

Teacher retention, mobility, and attrition in Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota

Educators in Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota partnered with the Regional Educational Laboratory Central to examine teacher retention, mobility, and attrition. Specifically, this study examined the proportions of teachers who remained in a teaching position in the same school (stayers, a measure of retention), transferred to a teaching position in another school or district (movers, a measure of mobility), or took a nonteaching position or exited their state public school system (leavers, a measure of attrition). Teacher mobility and attrition are frequently associated with challenges for students and schools, such as low student achievement and inequitable access to high-quality teachers.¹ The study used administrative data on teacher assignments between 2015/16 and 2016/17. The study findings provide region- and state-specific information that may be helpful in targeting workforce improvement strategies and developing teacher supports or incentives to improve teacher recruitment and retention where the need is greatest.

Key findings

- **Approximately four of five teachers remained in a classroom teaching position in the same school.** Between 2015/16 and 2016/17, 82 percent of teachers across all four states remained in a classroom teaching position in the same school. The proportion of stayers ranged from 79 percent in Colorado to 86 percent in Nebraska, suggesting slight differences in recruitment and retention needs across the four states.
- **The proportion of movers was slightly lower than the proportion of leavers.** About 8 percent of teachers across all four states transferred to a different school, and 10 percent took a nonteaching position or left their state public school system. The proportion of movers ranged from 7 percent in Nebraska and South Dakota to 9 percent in Colorado, and the proportion of leavers ranged from 8 percent in Nebraska to 13 percent in Colorado. The higher proportion of leavers in Colorado suggests that leaders in that state might wish to further explore this phenomenon and the factors contributing to it.
- **The proportion of stayers was similar in rural and nonrural schools.** The proportion of stayers across all four states was similar in rural schools (83 percent) and nonrural schools (82 percent). The proportions of stayers, movers, and leavers within each state were also similar in rural and nonrural schools.
- **Mobility and attrition varied substantially across districts.** The combined proportion of movers and leavers varied substantially across districts in each state. This finding suggests that supports for teacher recruitment and retention could prioritize districts with the highest rates of mobility and attrition and that state education agency leaders might wish to continue to monitor teacher retention, mobility, and attrition at both the state and local levels.
- **Slightly more than half of teachers who transferred from a rural district moved to a nonrural district.** Among teachers who transferred from a rural district between 2015/16 and 2016/17, 54 percent moved to a nonrural district. To better target retention initiatives, state leaders wishing to improve retention in rural districts might want to further examine patterns of teacher mobility to identify districts with the highest rates of rural-to-nonrural district mobility.

1. Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(3), 367–409. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ896364>.