

Mar 8, 2011, 04:14pm EST

High Teacher Turnover Rates are a Big Problem for America's Public Schools



Erik Kain Senior Contributor [Games](#)

f In the comments to [my response to Megan McArdle](#), commenter Socratic_Me asks why nobody is talking about actual teacher turnover rates. It turns out, teacher attrition [is high](#):



NCTAF's findings are a clear indication that America's teacher dropout problem is spiraling out of control. Teacher attrition has grown by 50 percent over the past fifteen years. The national teacher turnover rate has risen to 16.8 percent. In urban schools it is over 20 percent, and, in some schools and districts, the teacher dropout rate is actually higher than the student dropout rate. The pilot study shows:

- The costs of teacher turnover are substantial.
- At-risk schools spend scarce dollars on teacher turnover.
- Teacher turnover undermines at-risk schools.
- At-risk schools could recoup funds by investing in teacher retention.
- Turnover costs can be identified, aggregated, and analyzed.
- District data systems are not designed to control the costs of turnover.

The monetary loss for many schools impacts already stretched budgets and adds to the hiring struggles of school leaders. The problem is most acute in the nation's high minority, high poverty, and low performing schools. Because 46% of all *new* teachers in the United States leave the profession within five years, NCTAF says leaders of at-risk schools are in a constant cycle of rebuilding their staff.

Estimates put the costs of teacher attrition at \$7.3 billion a year. I find it hard to believe that policies geared toward keeping teachers around for only a few years would be *good* for students, teachers, or public schools. Already %46 of new teachers leave the profession within five years, and now reformers want to make it even less appealing for teachers to make teaching a career. This makes no sense. Whatever money is saved on benefits and higher veteran salaries is lost in recruitment, training, and other expenses associated with high turnover. Turnover is highest at the neediest schools.

Teachers cite lack of planning time, workload, and lack of influence over school policy among other reasons for their decision to leave the profession or transfer schools. Teachers who reported having worked with mentor teachers had increased job satisfaction. Students in poor districts were twice as likely to have inexperienced beginners than they were veteran teachers.



Erik Kain

[I write about video games, TV and movies.](#)
Reprints & Permissions

ADVERTISEMENT