

Michigan Teachers Who Are Not Teaching: Who Are They, and What Would Motivate Them to Teach?

Statewide teacher shortages in Michigan are impeding efforts to ensure all students equitable access to qualified teachers. To alleviate shortages, education leaders have considered recruiting certified teachers who are not currently teaching (both those who have never taught and those who left teaching). This study analyzed teacher certification and employment data and data from a survey of certified teachers who were not teaching in a Michigan public school in 2017/18 to gather information on the viability of this recruitment option. The report describes the characteristics of these nonteaching certified teachers, the three most important reasons why they are not teaching, and the three most important incentives that would motivate them to teach in a public school in the state. The study found that approximately 61,000 teachers certified in Michigan were not teaching in the state's public schools in 2017/18. A survey of nonteaching certified teachers found that they most frequently selected wanting a higher salary as one of the three most important reasons why they were not teaching and that they most frequently selected an increase in salary as one of the three most important incentives that would motivate them to teach. Respondents also frequently selected financial incentives, such as allowing retirees to retain their retirement benefits, improving other benefits, and forgiving student loans, as one of their three most important incentives. Nonteaching certified teachers might consider becoming a public school teacher if it were easier and less costly to earn or renew a teaching certificate, if they could more easily obtain a full-time or part-time position, and if they were assured of school leadership support and smaller class sizes or a lighter student load.

Why this study?

Faced with teacher shortages across multiple regions of the state and content areas, including career and technical education, special education, elementary education, and science,¹ Michigan education leaders are assessing the viability of recruiting certified teachers who are not currently teaching to fill vacant teaching positions in public schools. This study examined the characteristics of these teachers, their reasons for not teaching, and the incentives that would motivate them to teach in public schools. Knowing whether nonteaching certified teachers differ from current teachers and understanding the types of incentives that might influence a decision to seek employment as a public school teacher could help Michigan education leaders tailor their recruitment efforts.

1. Robinson, J., & Lloyd, B. (2017). Teacher turnover in Michigan: A look at teacher mobility and attrition rates. Michigan Department of Education. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Teacher_Mobility_Brief_Final_2017.09.18_v2_ada_601772_7.pdf. U.S. Department of Education. (2020). Teacher Shortage Area Report: Michigan. Retrieved July 15, 2020, from <https://tsa.ed.gov/#/reports>. Wan, Y., Pardo, M., & Asson, S. (2019). Past and projected trends in teacher demand and supply in Michigan (REL 2019–009). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED597828>.

What was studied and how?

This study examined three research questions:

1. How many of Michigan’s certified teachers were not teaching in Michigan preK–12 public schools during the 2017/18 school year? What were their demographic, employment, and certification characteristics, and which demographic and employment characteristics distinguish them from teachers who were teaching?
2. What reasons did certified teachers who were not teaching in 2017/18 give for leaving or choosing not to teach in preK–12 public schools? Did these reasons vary by demographic and employment characteristics?
3. What incentives did certified teachers who were not teaching in 2017/18 indicate would motivate them to return to or enter teaching in preK–12 public schools? Did the attractiveness of the incentives vary by teachers’ demographic and employment characteristics? Were some incentives more persuasive than others in influencing teachers to consider teaching?

For research question 1 the study team used administrative data from the Michigan Department of Education on teacher demographic and certification characteristics from 1961 to 2019 and on employment in public schools from 2013/14 to 2017/18. Descriptive statistics were used to compare teachers who were teaching in a Michigan public school during 2017/18 with those who had taught recently (between 2013/14 and 2016/17) and those who had not (not since 2013/14 or not ever). Regression analysis was used to examine whether teacher characteristics, such as age and gender, were associated with teaching status. To create the analytic sample for research questions 2 and 3, the study team used data from a survey administered by the Michigan Department of Education between December 5, 2019, and January 10, 2020, to all certified and formerly certified teachers with valid email addresses who were not teaching in 2017/18. Respondents selected the three most important reasons why they were not teaching in a Michigan public school and the three most important incentives that would motivate them to teach. The study team used frequencies to identify the 10 reasons for not teaching that appeared most often among respondents’ three most important reasons and used regression analysis to determine whether respondents’ characteristics, such as teaching status and presence of young children at home, were associated with the 10 most frequently selected reasons. The study team used the same approach to identify the 10 most frequently selected incentives that would motivate respondents to teach in a Michigan public school and to determine whether respondents’ characteristics were associated with the three most important incentives they selected.

