

Teacher Preparation and Employment Outcomes of Beginning Teachers in Rhode Island

Because teacher turnover can adversely affect student achievement and local education budgets, many states want to better understand the extent to which teachers switch schools or leave the state public school system. Leaders at the Rhode Island Department of Education are interested specifically in understanding factors related to teacher mobility, retention, and attrition. This study examined these outcomes among beginning teachers in Rhode Island who were trained in a teacher preparation program in the state between 2012/13 and 2016/17 and who then taught for at least one year in the state public school system by the 2017/18 school year. After three years about one-third of these beginning teachers were still teaching in their initial school, one-third were teaching in another school in the state public school system, and one-third were no longer teaching in the state public school system. In general, there was no statistically significant relationship between a beginning teacher's preparation program provider and the teacher's mobility, retention, or attrition outcome. These outcomes did vary by teacher certification field. They also varied by teacher preparation program type: teachers who were trained in alternative programs (programs that permit teaching before completion of all requirements for certification) were more likely than teachers who were trained in traditional undergraduate, graduate, or nondegree programs to stay in their school after one year and more likely to leave after three years. Stakeholders can use the findings from this report to inform policies and supports for beginning teachers, especially teachers who were certified in fields with higher attrition rates and teachers who were trained in alternative programs.

Why this study?

Rhode Island, like many other states, wants to better understand teacher mobility and attrition because of the adverse effects teacher turnover can have on student achievement and local education budgets.¹ This study defines mobility as a teacher moving from his or her initial teaching position in the Rhode Island public school system to a teaching position in another school in the state public school system, and attrition as a teacher leaving teaching in the state public school system. Leaders at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) want to understand how factors such as differences in the state's teacher preparation program providers, teacher preparation program types, and teacher certification field are related to mobility, retention, and attrition among beginning teachers. Stakeholders can use the findings from this report to inform policies and supports for beginning teachers, especially teachers certified in fields with higher attrition rates and teachers who were trained in alternative programs that allow participants to teach before completing all the requirements for certification.

1. Guin, K. (2004). Chronic teacher turnover in urban elementary schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(42), 1–30. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ853508>.

What was studied and how?

This study brief presents the findings of a study of the mobility, retention, and attrition of the 1,164 beginning teachers in Rhode Island who were trained at the state's 11 teacher preparation program between 2012/13 and 2016/17 and who then taught for at least one year in the state public school system by the 2017/18 school year. It answers two research questions:

1. What percentages of beginning teachers moved to another school in the state public school system, stayed in their initial school, and left teaching in the state public school system after one year and after three years? Do the percentages differ by teacher preparation program provider, teacher preparation program type, or teacher certification field?
2. Is there a relationship between the teacher preparation program provider or program type in which a beginning teacher was trained and that teacher's likelihood of being retained in the state public school system?

The analytic sample size for teacher mobility, retention, and attrition rates was 946 teachers after one year and 453 teachers after three years. The study team used descriptive and statistical analyses to answer the research questions. A mobility variable indicated whether a teacher moved to another school in the state public school system (mover), stayed in his or her initial school (stayer), or was no longer employed in the state public school system (leaver). Cohorts were pooled to produce mobility rates after one year and after three years of teaching in the state public school system.

Findings

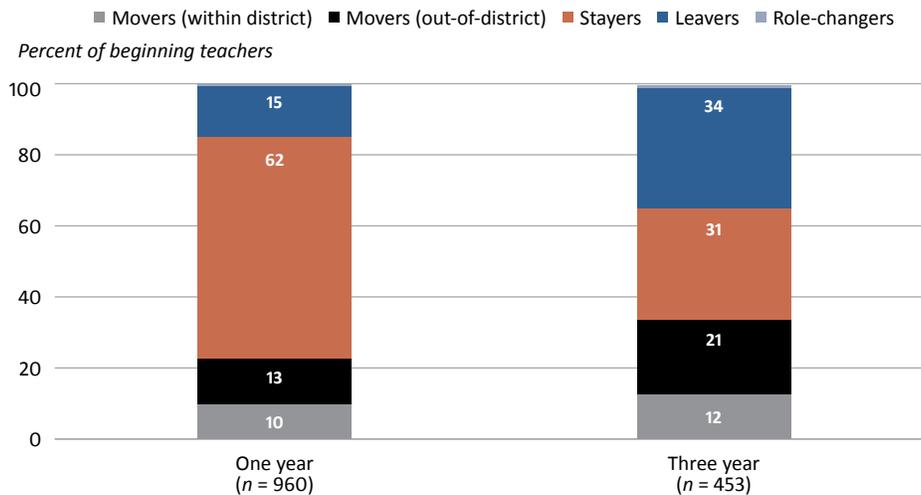
After three years about one-third of beginning teachers who were trained in Rhode Island and who taught in the state public school system for at least one year between 2012/13 and 2016/17 were still teaching in their initial school, one-third were teaching in another school in the state public school system, and one-third were no longer teaching in the state public school system

Approximately 62 percent of the 946 beginning teachers who taught in Rhode Island after being trained in the state between 2012/13 and 2016/17 were still teaching in their initial school after one year, and 15 percent were no longer teaching in the state public school system (figure 1). After three years 31 percent of beginning teachers were still teaching in their initial school, 34 percent were teaching in another school in the state public school system, and 34 percent were no longer teaching in the state public school system.

