

1999 FORMER TEACHER FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Georgia Professional Standards Commission
1454 Twin Tower East
Atlanta, Georgia

Prepared By

Winifred C. Nweke
Coordinator for Research

1999 FORMER TEACHER FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Purpose of Study

This is the second state-wide survey of former teachers in the state of Georgia. The purpose this survey was to investigate further and to clarify some tentative findings in the first survey in 1998. The focus of this second survey, as was the case for the first, is to find out why teachers who leave (leavers) leave and elicit from former teachers measures that could help in teacher retention. Findings of this study will be compared to previous studies in this area: a national survey of stayers and leavers (SASS, 1993/94 – 1994/95) and DeKalb County, (Grant, 1997) study.

Method

Participants

Participants were former teachers who taught in Georgia public school system in 1997/98 fiscal year but were not in the system in FY99. Questionnaires were sent to 121 former teachers. Only 63 of them completed and returned their questionnaires for a response rate of 52.1%. This is a great improvement in last year's response rate of 18.8%. The names and last known addresses of the participants were obtained from the Department of Education certified personnel files.

Procedure

The questionnaire was an expanded form of the questionnaire used in FY98 survey. The FY98 questionnaire, in turn, was a modification of the one used in the 1994-95. Former Teacher Survey in the School and Staffing Survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics. While the 1998 survey had only nine questions, the current one has 18. Also, in FY98 survey, respondents were asked to select one reason for leaving, but in FY99, they were allowed to indicate and rank their five most important reasons for leaving. This change in the questionnaire was a function of FY98 results which showed that respondents had more than one reason for leaving and did not like the fact that they were restricted to one reason alone. Allowing more than one reason for leaving also made this survey more comparable to the national survey which elicited first, second and third reasons teachers left teaching.

Result and Discussion

Participants' responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques and presented in Tables 1 to 9. What type of job did these teachers have? What kind of work environment did they have? Why did they leave? The participants' responses will provide answers to, or at least insight into, these questions.

Two-thirds (66.7%) of the former teachers had their own classrooms where they could permanently display or keep instructional materials, etc. Over 60% of the former teachers sponsored or coached student clubs and/or teams. They taught a wide range of class sizes. The smallest classes they taught ranged from one student to 29, with a mean and a median of 17. On the other hand, the largest classes they reported teaching ranged from 4 to 60, with a mean of 31 and a median of 33 students. Sixty-four percent of respondents said that they did not have adequate supply of instructional materials for teaching. Approximately 94% of the teachers said that they had a planning period during the day. The range of the number of preparations teachers made for classes was from 0 to 15! The modal number was three (31.7%). Approximately 29% had two preparations while 23.8% had four preparations to make per day. See Table 1.

Table 1. The number of preparations former teachers made per day

Number of Preparations	Frequency	Percent (%)
0	1	1.6
1	3	4.8
2	18	28.6
3	20	31.7
4	15	23.8
5	1	1.6
6	2	3.2
8	1	1.6
15	1	1.6
No response	1	1.6
Total	63	100

With regard to discipline problems, 66.7% of the former teachers felt that students assigned to them were no worse or better than those assigned to other teachers. Twenty-one percent felt their students were worse than other students while 11% felt their students were better.

In terms of the achievement or academic level of students they taught, 31.7% of the teachers said they had taught below average classes/students, 11.1% taught average or general level classes, while 57.1% said their were a mixture of different levels. See Table 2.

Table 2. Academic Level of Classes Taught

Academic Level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Below Average (Remedial Class)	20	31.7
General (Regular) Level	7	11.1
Advanced Level	0	0
Mix of Various Level	36	57.1
Total	63	100

In the next section is presented former teachers' responses as to why they left and what they were most dissatisfied with in the schools. The results are presented and discussed following the order of the questions.

Five main reasons for leaving teaching. (Question 1)

Former teachers' main reasons for leaving their teaching positions in FY99 are presented in Table 3. The most frequently selected first choice reason for leaving was poor discipline among students (20.6%). The next most frequently selected first reason was family and personal move. These are comparable to the FY98 survey findings where poor discipline and family and personal move tied for the most important reason for leaving.

The most popular second reason for leaving was students' lack of motivation (23.8%) followed by poor discipline among students (19.0%). The most frequently selected third reason was lack of professional support from other school professionals (22.2%) followed by dissatisfaction with teaching as a career. Fourth most popular reason for leaving teaching was dissatisfaction with teaching as a career while the fifth reason is pursuit of another career which tied with poor discipline. (9.5%). Thus, in sum, the major reasons teachers said they left the public school classroom in Georgia were poor discipline among students, students' lack of motivation to learn, lack of professional support from other school professionals and general dissatisfaction with teaching as a career, in that order.

