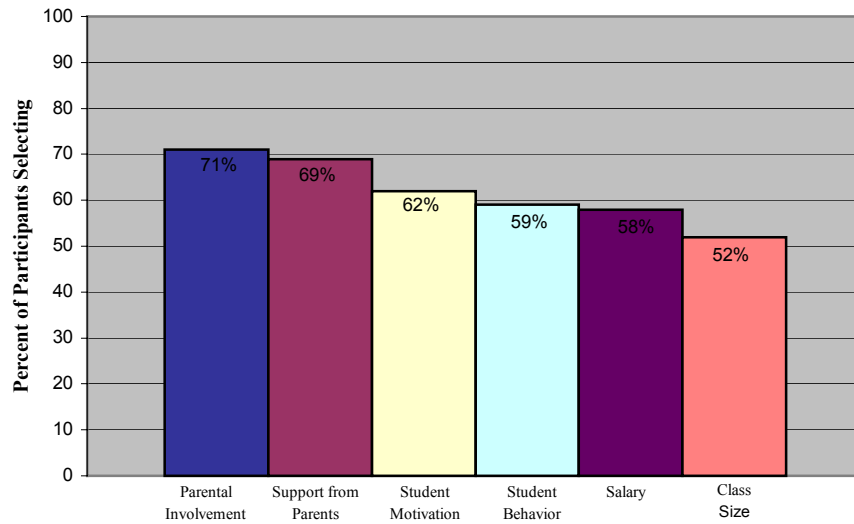
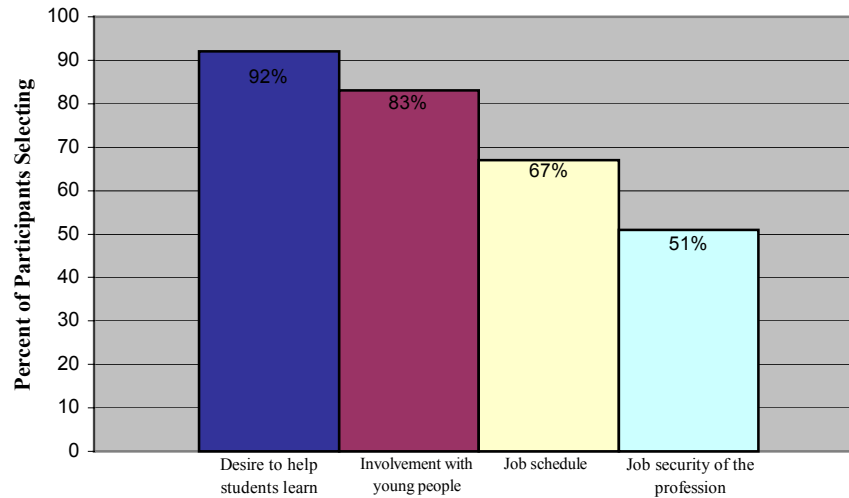


Figure E. Reasons Participants Pursued a Career in Education



The participating teachers suggested that instilling students' desire for learning and a respect for others is partially the responsibility of the parent. Parents model appropriate behaviors for their children. The participants suggested that parents should take more interest in their children's academic life. The lack of parental involvement was

...having administrative support and respect was a primary theme of focus group discussions and survey responses...

mentioned on the surveys as one of the negative aspects of teaching and as a cause of teacher burnout. It was also listed as a challenge for Georgia's educational workforce and system. This is mirrored in the items participants indicated as being unsatisfactory aspects of the teaching profession.

Lastly, teachers argued that the community in general was also a piece of the accountability puzzle. In areas of the state with a low tax base, teachers have to buy their own supplies or do without. Teachers noted the role of business and industry in hiring Georgia's graduates. Out of necessity, these entities should become involved with the sharing of resources or support of educational activities to ensure that students receive a quality educational experience.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The participants felt that administrative personnel need to be supportive of teachers' classroom decisions; need to ask for teachers' input on decisions affecting schools; need to show respect for teachers so that others will follow suit; and need to ensure that teachers have the classroom support and resources they require. The issue of having administrative support and respect was another frequently mentioned issue in focus group discussions and on survey responses.