Beginning teachers who were trained in traditional undergraduate, graduate, and nondegree teacher preparation programs in Rhode Island had similar mobility, retention, and attrition rates, but beginning teachers who were trained in alternative programs were significantly more likely to leave the state public school system after three years

Mobility, retention, and attrition rates of beginning teachers were similar for teachers who were trained in traditional undergraduate, graduate, and nondegree teacher preparation programs in Rhode Island after both one year and three years. These rates differed significantly from those of teachers who were trained in alternative programs. After one year teachers who were trained in alternative programs had a lower mobility rate (6 percent) and a higher retention rate (82 percent) than teachers who were trained in traditional undergraduate programs (28 percent mobility and 59 percent retention), graduate programs (19 percent and 60 percent), and nondegree programs (25 percent and 65 percent). After three years, however, teachers who were trained in alternative programs had a higher attrition rate (72 percent) than teachers who were trained in traditional undergraduate

Figure 1. Beginning teachers who were trained in Rhode Island and who taught in the state public school system for at least one year left teaching in the state public school system at a higher rate after three years than after one year, 2012/13–2017/18



Note: Less than 3 percent of beginning teachers who were trained in Rhode Island changed roles; to keep the discussion concise, results for role-changers are presented in the figures but are not discussed in the findings.

Source: Authors’ analysis of Rhode Island Department of Education data for 2012/13–2017/18.

programs (21 percent), graduate programs (30 percent), and nondegree programs (32 percent). These findings are consistent with the results from the advanced statistical analysis for research question 2.

After one year and after three years, the mobility, retention, and attrition rates of beginning teachers did not differ significantly across individual teacher preparation program providers, except in the case of one private provider offering an alternative program

Rates of beginning teachers staying, moving, or leaving teaching in the state public school system were not associated with a teacher’s preparation program provider except in the case of one private provider offering an alternative program.

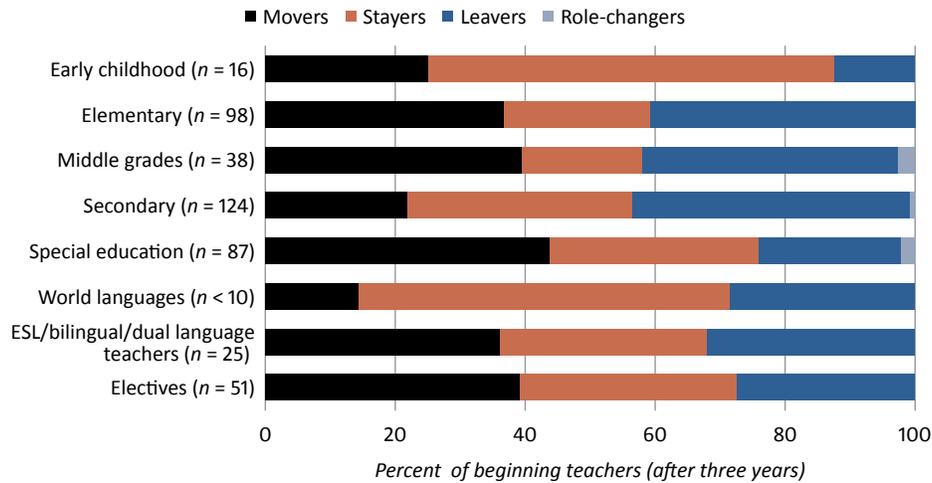
The three-year mobility, retention, and attrition rates of beginning teachers who were trained in Rhode Island varied by teacher certification field; teachers with special education certification had the highest mobility rate, and teachers with early childhood certification had the highest retention rate

Across teacher certification fields there were no statistically significant differences in one-year mobility, retention, or attrition rates of beginning teachers in Rhode Island. However, after three years teachers with special education certification had a statistically significantly higher mobility rate (44 percent) than beginning teachers with secondary certification (22 percent). Also after three years beginning teachers with early childhood certification had a statistically significantly higher retention rate (63 percent) than teachers with elementary certification (23 percent; figure 2).

Implications

Because teacher preparation program providers are increasingly accountable to state education agencies for how well they prepare teachers, especially in hard-to-staff schools or subjects, RIDE and the program providers might be interested in these findings and in further understanding why teachers move, stay, or leave. There may

Figure 2. After three years beginning teachers trained in Rhode Island with special education certification had the highest mobility rate, and beginning teachers with early childhood certification had the highest retention rate, 2012/13–2017/18



ESL is English as a second language.

Source: Authors' analysis of Rhode Island Department of Education data for 2012/13–2017/18.

be some unmeasured characteristics of the teacher preparation programs, such as those related to the quality of the candidates' experience, that could help explain these patterns.² In particular, RIDE might want to investigate why teachers who were trained in alternative programs leave the state public school system at a higher rate after three years than teachers who were trained in traditional programs. Such information, paired with the results of this study, can guide discussions between state policymakers and program providers about whether to promote certain practices, such as offering more courses in teaching and methods strategies or providing more opportunities to observe other teachers. Program providers can use the findings from this study to inform the supports they provide to teacher candidates and beginning teachers, especially those in groups with the highest mobility rates, such as teachers with special education certification, and the highest attrition rates, teachers with secondary certification. In addition, prospective teachers can use the findings to inform their selection of certification field.

An important limitation of this study is that the data do not indicate why a teacher is no longer teaching in a Rhode Island public school. Teachers might have had a one-year position, been laid off for lack of effectiveness, or had another reason for leaving. Without this information, the attrition rates might be overestimated. Another limitation is that the data cover only about 38 percent of teachers trained in Rhode Island (1,164 of 3,045 teachers). Many teachers trained in the state do not go on to teach in Rhode Island public schools, and thus they were not included in this analysis. Therefore, the study is unable to generalize to the broader population of teachers trained in a Rhode Island teacher preparation program.

2. Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2012). Retaining teachers: How preparation matters. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 30–34. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ988729>.

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