

TACIR

STAFF RESEARCH

BRIEF

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SUMMARY

A survey of Tennessee teachers who have migrated from one Tennessee school system to another indicated that salary was the number one factor influencing teacher migration, with over twenty-one percent of migrating teachers selecting salary as the most influential factor in their decision to move. However, the vast majority of migrating teachers (78.18 percent) indicated that some other factor was their major influencing factor. This brief shows that salary is a major influence on migration decisions (even among teachers who indicated some other factor as being the most influential), but that no one factor can be said to command the attention of researchers at the expense of all others. Migration decisions are complex decisions where teachers weigh numerous issues before deciding whether or not to move.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher mobility is an important issue because it has been demonstrated that high levels of teacher mobility cause significant decreases in student performance. Teachers' preferences for other schools affect the attitudes and grade aspirations of students (Bempah, Kaylen, Osburn and Birkenholz, 1994). Some test results such as verbal scores have been directly affected by disruptions caused by teacher migration (U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, 1970 and Hanushek, 1986). Low rates of teacher turnover were

positively associated with pupils' scores on tests of verbal abilities by Burkhead, Holland and Fox, (1967). Bempah et.al. reported studies by Engel and Hall (1984) and Threadgill (1988) that indicate the cost associated with recruiting replacement teachers gives administrators incentive to retain experienced teachers.

With the importance of teacher mobility in mind, the **Center of Excellence for Basic Skills (COE)** and the **Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR)** recently conducted a survey of teachers who have left employment with one Tennessee school system to go to work for another Tennessee system. The intent of this survey was to determine what factors influence teachers' migration decisions, and the relative influence of those factors. The survey responses were analyzed for their distribution and selected factors were further examined to determine the existence of significant relationships.

SURVEY RESULTS

Responses. After working with the TACIR to develop the teacher migration survey instrument, the COE distributed the instrument to 1,434 teachers who had left employment of a school district in Tennessee and subsequently went to work for another district within the state, and were individuals for which current addresses were available. The COE

recorded all valid answers given by the teacher respondents.

Survey Structure

TACIR and the COE divided the survey into three sections, summarized as follows:

Section 1. What was the major factor that influenced your decision to change employers?

Section 2. For each of 25 distinct factors, select which school system; your current, former or neither (no preference), with which you were most satisfied.

Section 3. Given a list of 32 factors, rank the top ten factors that affected your decision to change employers.

There were 417 valid responses from the surveyed individuals. Any legible answer was considered to be valid. The survey was designed to have multiple passes or sections to establish creditability for the responses.

Demographic Data and Exploratory Question. The first section included questions asking the teacher respondents for specific demographic data that would establish such factors as: age, gender, tenure, marital status,

number of years experience, position, grade levels, consolidation impact, recruitment activity and physical condition of the school plant. This data was used to compare migration factor results for various subsections of the respondent population.

The primary question of the first section asked the teachers to provide the major factor that in their opinion determined their change of employment. The survey designers felt it important to ask this question in the first section in order to reduce any influence on the answer that might come from reading the migration factor choices in the next two sections.

As shown in Table 1, salary was the number one given response, with 21.72 percent of respondents indicating that it was the major factor influencing their decision to migrate. Although this shows that salary was the most influential of the factors, it also shows that the vast majority of migrating teachers (79.28 percent) felt that some other factor was most influential. Other factors listed included commute time and distance, listed by 17 percent, and spouse changing jobs or moving, which was indicated by 14 percent of the respondents. Dissatisfaction with administrative support / leadership accounted for eight percent of the first choice answers. Miscellaneous other responses, none larger than eight percent, accounted for the remaining 35 percent of the responses.

Table 1. Top Five Responses to Survey Question: “What was the major factor determining your change of employment from one school district to another?”

