

Comments on the Second Report of the Teachers Leaving the Field Committee: An address to the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association

Why are Kansas teachers leaving the profession?

by James N. Akin

Introduction

My comments today are based on the second report of the "Teachers Leaving the Field Committee," charged by the Teacher Standards Board of the State of Kansas, to determine and document specific reasons for teachers leaving their profession, and to ascertain the magnitude of the departure.

The committee is and has been comprised of two school teachers, a board member, a career development person, a vocational-technical teacher, a personnel administrator, representatives of the State Department of Education, a School of Education faculty member, . . . and one superintendent who never participated.

We received considerable support from the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (MCREL) during the first year, from the State Department of Education, from school administrators from throughout the state, and of course, from departing school teachers.

Questionnaires were made available to 1,729 teachers who had indicated to their administrators that they were leaving their districts. A total of 743 useable responses (43 percent) were received in time to be used in the report. Data which was received later is being used in an analysis of shortage fields.

Procedure

All 307 districts in Kansas were asked to provide lists of teachers who were leaving their districts at the end of the 1980-81 school year. One hundred eighty-four (60 percent) of the districts provided the researchers with lists of departing teachers. Administrators were asked to provide the departing teachers with questionnaires which

James N. Akin is associate director of Career Planning and Placement at Kansas State University.

were completed and anonymously returned to the Kansas State Department of Education.

PROBLEM

Teacher supply/demand has been receiving increasing attention since 1976 when I completed a report which was distributed by the Association for School, College and University Staffing (ASCUS). That report has been continued as an annual activity and has been joined by numerous other surveys, reports and articles on this subject from throughout the United States.

There is a documented decline in the rate of graduation or "production" of new teachers from universities. This decline approaches 60 percent over the past decade in the United States and exceeds 50 percent in Kansas. In addition, many experienced teachers are known to be leaving teaching. The likelihood of those teachers returning to teaching at some future time is unknown. Future demand will be affected by changes in the teacher/pupil ratio, tightening economy, the "back to basics" movement and changes in the number of students to be educated.

The special thrust of this study was to document characteristics of a representative sample of Kansas teachers who were leaving their teaching jobs at the end of the 1980-81 year. The goal of the study was to provide information to guide future efforts toward improving conditions toward the end of attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers for the schools of Kansas.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Early groupings of the data included analysis by (1) elementary and secondary teachers, and (2) those who planned to or wished to teach the following year versus those who are dropping out of the field. Other variables included mobility, long term teaching prospects, sex, type of school, size of district, subject taught (position description), age, years of experience and reasons given for leaving.

SUMMATION OF DATA

Approximately two-thirds of the departing teachers did not wish to teach the next school year in a different district. These "non-seekers" included 162 males (35.1 percent) and 299 females (64.8 percent). Fifty-one percent of the departing females and 68 percent of the departing males had not accepted and were not seeking new teaching positions for the 1981-82 school year.

Of the 439 teachers (approximately two-thirds of the total) who indicated they would not plan to teach the following year, 97 (22 percent) said that they would plan to teach sometime in the future; 165 (38 percent) indicated that they would not teach again; and 177 (40 percent) said that they didn't know whether they would ever teach again. Twenty-two percent of the 720 responding teachers were leaving Kansas and were lost to the state teacher pool.

The larger the district the less likely departing teachers were to be seeking new positions. Of the four groups of schools (by size) the percentage of departing teachers planning to relocate into new positions ranged from 42 percent, 39 percent, 38 percent to 29 percent in the smallest to the largest districts, respectively.

Certain subjects (or job assignments) appeared to have a higher than average rate of teachers dropping out of the profession; these were elementary (self contained),

science, fine arts areas, reading, home economics, counseling and industrial arts.

Of the 743 teachers leaving their districts 52 percent were age 30 or younger. Approximately 37 percent of those departing teachers who were of age 26 through 40 planned to continue teaching in another district. Those teachers aged 41-55 who were departing expressed much greater interest in relocating into a new teaching position. Early mobility should not be surprising since mobility is tolerated only during early years by district salary schedules.

Teachers not planning to teach during the next school year viewed classroom problems as more significant than did teachers who were seeking new teaching positions (2.85 to 3.45 with 1 = greatest and 5 = least significance). Teachers with one year of experience ranked classroom problems higher than did other departing teachers **only** if they were not planning or wishing to teach the following year.

Personal reasons were more significant to females (2.26) than to males (2.92) among those who did not plan to teach the following year. Men at the senior high school level reported personal reasons as significant more often than did men at other levels while females at the senior high school level less frequently indicated that personal reasons were significant than did women at other levels. Elementary teachers indicated that the most influential factors causing them to leave their teaching positions were: (1) family responsibilities, (2) lack of administrative support, (3) salary, (4) spouse moving and (5) other personal reasons. Secondary teachers said that their reasons for resigning were: (1) salary, (2) lack of administrative support, (3) extra duty assignments, (4) "other" personal reasons and (5) fringe benefits.

An interesting side comparison reveals that males who were not planning to move to a new teaching position and females who did plan to teach the following year reported financial reasons as being more important in their decision to depart. Females tended to rank school climate as being more significant (2.82) than did males (3.00). Community reasons were more important to teachers leaving smaller as opposed to larger school districts and to

those who were planning to teach elsewhere as compared to those who are dropping out of teaching.

SUMMARY

Personal reasons were more influential to departing teachers if they were female, had taught two to five years, taught at the elementary level, were leaving a large district or were seeking a new teaching position.

School climate was cited as more significant by departing teachers who were female, had one to nine years experience, taught at the senior high level in districts with 1,000 to 4,999 students and were seeking or had obtained new positions for the next school year.

Finances were more likely to be identified as very significant by departing teachers who were male, had ten or more years experience, taught at the senior high level, were leaving one of the largest districts and were not planning to teach during the following year.

Classroom problems were more likely to be identified by departing teachers who had one year of experience (however, those teachers with ten years experience or more were also concerned about this), had taught in one of the largest schools (least significant in smallest) or were not planning to teach the following year.

Community factors were more often cited by teachers who had taught one year (however, teachers with ten or more years of experience also cited this item), taught at the middle school level, taught in one of the smallest schools, or were planning or hoping to teach during the following year.

FUTURE EFFORTS

The committee has selected two major thrusts for the current year: One effort will be to gather information about and to understand the teachers' perception of "lack of administrative support." This may be a general frustration aimed at a general lack of support for teachers and education or may deal with specific issues. The committee will also gather information from other research efforts to supplement the two reports which have been completed by the committee.