

REDUCING MUSIC TEACHER TURNOVER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Sung Eun Kim & David Barg

American schools are increasingly challenged to staff their classrooms fully and continuously with effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Teachers with substantial experience and expertise are crucial for maintaining systemic stability and supportive learning environments, and for optimizing student learning (NCTAF, 2007). Simmons (2000) reported that 10% of all new teachers leave during their first year of practice, and Ingersoll (2001) put the number of teachers who leave within the first five years at 40% to 50%. According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003), the number of those who leave was evenly split between attrition (those who leave teaching altogether) and migration (those who move to teaching jobs in other schools). Strategies for increasing the supply of new teachers to meet this challenge have been developed (e.g., Bergee, Coffman, Demorest, Humphreys, & Thornton, 2002; Brown & Alley, 1983; Byo & Cassidy, 2005; Madsen & Kelly, 2002); yet, new graduates meet only 50% of the annual need for new music teachers (Lindeman, 2004). This gap exists despite the fact that the number of music education graduates has increased over the past decade (Kimpton, 2005). Research suggests that meeting the need for music teachers will not be achieved by training more teachers; rather, need will be achieved by increasing teacher retention.

The Turnover Problem

The teacher shortage is real. Numerous studies have documented attrition in education generally, and music education specifically (see Table 1). Approximately 2.25 million teachers were hired between 1994 and 2004, but some 2.7 million teachers left the profession during that period. Over 2.1 million of those left before retirement. (Useem, Offenber, & Farley, 2007). MENC and the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) reported that more than 5,000 music teacher openings remained unfilled every year; new university graduates could meet only 50% of

the reported demand (Kimpton, 2005). The U.S. Office of Postsecondary Education (2008) released data indicating that 24 state departments of education had a “critical demand” for music teachers and requested funding to increase matriculates into teacher preparation programs (as cited in Hancock, 2009).

Since the teacher shortage rates are one of the highest of all professions (Ingersoll, 1999), the consequences of turnover are acute in education. The insufficient number of expert teachers of long service is creating unacceptable educational, institutional, and financial consequences. This low retention is exacerbated by—among other factors—non-competitive starting salaries, increasing demands for expanded skills without commensurate rewards, and the retirement of baby boomers. This policy brief proposes an approach including preservice administrative training for music education majors that may reduce the consequences of teacher dropout by addressing teachers’ reasons for leaving the profession.

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Table 1
Summary of Findings on Teacher Attrition

Who	Action	Source	When:	Number
All teachers	Leave the profession	Ingersoll, 2002.	Within 1 st year	11%
			Within first 3 years	29%
		Merrow, 1999.	Within first 3 years	30%
			Within first 5 years	+ 50%
Ingersoll & Smith, 2003.	Within first 5 years	40–50%		
Music teachers	Leave the profession	Madsen & Hancock, 2002.	Within first 10 years	17%
			Within first 16 years	34%
	Plan to leave the profession	Hancock, 2008; Killian & Baker, 2006.	Every year	11–27%
Fine arts teachers	Leave the profession	Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004.	Every year	8%

Consequences of Turnover

Financial. In both small and large districts, studies found that the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement teacher was substantial. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) conducted a pilot study of actual cost data. NCTAF utilized cost data from five districts (in urban and non-urban settings) and demographic data from the National Center for Education Statistic. They found that the national cost of public school teacher turnover could be over \$7.3 billion a year (NCTAF, 2007). Compared to the previous estimate of \$4.9 billion by Alliance for Excellent Education (2005), the cost of losing teachers is rising. In addition, NCTAF estimated the cost of teacher turnover in a number of selected school districts around the country (Table 2). Dollars spent to recruit, hire, and train new teachers must be diverted from human and material resource budgets that support teaching effectiveness and student growth. It is clear, then, that this continual process is undermining teaching quality and efforts to close the achievement gap.

Compromised learning. High turnover rates compromise learning by destabilizing the learning environment and exposing students to limited opportunities (NCTAF, 2002). Research shows that differential teacher effectiveness is a strong determinant of differences in student learning, far outweighing the effects of other classroom variables (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Num-

TABLE 2
Cost of teacher turnover in selected school districts

District	Annual Cost
New York, NY	\$115,221,250
Los Angeles, CA	\$94,211,250
Houston, TX	\$35,043,750
Boston, MA	\$13,020,000
Richmond, VA	6,072,500

Note: Selected states from NCTAF, 2007

erous studies have shown that teacher effectiveness increases most rapidly during the early years of a practice. New teachers struggle, but they are able to raise student achievement as their knowledge and experience deepens. When those teachers leave, however, students are prevented from learning from teachers who are at their peak effectiveness (NCTAF, 2002).