Findings

About 61,000 teachers certified in Michigan were not teaching in the state’s public schools in 2017/18, and most had not taught recently in a public school in Michigan

Administrative data revealed that 61,252 teachers certified in Michigan were not teaching in a public school in the state in 2017/18² and that 70 percent of them had not taught recently in a public school (not since 2013/14 or not ever after receiving their initial certificate). Most (93 percent) of the nonteaching certified teachers were younger than retirement age (that is, they were age 60 or younger).

Based on survey responses, 22 percent of certified teachers who were not teaching in a Michigan public school in 2017/18 might have been in administrative or instructional leadership roles in public or private schools. Because

2. The place of residence of these certified teachers is unknown. However, results from a nonrepresentative survey of these teachers indicate that 16 percent of the 61,252 might be living 20 or more miles outside of Michigan.

these certified teachers already serve students and teachers in important roles, it might not be desirable to recruit them as teachers.³

Compared with teachers who were teaching in a Michigan public school in 2017/18, certified teachers who had not taught recently were younger, and a larger percentage of those who had taught recently but were not teaching in 2017/18 were from a racial/ethnic minority group

Certified teachers who had not taught at any point between 2013/14 and 2017/18 were more likely to be younger than 35 (31 percent of them) than teachers who were teaching in 2017/18 (20 percent).

Teachers who had taught at some point between 2013/14 and 2016/17 but were not teaching in 2017/18 were more likely to be from a racial/ethnic minority group (14 percent) than those who were teaching in 2017/18 (9 percent).

Survey respondents most frequently selected wanting a higher salary and pursuing career opportunities outside of teaching as one of the three most important reasons why they were not teaching

About 33 percent of respondents selected wanting a higher salary as one of the three most important reasons why they were not teaching.

Other reasons that were frequently selected as one of the three most important reasons for not teaching included wanting more career growth opportunities (selected by 16 percent of respondents), taking courses to advance a career in education (11 percent), and inability to obtain a full-time teaching position (10 percent).

For most types of teachers (such as certified teachers who have taught in public schools and those who have not, those who are from a racial/ethnic minority group and those who are not, those who have young children at home and those who do not, and those certified to teach elementary grades and those certified to teach secondary grades), wanting a higher salary was most frequently selected as one of the three most important reasons for not teaching. The only exception was among certified teachers who had never taught in a Michigan public school: a greater percentage of these respondents than of other respondents selected not being able to obtain a full-time position as one of the three most important reasons why they were not teaching.

Survey respondents most frequently selected a higher salary and an easier way to renew or earn certification as one of the three most important incentives that would motivate them to teach in a Michigan public school

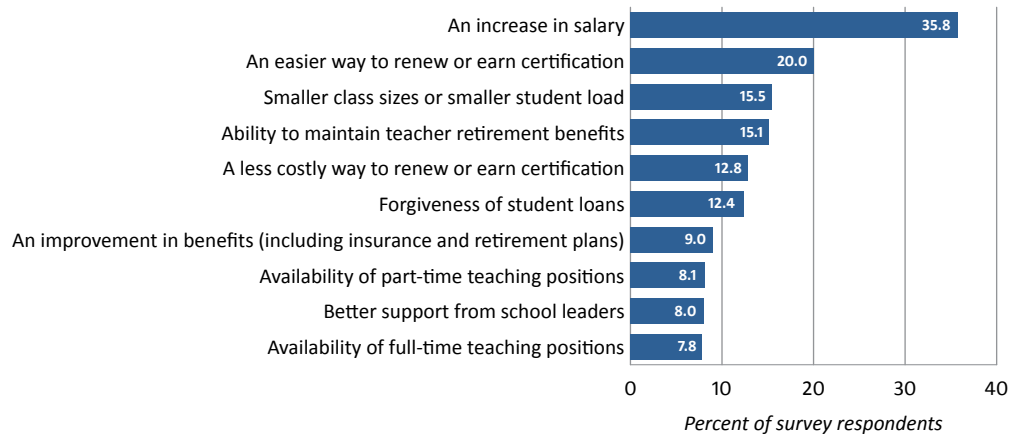
The incentive that survey respondents most frequently selected as one of the three most important that would motivate them to teach in a Michigan public school was a higher salary (36 percent). The second most frequently selected was an easier way to renew or earn certification (20 percent). Other incentives that were frequently selected as most important were smaller class sizes or student load (16 percent of respondents), the ability to retain teacher retirement benefits (15 percent),⁴ and a less costly way to renew or earn certification (13 percent; figure 1).