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Salary	81	21.72%
Commute time/distance	62	16.62%
Spouse changed jobs/moved	51	13.67%
Administrative support leadership	29	7.77%
Opportunities for professional advancement/degree or certification	18	4.83%

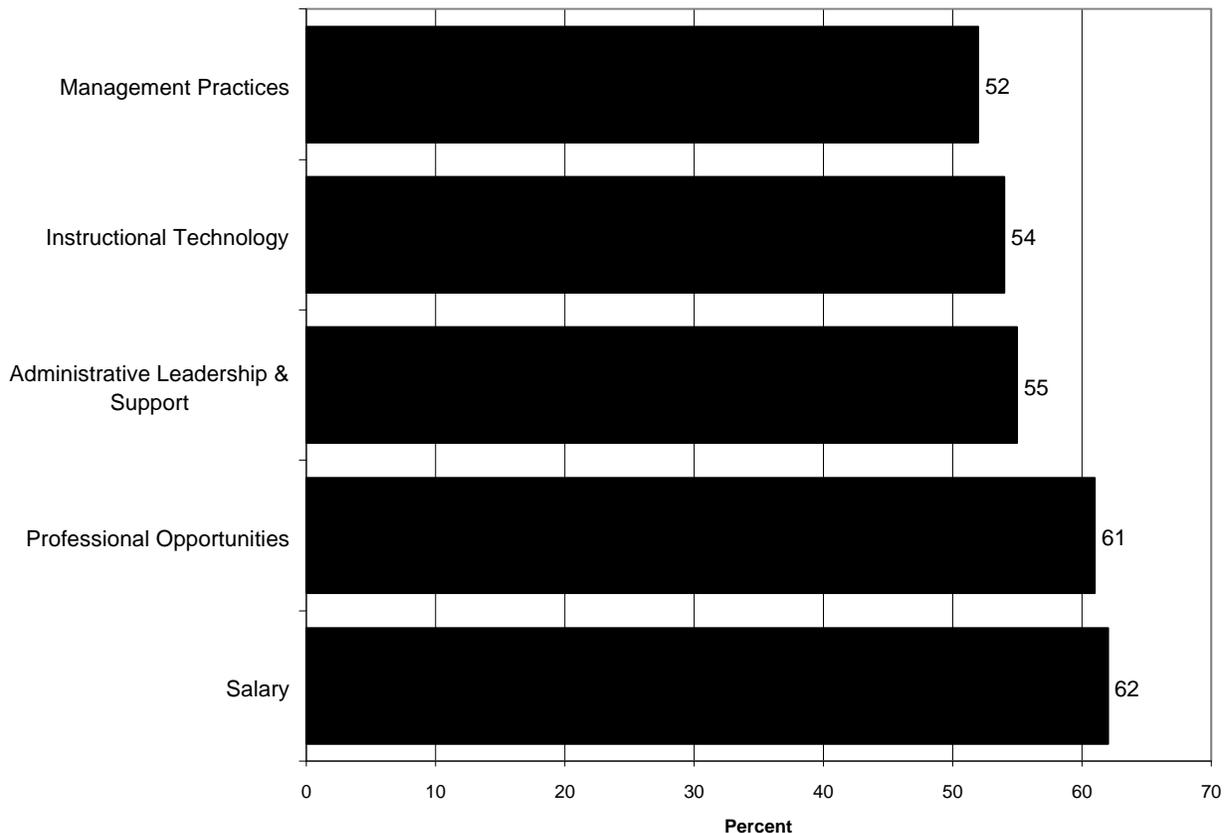
School District Preferences. The second section of the survey asked teachers to select which school system; their current, former or neither (no preference), with which they were most satisfied, given a set of twenty five distinct factors derived from an extensive analysis of economic finance literature. Teachers generally favored their new school systems over their former school systems. Figure 1 lists the top five factors preferred by respondents in their current system over their former system.

The highest response rate was for salary, which was preferred in the current system by 61.7 percent of respondents. Salary was almost matched as first choice by professional opportunities at 61 percent. Administrative

leadership and support and instructional technology were very similar in outcome with 55 percent and 54 percent, respectively. Furthermore, the management practices of the current system, at 52 percent, outpaced all of the remaining responses.

No single factor in their former system was preferred by a majority of responding teachers over their current systems. The highest response rate for an item preferred in the former system over the current system was school atmosphere. This factor was preferred in the former system by 33.6 percent of respondents. Salary, the highest ranking factor preferred in the current system, was preferred in the former system by 25.2 percent of respondents.