School districts with significant retention issues often respond to a shortage of effective teachers at the prevailing wage not by leaving teaching positions vacant, but by filling them with ineffective teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). When classrooms are staffed with inexperienced, under qualified, and/or uncertified teachers, curricular consistency, instruction, and student performance are likely to be compromised (Terry & Krisonis, 2008). Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) reported that students of under-certified teachers

achieve about 20% less academic growth per year than do students of certified teachers.

Reasons for Turnover

A survey of the literature finds considerable diversity in music teachers' reasons for leaving the profession. Siebert (2008) reported reasons related to administration, students, and music. Administration-related reasons included poor salary, lack of administrative support, heavy teaching schedule, insufficient preparation time, travel to several buildings, excessive administrative duties, and insufficient budgets. Student-related reasons included poor discipline, lack of enthusiasm, and poor public perception of music teaching. Music-related issues included multiple performance expectations and under-utilization of skills. Other reasons for leaving the profession included low priority of music and the arts in the curriculum, the ongoing need to justify music programs, and inadequate preservice preparation.

Inman and Marlow (2004) referenced research that identified lack of collegiality, administrative support and professionalism as being more important than insufficient salaries. Also, family, personal circumstances, and job dissatisfaction were the reasons most frequently cited by teachers leaving the profession (Voke, 2002).

Current Strategies to Reduce Turnover

School districts are currently finding and adopting retention strategies that are reported to meet with some measure of success. These strategies include mentorship, induction, creating small schools, and recruiting new teachers from within the local community. These plans can provide major benefits that help improve teacher retention, but there are some challenges for inclusion.

Mentoring Programs

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2006) defined mentoring as one-on-one assistance and support given by and experienced professional to a novice. Currently, many schools provide mentoring programs to support the induction of new teachers and ask for advice from experienced teachers (McCann & Johannessen, 2004). Research has found that men-

torship can lead to higher teacher retention and accelerated teacher effectiveness to improve student achievement (Eaton, & Sisson, 2008). The absence of formal systematic mentoring structures, however, characterizes its vulnerability: Mentoring programs that lack consistent schedules, prepare and train mentors insufficiently, and pair mentees with mentors from different fields usually prove to be of limited value (McCann & Johannessen, 2004).

Induction Programs

Induction programs introduce beginning teachers to their new position's culture, procedures, and expectations. Huling-Austin (1990) identified five goals for such programs: (a) improving teaching performance, (b) increasing teacher retention, (c) promoting the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers, (d) satisfying state or district requirements, and (e) transmitting the culture of the educational system to beginning teachers. It has also been found that these programs can help teachers realize their full potential, thus keeping them in the profession longer, enhancing greater student learning, and saving money (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2006). However, induction programs share some of the above-mentioned mentoring program vulnerabilities, including fostering competition among teachers, not addressing teachers' personal-developmental needs, and attempting to cover too much material (Lawson, 1992).

Reducing School Size

To improve the teaching and learning environment, school districts have experimented with reconstructing schools to make them smaller (Bryk, 1994). This strategy assumes that strong sense of engagement and belonging will be built among students and teachers. Communication among the staff and teachers is easier so that each of group can focus on their fields as well. Thus, teachers' instructional quality can be improved in this environment with satisfaction (Wasley et al., 2000). Cotton (1996) found the major benefits of smaller schools included the following: (a) students learned well and often better, (b) attendance was higher and dropouts fewer, and (c) extracurricular participation in-

creased. This approach faces challenges, however, including cost issues, shortage of resources and technical assistance, and system impediments (McRobbie, 2001).

Recruiting Local Teachers: Developing Community Support Systems

Resource-challenged urban and rural school districts are often challenged to attract and retain new teachers. Some districts have initiated programs to recruit local candidates, offering such incentives as paying off student loans and underwriting tuition for advanced degrees (NCTAF, 2002). Like reducing school size, this approach is too locally based to have any impact of scale.