It is interesting to note that in the 1994-95 SASS survey, poor student discipline was not cited as a major reason why teachers left. This issue seems to have acquired greater prominence in more recent surveys such as Grant's (1997) and the PSC's 1998 and as well as the current survey. Does this issue reflect a shift in teacher concern or is it a function of the nature of the sample and the target population? Specifically, the sample in SASS survey included public and private schools, and rural and urban schools. The samples from the Grant's and PSC's surveys are more localized and more urban.

Table 3. Main Reason For Leaving Teaching Position: Comparisons Across Two Years

Year of Survey	Professional Standards Commission						
	1999					1998	
	1 st Reason %	2 nd Reason %	3 rd Reason %	4 th Reason %	5 th Reason %	No.	Per Cent
Reasons							
Family and personal move	17.5	9.5				7	18.9
Poor discipline among students	20.6	19.0			9.5	7	18.9
Lack of professional support from other school professionals			22.2			5	13.5
Pregnancy/Child rearing						4	10.8
Salary						3	8.1
Further education in fields other than education						3	8.1
Contract was not renewed/Schl staffing action						2	5.4
Dissatisfied with teaching as a career			19.0	14.3		1	2.7
Further education in the field of education						1	2.7
Health						0	0.0
Students= lack of motivation		23.8				1	2.7
Retirement						1	2.7
Pursuit of another career					9.5		
Other reasons						2	5.4
Total						37	100

What are your five most important areas of dissatisfaction with the teaching profession? (Question 2.)

Participants were asked to indicate, from a list of 14, five areas of dissatisfaction with the teaching profession. A summary of their responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Five Most important Areas of Dissatisfaction With Teaching As a Profession

Areas of Dissatisfaction	1st Area	2nd Area	3rd Area	4th Area	5th Area
	%	%	%	%	%
Poor opportunity for professional development					
Lack of Recognition from the administration					
Lack of resources & materials/equipment for your classroom		17.5			
Inadequate support from the administration	14.3				
Lack of influence over school policies and practices					
Lack of control over your own classroom			11.1		
Intrusions on teaching time (i.e. not enough time working directly with students)					
Inadequate time to prepare lesson/teaching plans				12.7	
Poor student motivation to learn	9.5	17.5		14.3	
Class size too large	9.5	17.5			
Student discipline problem	31.7	12.7			
Poor salary	11.1			11.1	
Too much paper work				12.7	9.5
Too many non-teaching tasks			11.1		

The area that most former teachers were dissatisfied with was the problem of student discipline. (31%). The runner-up for the first area of concern was inadequate support from the administration. This is not surprising given that the first ranked reason for leaving was poor student discipline, while the third was inadequate professional support from other professionals in the school. Three areas tied for the second most frequently cited area of dissatisfaction. These are lack of resources and materials/equipment for the classroom, poor student motivation to learn, and the large size of classes. Again, this is consistent with why they left. Other important areas of dissatisfaction for these former teachers were lack of control over their own classrooms, the number of non-teaching tasks assigned to them, and the amount of paper-work teachers have to do. The areas of dissatisfaction match almost exactly those elicited in the SASS and Grant's survey: student discipline problems, poor student motivation and inadequate support from the administration.

What Are You Currently Doing? (Question 12)

The survey also sought to find out what these former teachers were doing at the time of the survey. Their responses are summarized in table 5. A large proportion of them (38.1%) had started on new careers outside the field of Education. As much as 9.5% were looking for other jobs, 7.9% moved out of state while another 7.9% is raising a family.

Table 5. What Leavers Are Currently Doing

Current Job	Frequency	Percent (%)
Career Outside Education	24	38.1
Looking for Another Job	6	9.5
Raising a Family	5	7.9
Teaching in Another State	5	7.9
Teaching in Private School in Georgia	3	6.3
Taking Continuing Ed Courses for Enrichment	2	3.2
Other	12	19.0
Total	63	100

Nevertheless, 63.5% of the teachers said they plan to return to teaching some day, 23.8% said they would not. Those who plan to return to teaching were asked to estimate how long they planned to stop-out. The responses are presented in Table 6. About one third of the teachers plan to go back to the classroom after one year. Twenty-five percent would go back in two to five years, 22.5% will go back to teaching but is not sure when. Thus, it is encouraging that despite their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the school, especially regarding poor student discipline, students' lack of motivation, lack of support for teacher, as much as 63.5% would go back to the classroom. More importantly, 55% of these plan go return to the classroom within five years.