FIGURE 1. Top Five Factors Preferred by Respondents in Their Current School District Over Their Former School District



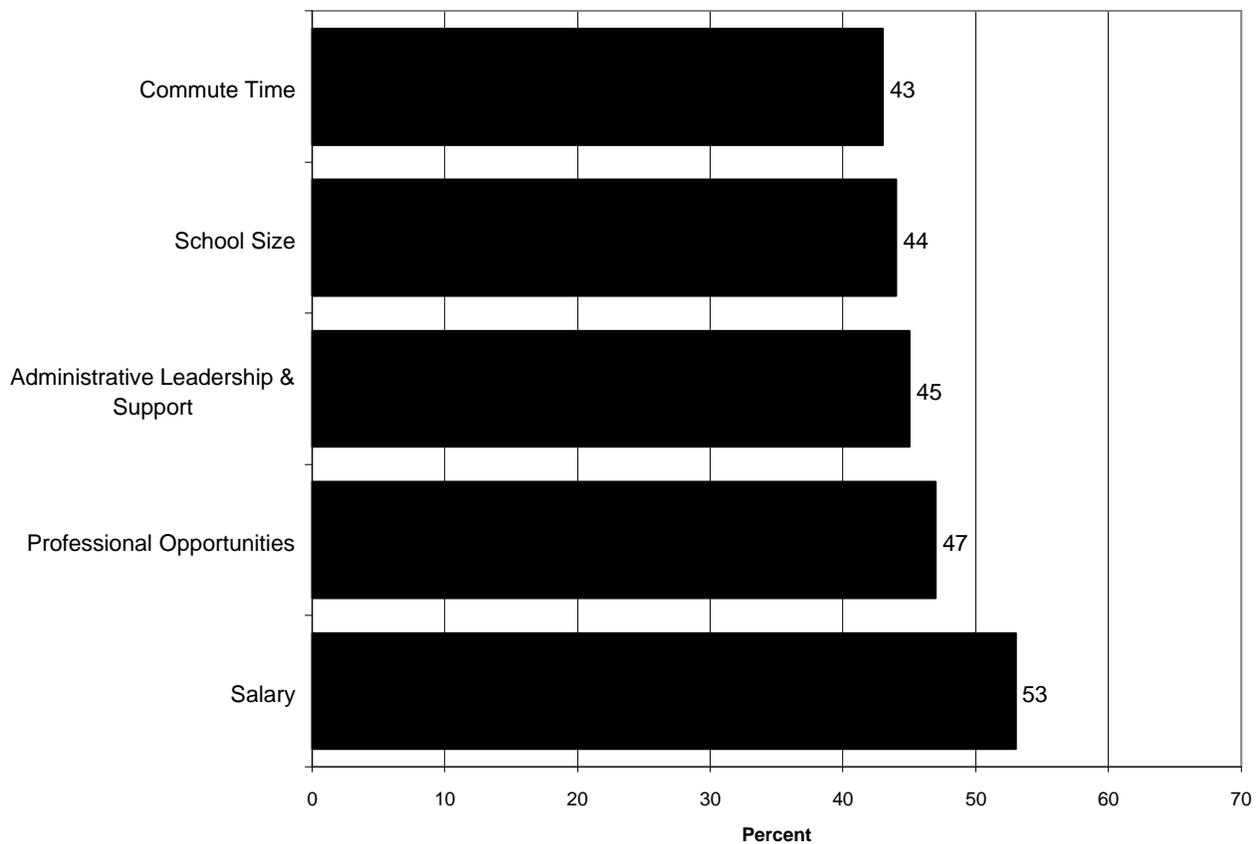
Several factors were rated by a majority of respondents as not being preferred in either system. English as a Second Language programs (80.7 percent), opportunities for an advanced degree or certificate (52.8 percent), and satisfaction with professional negotiations (50.9 percent) were all ranked as not being favored in either the current or former system by a majority of respondents.

The teachers were also asked to indicate if each factor affected their decision to migrate to another school system. Figure 2 shows that salary, at 53.3 percent, had the highest rate of respondents indicating that it did influence

their decision to migrate from one system to another. Again, though this clearly shows a significant impact by salary on migration decisions, it also shows that salary was not considered an influence on their decision by nearly half (46.7 percent) of respondents.

The findings of the second section of the survey form appear to support the hypothesis that migration decisions are complex decisions, where the teacher weighs various issues before deciding to move or not. This conclusion is supported by the final section of the survey form, discussed below.

FIGURE 2. Top Five Factors Considered by Respondents to Have Influenced Their Decision to Migrate from One System to Another



Magnitude of Factor Influences. The third and final section of the survey asked the teacher respondents to choose in order of the magnitude of impact, the top ten factors that affected their decision to leave employment in one school district in favor of employment in another district. This section differed from the previous in that its question asked the respondents to assign a relative value to each of the top ten factors, whereas the last section asked the respondents to merely indicate whether or not each factor was a consideration.