A majority of certified teachers (58 percent) who responded to the survey indicated that they would consider teaching again in a Michigan public school. Regardless of these teachers' characteristics, they most frequently chose a higher salary as one of their most important incentives.

3. Michigan administrative data indicate that 3.9 percent of nonteaching teachers have an administrative role in a public school.

4. In Michigan, teachers receiving retirement benefits cannot teach full-time without losing some benefits, with certain exceptions (The Public School Employees Retirement Act of 1979 (1980), <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-38-1361>).

Figure 1. Survey respondents most frequently selected a higher salary as one of the three most important incentives that would motivate them to teach in a Michigan public school, 2019/20



Note: Of the 9,842 nonteaching certified teachers in the analytic sample of survey respondents, 7,563 respondents selected at least one most important incentive. Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who selected the incentive as one of the three most important incentives that would motivate them to teach in a Michigan public school. Percentages are not weighted and might not represent the most important incentives among all Michigan certified teachers who were not teaching in 2017/18. The categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Authors' calculations based on the Michigan Department of Education's survey of teachers who are not teaching, administered between December 2019 and January 2020 (see appendix B for the survey instrument).

Implications

The findings from this state-level study suggest several ways that state and district education leaders could tailor teacher recruitment to attract nonteaching certified teachers; however, while the findings apply at the state level, they might not apply within specific localities.

Certain incentives might be more persuasive than others to motivate certified teachers to fill vacant teaching positions. One is higher teacher salaries. Public school teachers in Michigan earn 23 percent less than other college graduates employed in the state.⁵ Without salary increases to reduce the pay gap, certified teachers might not be willing to enter or return to teaching. Other financial incentives most frequently selected as persuasive by survey respondents include student loan forgiveness, ability to retain retirement benefits, and improvements in other types of benefits.

The study found that simplifying the certification and certificate renewal process and making it less costly could influence teachers' decision to take a teaching position in a Michigan public school. The Michigan Department of Education could further publicize the 2017 changes to the certification process that accomplished this.⁶ The study also found that inability to obtain full-time and part-time teaching positions might be a barrier to teaching in Michigan. State and district leaders might consider publicizing open teaching positions across the state.

District and school leaders could strengthen classroom and leadership support to alleviate teachers' anxieties about teaching. Supports such as teacher aides, mentors or coaches could help address teachers' concerns about class sizes, student load, discipline, and leadership support that emerged in the survey.

5. Allegretto, S., & Mishel, L. (2018). *The teacher pay penalty and compensation gaps through 2017*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved June 24, 2020, from <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-gap-2018/>.

6. Michigan Department of Education. (2017). *Teacher certification code: Summary of key changes*. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Summary_of_Changes_Teacher_Cert_605458_7.pdf.

The study results based on survey responses should be interpreted with caution because the respondents are not representative of all nonteaching certified teachers in Michigan and because the survey was administered before the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers' perceptions of desirable incentives for teaching in public schools could have since changed.

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Lindsay, J., Gnedko-Berry, N., & Wan, C. (2021). *Michigan teachers who are not teaching: Who are they, and what would motivate them to teach?* (REL 2021–076). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.