The teachers noted that it is rare that teachers are recognized for their teaching excellence. The need to feel respected and to be recognized for doing a good job was a strong theme of focus group discussions. In the data collection sessions, respect and recognition were highly ranked when teachers reported their thoughts about how to improve the work environment. Respect and recognition also were shown to be important to teachers when they responded to questions on topics such as aspects in need of change, causes of teacher burnout, how to improve teacher recruitment and retention, the negative aspects of teaching, and challenges for educators.

Additionally, administrators can help teachers by working to reduce paperwork and increase planning time apart from necessary meetings or non-teaching duties. Teachers noted that paperwork takes up valuable teaching time and forces them to take work home. In addition, planning periods are used for completing paperwork requirements and for meetings rather than for

Additional state funding is needed to improve teacher compensation.

planning upcoming lessons. Paperwork was the primary cause for teacher burnout, and it was listed on the survey as a negative aspect of teaching. Paperwork reduction was also noted among the aspects in need of change, and as a way to retain teachers and to improve Georgia's schools.

COMPENSATION

The participants mentioned that state funding is needed to improve salaries and benefits; to provide incentives for recruitment and retention, including signing bonuses, mortgage assistance, reimbursement for professional development, added pay for additional responsibilities, tax credits, continued pay steps, and a retirement plan with exemptions (with a lower number of years of service required and better retirement pay) for those who wish to continue teaching past retirement; to provide materials and resources, including more computers and computer training, more copiers, and supplies; to provide classroom assistance to help meet individual student needs, teacher paperwork, and large class size control issues; and a publicity campaign, or otherwise public show of support and respect, for the teaching profession to recognize the hard work of Georgia's teachers and to help in the recruitment of future teachers.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Participants discussed how ill prepared for the classroom new teachers are. They suggested that colleges and universities preparing students for the teaching profession emphasize the realities of the classroom experience, including more time for student teachers in actual teaching environments and more classroom management training. It was also suggested that university faculty continue to mentor and support the educational needs of their students who graduate and are placed in a teaching position. The participants advocated a closer relationship between university-level faculty and school-level personnel. The participating teachers also felt that having more on-site classes to help teachers with professional development or to help further their education would make higher education opportunities more accessible. They also advocated reimbursement or compensation for professional development or furthering their education.

MENTORING

Mentoring of new teachers by veteran teachers was highly advocated in focus group discussions. Having a sense of teamwork among school faculty contributed to good

The implications of this study on the recruitment and retention of teachers in Georgia are wide-ranging and consequential.

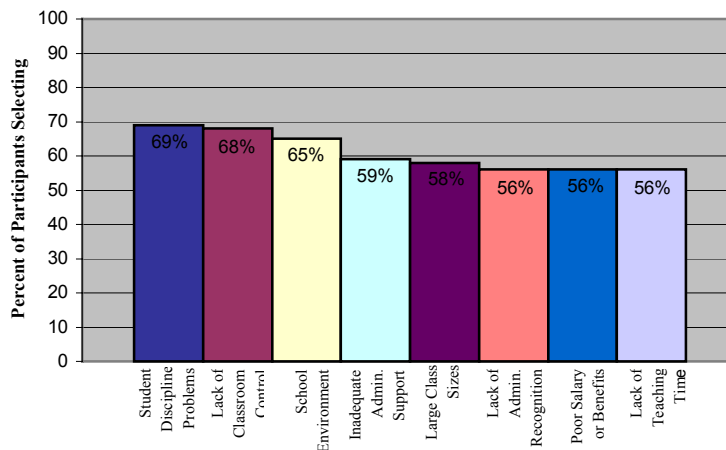
teacher morale and a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning. Mentoring was also shown to be of importance to teachers when they noted on the survey their ideas for improving teacher retention.