For each of the top twenty factors, Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who ranked that factor as the number one influence on their migration decision. The top five responses to this question were almost identical to the top five responses in the first section of the survey. Salary was ranked number one by the largest percentage of

respondents, but it still was ranked number one by only 21.3 percent of the respondents.

The third section of the form added more depth than the first section, in that it allowed respondents to show how their other nine top factors compared to their number one factor. Table 3 shows that in addition to receiving the highest response as a number one factor, salary also received the highest response as the number two, and number four factors. The other top responses were similar for the number two and three factors, with benefits and school atmosphere replacing spouse changed jobs/moved and professional opportunities as top five responses. It is important to note that salary was ranked within the top four factors for just over half of the respondents (51 percent). This again demonstrates that salary is an important factor in migration decisions, but that it is still just one factor among many.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents Ranking Each Factor as the Number One Influence Affecting Their Decision to Migrate from One System to Another, Top 20 Factors

Factor	Percentage Ranking Factor as No. 1 Influence on Migration
Salary	21.3
Commute time/distance	16.3
Spouse changed jobs/ moved	13.4
Administrative support/ leadership	7.6
Opportunities for professional advancement	4.7
Subject taught	4.2
Politics	3.4
Non-tenure non-renewal of contract	2.9
Grade level taught	2.4
Philosophical compatibility (district)	2.1
School atmosphere	2.1
Management styles (school)	1.8
Professional Development	1.8
Safety issues	1.8
Student behavior	1.6
Class load	1.3
Management styles (district)	1.3
Philosophical compatibility (school)	1.3
Recruited by other district	1.3
Class size	1.1

TABLE 3. RANKING OF FIRST FOUR FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED MIGRATION

Ranking	Percent
#1 FACTOR	
1. Salary	21.3%
2. Commute Time/Distance	16.3%
3. Spouse Changed Jobs / Moved	13.4%
4. Administrative Support / Leadership	7.6%
5. Professional Opportunities	4.7%
#2 FACTOR	
1. Salary	14.9%
2. Benefits	11.9%
3. Commute time/distance	8.1%
4. Administrative Support / leadership	5.7%
5. School Atmosphere	5.1%
#3 FACTOR	
1. Benefits	8.7%
2. Salary	6.8%
3. Management Styles	5.9%
4. School Atmosphere	5.6%
5. Administrative Support / Leadership	5.3%
#4 FACTOR	
1. Salary	8.0%
2. School Atmosphere	5.5%
2. Class Size	5.5%
2. Commute Time / Distance	5.5%
3. Administrative Support / Leadership	5.1%
4. Management Styles	4.8%
4. Subject Taught	4.8%
5. Professional Development	4.5%

DISCUSSION

The intent of the research was to determine the factors that contributed to the decision of public school teachers to leave employment in one school district in order to be employed in another within the state. The findings for Tennessee were not unlike those for other states as determined by the review of the literature.

Workplace and Personal/Family Conditions.

Tennessee teachers indicated they changed positions or migrated to other districts as a result of either workplace or personal/family conditions. We addressed these conditions by

including both workplace and personal/family migration factors in the survey. Most of the factors considered in this project were workplace factors, although commute time/distance, recreational/cultural opportunities, and relocation of spouse are examples of personal/family factors. The factors of cost of living and recreational/cultural opportunities, as well as the workplace factors of non-renewal of contract and professional negotiations are examples of conditions not discovered in the analysis of the literature. However, the survey designers felt these were important factors to consider in this project. None of these four factors were listed by a significant number of respondents as being major mobility factors.

In considering the five factors ranked the highest by percentage of respondents who indicated the factor affected their decision to migrate in the second section of the survey form, professional opportunities, administrative leadership and support, and school size are workplace factors, while commute time is a personal/family factor. The leading factor, **salary, can be categorized as both a personal/family and a workplace factor.** It would be a personal factor inasmuch as any salary increase would increase the purchasing power of the individual. Salary could also be a workplace factor by virtue of the individuals perceiving themselves as under compensated for their professional skills and expertise, therefore seeking a higher salary position to remedy the situation.