Table 6. How Long Leavers plan to Stay out of Teaching

Anticipated Number of Years Out of Teaching	Frequency	Percent (%)*
1 year	12	30.0
2-5 Years	10	25.0
6-10 Years	2	5.0
More Than 10 Years	0	0
Don't Know	9	22.5
No Response	7	17.5
Total	40	100

* As a percent of those who said they plan to return to teaching

Most of the teachers who plan to return to the classroom (72.5%) would go back to Pre-K to 12 classrooms. Only 18% would go into Higher Education. Detailed response patterns are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. If You Ever Return to the Classroom in Georgia, at What Level Would You Like to Teach? (Question 15).

School Level	Frequency	Percent
College & University	3	4.8
Community College	7	11.1
High School	24	38.1
Middle Grades (6-8)	5	7.9
Pre-K to 5	4	6.3
No Response	20	31.7
Total	63	100

Among those who plan to return, 57.5% would go back to public schools while 17.5% will switch to private schools.

Interestingly, 38% of the participants would like to go back to Education in other position than teaching. Specifically, 19% would go back as counselors, 7.9% as administrators, 3.2% as instructional technologist, 1.6% as consultants and 3.3% as teachers in teacher preparation programs.

Finally, the participants were asked to suggest what measures they think would help discourage teachers from leaving or encourage them to stay. Their responses are presented in Table 8. Interestingly, the first measure suggested by 34.9% of participants was Providing higher salaries and /benefits to teachers instead of the runner-up, Dealing more effectively with student discipline, which was cited as the most important reason for leaving. Their suggestion for higher salaries is consistent with their plan to return to the classroom within five to 10 years despite the discipline problems and raises doubt about the real reason they left in the first place. Other suggestions that would help keep teachers in the classroom include reducing class size, providing better resources and materials for the classroom and reducing the burden of paperwork for teachers. These findings are similar to those in the SASS findings where 53.1% of the stayers said that increased salary would be the most effective step that schools might take to encourage teachers to stay in teaching.

**What are Five Steps Schools Might Take to Encourage Teachers to Remain in Teaching?
(Question 18)**

Table 9. Steps to Teacher Retention

Steps to Encourage Retention	1st Step	2nd Step	3rd Step	4th Step	5th Step
	%	%	%	%	%
Providing higher salaries and/or fringe benefits	34.9		12.7		
Improving opportunities for professional development					
Dealing more effectively with student discipline	25.4	15.9	15.9		
Giving teachers more authority in the school and in their own classrooms	11.1	15.9	12.7	11.1	
Increasing standards for students' academic performance					
Providing better resources and materials for classroom use				15.9	11.1
Decreasing class size	11.1	17.5		15.9	
Giving special recognition and/or assignment to excellent or outstanding teachers					
Reducing paperwork burden on teachers					17.5
Providing more support for new teachers					
Increasing parental involvement in the schools					
Reducing teacher workload					
Providing merit pay or other incentives to teachers					
Improving opportunities for professional development					
Providing tuition reimbursement for coursework required for certification or career advancement					
Revising health insurance programs to include stress reduction seminars, counseling & physical fitness options					

In summary, this survey confirms some of the findings from the previous year's survey. Both FY98 and FY99 survey of former teachers show a serious concern for poor student discipline in the classroom, inadequate support for teachers by either the administration or by other professionals in the school, poor student motivation to learn and large classes. Former teachers feel that increased salaries would help to keep teachers in the classroom despite their

concerns. They also feel that student indiscipline needs to be dealt with. In addition they think teachers should be provided with resources and materials to do their work which should not include as much non-teaching tasks and paperwork as is currently the case. It was encouraging to note that despite their concerns, that most of these former teacher only stopped-out for a brief period and plan to go back to the classroom. There appears to be a greater concern over students discipline in recent years in schools than used to be the case.

References

Grant, F. D. (1997). A Study of the perception of teachers about the variables that affect the attrition and retention of teachers in the DeKalb County School System. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, submitted to Clark Atlanta University.

Nweke, W.C. (1999). Former Teacher Follow-up Survey – FY98. Unpublished Survey, Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 1454 Twin Towers, East, Atlanta, GA 30334.

Tabs, E. D. (1997) School and Staffing Survey: Characteristics of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey: 1994-95. National Center for Education Statistics, US. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (NCES 97- 450).