IMPLICATIONS

The concerns of Georgia’s current educator workforce, as evidenced in survey and focus group responses, are substantial and require immediate attention in the recruitment and retention effort. When considering in sum the concerns of teachers (e.g., support from parents and administrators, student discipline and willingness to learn, compensation), the following implications for recruitment and retention emerge:

- Without improving the work environment of teachers (in particular, student discipline, administrative support, parental involvement, and resource availability), current teachers will continue to experience frustration and burnout, thus leading to resignation from the field.
- Without a high level of job satisfaction, teachers are increasingly likely to leave teaching and are less likely to encourage others to enter the field. Figure F lists factors that impact teacher satisfaction, and thusly, teachers’ likelihood for leaving the teaching profession.

Figure F. Likely Reasons for Leaving the Teaching Profession



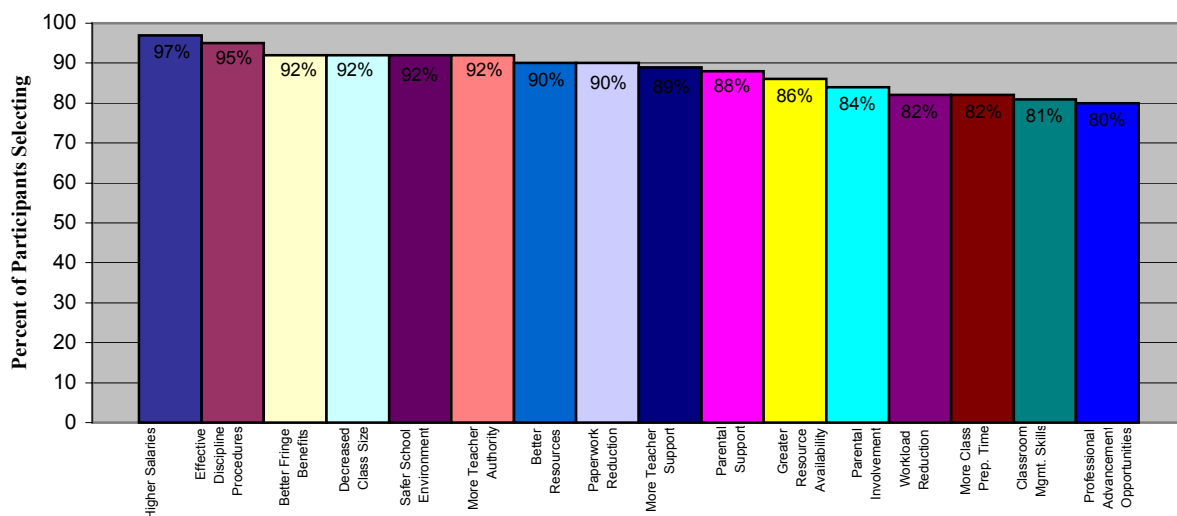
Recommendations are based on participants' responses during the data collection sessions.

- As mentioned earlier in this study, the costs associated with teacher turnover are enormous. Without adequate measures to increase teacher retention, these costs will continue to be incurred.
- Without benefits or incentives to enter into and remain in teaching, the current teacher shortage will continue due to a lack of interest in a field that pays less than occupations that require similar levels of education.
- Without real-world teaching experiences that require classroom management skills, preservice teachers, upon entering the education workforce, will be more inclined to leave teaching due to the inability to handle everyday situations and stressors. It is this exit that exacerbates the teacher shortage and the occurrence of out-of-field teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants' responses to survey questions and their discussions during focus group sessions serve as foundation for creating recommendations to increase teacher retention in Georgia (see Figure G). These recommendations include: higher salaries, better fringe benefits, effective discipline procedures, decreased class size, and a reduction in paperwork.

Figure G. Important Methods to Increase Teacher Retention



In summary, the following recommendations for improving Georgia’s educational system are offered:

Work Environment.