Other than salary, commute time was the highest rated personal/family factor influencing migration, with 42.8 percent of respondents listing it as a migration consideration. Commute time was also listed as the second highest factor in response to the first section question (What was the major factor determining your change of employment from one school district to another?), with a 16.62 percent response. Additionally, commute time was the second highest rated response in the third section request for respondents to rank their top ten migration considerations. It was ranked the number one factor by 16.3 percent of respondents and the number two factor by 8.1 percent of respondents.

Other personal/family factors cited as migration influences in the second section were cost of living (22.2 percent) and recreational/cultural opportunities (19.9 percent). The relocation of a spouse was a personal/family factor not available for consideration in the second section (as the intent of that section was to compare former and current systems), however, it was a major factor listed in response to both the first and the third section. It received the third highest response to the first section (13.67 percent) and was ranked the number one factor by 13.4 percent of respondents to the third section. It is important to remember that while the second section question asked respondents to indicate whether or not a factor influenced their

decision to migrate, the third section question asked each respondent to rank their top ten migration factors.

Other than salary, the highest ranked workplace factors in response to the second section's identification of migration considerations were professional opportunities (47.4 percent), administrative leadership and support (45.4 percent), school size (43.6 percent), and management practices (36.2 percent). Administrative leadership and support and professional opportunities were also ranked in the top five responses to both the first section and the number one factor ranking in the third section.

Salary and Benefits. The analysis of the final section of the survey indicates that when four of the most often chosen (of ten) ranked factors that influenced teachers' decisions to migrate are considered, it is apparent that salary was the major factor. Three of four of the most often chosen indicate salary to be the first chosen factor with the fourth being benefits. Benefits can be seen as a subsidiary of overall salary. It is important to note that when the first section of the survey requested the respondents to register the primary reason for their migration, the answer was salary; however, the second reason registered was relocation of the spouse followed by administration/ management practices. The fourth most often registered reason for migration was commute time and distance. In considering the choice of salary as the major factor, in the first section of the survey, one must also consider the implications that it was the primary response for only 22 percent of the teachers who returned the survey.

Significant Relationships. Inasmuch as salary was identified as the most chosen single variable affecting teacher migration, it was important to determine if there were variables that could be shown to have a significant relationship with salary. There were significant relationships with salary and the following variables: professional opportunity, cost of living, address change, recruitment, class size and school size.

Tennessee like many other states has expended considerable resources on the reduction of class sizes. However, some districts have been able to reduce these class sizes more than other districts. When the factor of class size effect on the decision to migrate is analyzed with the major factor on migration, salary, a significant relationship is determined ($\chi^2 = 11.534 + <.001$). This is interesting inasmuch as those districts that would have resources to provide higher salary would also probably have resources available to further reduce class sizes.

The analysis also indicates that commute time and distance is a major consideration in migration decision making. Further analysis established a significant relationship between these factors. It can be interpreted from the data that those who changed positions but did not change their permanent addresses were willing to commute the time and distance necessary to obtain a higher salary. The other major consideration discussed should be that of teachers' working environment. Some factors found **NOT** to contribute to mobility decision making were: physical aspects of the school plant, personal safety, professional negotiations or school size. Factors related to the working environment found to contribute to mobility even among teachers with tenure and continuing contracts were; administrative leadership and support, management practices and philosophical compatibility.

CONCLUSION

Salary is a major influence on migration decisions. However, no one factor can be said to command the attention of researchers at the expense of all others. Migration decisions are complex decisions where teachers weigh

numerous issues before deciding whether or not to move.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Investigations of the following were out of the scope of this study but are suggested as the results of this research:

- Determine differences in salary levels of migrating and non-migrating teachers to determine the degree of salary supplement required to retain teachers,
- Determine geographical impact on the decision to migrate as the degree of rurality or urbanicity with the magnitude of salary,
- A further analysis of work place environment and culture on teacher mobility and a determination of implementations necessary for improvements which would aid in the retention of productive teachers in all school districts.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Detailed background information, information pertaining to survey methodology, copies of survey instruments, and detailed survey results are available in an unpublished manuscript prepared by Dr. Gary Peevely, Research Director of the Center of Excellence for Basic Skills. This paper was developed by Dr. Peevely working in conjunction with Dr. Harry Green, TACIR Executive Director, and Cliff Lippard, TACIR Director of Fiscal Affairs and principal author of this brief. For copies, call the TACIR at (615) 741-3012.

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