While mentoring and induction programs operate at some measure of scale, they appear to lack the systemic structure, buy-in, consistency, and accountability needed for an overarching solution. The small school and community support systems are necessarily limited by lack of scale. A principal weakness of all these solutions, however, is their timing: They address challenges that have already developed into problems, rather than preventing them from arising in the first place.

Reducing Music Teacher Turnover: A Policy Recommendation

As outlined above, diverse solutions to the retention issue have been proposed, implemented, and researched. Given more time and improved implementation, those solutions may yet prove effective. At this time, however, research suggests that the problem continues to grow (NCTAF, 2007).

We recommend that music teacher education programs adopt the policy of including in students' programs both theoretical and hands-on instruction in education administration and advocacy. This recommendation will support efforts to build an appropriate relationship with school administrators in order to resolve administration-related problems, which is one of the main reasons for music teachers' turnover (Siebert, 2008).

In *The Effect of an Educational Administration Course on the Expectations of Pre-service Teachers*, Menon (2004) demonstrated that preservice teachers who understood the organizational as-

pects of their job could be expected to have a more realistic view of their future workplace. The data collected in Menon's study reported that the preservice teachers who completed the educational administration course were more likely to be prepared for the realities of their future workplace and thus avoid a work-related reality shock. Preservice teachers who form realistic expectations to their future workplace are less to suffer from anxiety and frustration due to a conflict between initial beliefs and the actual conditions at the school unit.

The recommendation points in a direction that may not have been fully explored. Since the costs in financial and learning terms created by teacher dropout are so high and increasing, and since no high-impact solution has been found, no serious recommendation should be rejected without some kind of trial. We suggest, therefore, that our recommendation be adopted on a trial basis by a number of institutions, and that a longitudinal study be launched to track its effectiveness.

Sample Program Description

Incorporating content in the theoretical aspects of school organization, and administration, as well as practical aspects of current practice in the educational system, this recommendation could be done either across courses or in a single course. The sample program described here employs a single course approach that integrates the resources of the school of education and the music education department.

"Administration and Advocacy for Music Education Majors" is a one-semester, required course to be taken before student teaching. Students would learn about such areas as principals' goals and priorities, budgeting, ordering and reporting procedures, scheduling, maintenance, and special challenges for traveling teachers. A collaboration would be established between the music education department and a school of education. The school of education would provide general training, and the school of music education would provide music-specific training.

Students would spend ten weeks in the school of education. Classes would be devoted to a variety of areas: Budgeting (ordering process, paying vendors, fundraising procedures, payroll, etc.),

General school administration (attendance, reporting, health issues, etc.), Building (rules, repairs, equipment, custodian, etc.), Scheduling (classes, buses, trips, etc.), and Advocacy (raising visibility of music in school and district, generating publicity for the principal and school, etc.). Students would also devote a portion of their student teaching to hands-on administrative work, as appropriate.

During the last five weeks of a 15-week semester, students would take the classes in the music education department. Every week, guest lecturers such as administrators, staff, and educators from local school districts would lead the classes. Students can have more realistic view of their future workplace as well as they can interpret and apply the administration-related knowledge into music class environments.

Despite the challenges in developing such collaboration, both partners might expect significant benefits. In addition to creating opportunities to research this approach to music teacher retention, launching this initiative could prove a strong recruiting tool, especially if, over time, the program increased retention of its graduates. The program would raise and establish a unique music educational profile that could generate publicity at all levels that may assist in recruiting both residential and online students.

The inclusion of this program should be implemented after the acknowledgement of existing educational administration programs, and developed in detail conducted by both the school of education and music education department. It is hoped that further research can provide additional evidence regarding the effects of both music education majors and the inclusion of the course in teacher education programs. Subsequent job satisfaction of in-service teachers should be followed as well.

Conclusion

It is clearly not possible in a single recommendation to address every factor that has been attributed to music teacher turnover (see e.g. The National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Siebert, 2008; Whitener, et al., 1997), but we believe that focused, highly practical, preservice training in administration may reduce the stress, confusion, and overwhelmingness that character-

ize the first-year experience of many teachers. Eliminating those elements may then enable new teachers to concentrate on doing that which will provide sufficient gratification to keep them in the classroom: making music and developing relationships with students.

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