The teaching environment has to be more attractive to recruit and retain teachers. According to Corcoran and colleagues (1988)³, “good working conditions are associated with better teacher attendance, more effort, higher morale, and a greater sense of efficacy in the classroom.” These conditions include:

- Strong, supportive administrative leadership;
- Good physical working conditions;
- High levels of collegiality; and
- High levels of teacher autonomy and decision making.

Student Learning and Motivation.

Student apathy and lack of motivation to learn is a real problem for teachers. Students need to be more motivated to study hard and to do well in school. They must be held accountable to some degree for their own progress in school. Teachers can teach, but if students don’t want to learn, no learning will take place. Furthermore, they need to learn to respect themselves and others, especially their teachers. Also, students need to learn how to behave in such a way as to be a constructive addition to classroom learning, rather than being a distraction. They further need to have respect for the physical property of others, including school property.

Parental Support and Accountability.

Parents need to be held accountable for teaching their children proper values and life skills. When parents fail to show respect to teachers, children mirror these attitudes, which can potentially manifest into discipline problems. Parents need to support teachers in their work by participating in such activities as school meetings and parent-teacher conferences. They also need to support teachers in their decisions on discipline, homework, or special services for students. When possible, parents need to volunteer their time (and resources) to help free teachers from non-teaching duties that overwhelm teachers who already have a full workload.

Teamwork and Collegiality.

Teachers need to help each other establish a teamwork environment, one that facilitates teachers’ (both new and veteran) feelings of being supported. New teachers need mentoring by veteran teachers who teach the same subject at the same grade level and who are located nearby to facilitate quick and easy answers to questions. Also teachers need to share ideas with their colleagues about what works in their classrooms.

Administrative Support.

Teachers expressed the desire for more equitable treatment by administrators, especially in terms of distribution of resources and supplies. Administrators need to support teachers when dealing with parents, students, and the community in general. Administrators also need to involve teachers in the decision-making process.

³Corcoran, R., Walker, L. J., & White, J. L. (1988). Working in urban schools (Document #ED 299 356). Washington, DC: The Institute for Educational Leadership.

Salaries and Benefits.

Salaries increases, along with bonuses and step pay raises that continue through retirement, are lead issues in retention discussions. Retirement benefits need to be improved, such that teachers who retire are able to receive a larger percentage of their salaries. Other benefits (e.g., life insurance, dental and vision packages, medical insurance, and retirement) need to be increased and improved. Positive press coverage of teachers should be provided to help promote teaching as an attractive profession and to increase the community's overall respect for teachers and the teaching profession.

Incentives and Recruitment.

As is happening in some other states, Georgia needs to provide recruitment incentives such as home mortgage plans, pay for additional responsibilities, pay for attending professional development meetings or workshops, tuition reimbursement for academic courses, repayment of student loans, and tax credits of various types. Teacher recognition programs should also be put into place to recognize the efforts of teachers in their classrooms.

Teacher Workload.

The amount of paperwork and other non-teaching duties required of teachers needs to be addressed. Paperwork adds to the already heavy workload that teachers carry. Teachers need classroom assistance to allow them to teach. Also, additional funding needs to be provided to ensure that local schools have the needed facilities, resources, supplies, materials, and support staff.

Teacher Preparation Programs.

Future teachers need to be better prepared for the classroom. More time in an actual classroom setting needs to take place to ensure that new teachers know what to expect and know what to do in handling everyday problems encountered in the classroom. Also, university faculty have to become more involved in pairing student teachers with certified, mentor teachers in the school and in observation (for assessment) of student teacher performance in the classroom.

Community and Business Participation.

The general public has a responsibility for helping to ensure that Georgia's student population is better educated. Businesses will be hiring these future workers. Therefore, a skilled, well-qualified workforce will be of importance to them. This means that businesses should become involved with education by sharing resources and funding with schools in their area.



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Georgia's Teacher Quality Plan, a component of the P-16 Initiative
Georgians Working Together to Help Students Succeed

