Finding and Keeping Educators for Arizona’s Classrooms

Findings from the research

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- I’d like to start by thanking the funders for this project –
  - The Arizona Community Foundation
  - Helios Education Foundation
  - And the Pike and Susan Sullivan Foundation
- Their support enabled us to take a really in-depth look at the teaching profession in Arizona
- I’d also like to thank Samantha Briggs, who did an incredible job as Research Assistant.
- Finally, a word of gratitude to the thousands of education professionals from around the state who contributed to the success of this project.
- Their words brought the data to life.
- This was a comprehensive look at the forces affecting the hiring and retention of teachers statewide.
- We analyzed data from federal sources and from the Arizona Department of Education
- We conducted an online survey of teachers and administrators that had over 2,000 responses.
- We also sought out the voices of the education community with dozens of interviews and focus groups with teachers, administrators, and board members from every corner of the state.
- These personal insights served to validate and extend the hard data we received from other sources.
- You’ll see some of their comments on the following slides, backing up the data in the charts.
In 2014, the number of teachers leaving after spending three years or less in the classroom was nearly double the number of teachers leaving later in their careers.

Source: Arizona Department of Education

- We were able to get several years’ worth of data from the Arizona Department of Education that allowed us to track how teachers move in and out of the profession.
- The dataset covered essentially all district school teachers and the great majority of charter school teachers.
- Here’s what a typical year looks like:
  - The yellow circles are teachers remaining in the system.
  - Green shows those coming into the system.
  - Red symbolizes those leaving the system.
  - The data shows about 62,000 teachers in 2014, with 52,000 returning to the classroom from the previous year.
  - The green circle at the top represents about 1,000 teachers who returned to the classroom after being out of the dataset for a year; these teachers are returning from leave, maternity leave, medical leave, etc.
  - The red circle next to it is another 1,000 that will go on leave at the end of the 2014 school year, returning in 2016.
  - The large green circle represents the eight or nine thousand new teachers hired in 2014.
  - Now the action as far as turnover goes, happens in the red circles at the bottom of the chart.
  - We had information on the age and experience level of the teachers in the database, so we were to surmise that about 1,300 of those that left after the 2014 school year were retiring.
  - About 1,100 of those that left had been in the classroom at least four years, but were not likely to be retiring.
  - Some of these people may have moved into administration, some moved out of state, and some changed careers.
  - The largest chunk of teachers leaving the classroom after 2014 had been in the classroom 3 years or less.
  - Nearly five thousand teachers left with just a few years in the classroom.
  - That’s nearly double the number of mid-career and retiring teachers combined.
  - Twenty-two percent of the new teachers who were hired in Arizona between 2013 and 2015 left after their first year on the job.
  - Of the new teachers hired in 2013, 42 percent were not in the ADE database by 2016.
  - That breaks down to about 40 percent attrition for the district school teachers and 52 percent of the charter teachers in three years.
  - So what does this level of turnover look like in the classroom?
"There’s going to be a gap in instruction so those kids are losing out on receiving comparable instructions as their peers in a similar course. Administratively, it’s a big hassle because parents become up in arms, parents become concerned, ‘what happened to Mr. So and so, who’s teaching my kid?’"

- School Principal

- The large turnover of new teachers means that a relatively low percentage of them go on to become experienced, veteran teachers.
- Over a third of our K-12 teachers have less than 5 years experience in the classroom.
- Anyone who has taught will tell you that it takes some time, maybe two or three years, to really get your feet under you as a teacher.
- Teaching is an art and a skill that takes some time to master, even if you’ve been very well prepared for the job in school.
- So we’ve got a potential issue where many of our children are being taught by people who have not fully matured in their profession.
- It’s important to note that Arizona isn’t alone in dealing with this problem.
- It’s difficult to compare state-to-state, but the indications are that other states are experiencing turnover at similar rates.
- The ADE data also revealed another interesting facet of our teaching population.
Why Should We Care?

Race / Ethnicity of Students

- White: 44%
- Latino: 41%
- African American: 14%
- Asian
- Native American
- Other

Race / Ethnicity of Teachers

- White: 78%
- Latino: 14%
- African American: 14%
- Asian
- Native American
- Other

Source: Arizona Department of Education

- This is the racial and ethnic breakdown of our K-12 students. The yellow slice shows our 44 percent Latino, with 41 percent White, and smaller percentages of others.
- Now let’s see what the teachers for those kids look like: <CHANGE>
- It’s a very different picture.
- There are a couple of concerns here.
- First of all, there’s some research suggesting that, especially in low-income schools, students benefit from having at least some access to teachers with similar ethnic backgrounds to them. Having a role model seems to be effective.
- There are also indications that parents are more likely to get involved not only the education of their own children, but also advocate for the wider school community if they can identify more closely with the faculty of the school.
- Finally, it hints that unless we are more successful at getting Latino kids today interested in teaching as a career, our teacher shortage is likely to continue into the future.
- These are all areas where we’re anxious to do additional research.
An Uncommon Profession

“I don’t do it for the pay, but I’d sure like more.”
– Charter School Teacher

2016 K-12 Teacher Pay

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

- So what’s driving all the turnover in teaching?
- There are a number of reasons, but the most obvious one is teacher pay.
- For years people have said that we can get away with paying teachers less in Arizona because our cost of living is low here.
- It’s true that it costs a little less to live here than most places, but it turns out that when you control for local cost of living,
  - Our elementary teachers have the lowest median salary in the nation.
  - And our high school teachers are paid 49th out of 50 states.
- This chart shows data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on teacher pay in Arizona and some comparison cities.
- We don’t have reliable data on what teachers make according to their years of experience, but I think this chart gives us a reasonable approximation.
- The beige bars show pay for Arizona, Phoenix, and Tucson.
- Green is Denver, Blue is Salt Lake
- And maroon is the national average.
- The bars in the middle show the median pay. This means that in Tucson, for example, half the teachers make more than about $40,000 and half less than that.
- The bars on the left are for the 10th percentile pay. So 10 percent of teachers in Arizona make about $32,000 and 90 percent make more than that. This is pretty good gauge of starting teacher salary in the state.
- You can see that starting teachers in Arizona make less than the national average, but not a LOT less. We’re really not doing that bad. They actually earn more than beginning teachers in Salt Lake City.
- On the right side is the 90th percentile salary, which is what the veteran teachers who have been teaching for years should earn.
- There’s a huge difference here. Nationally and in other areas, teachers who remain in the profession are eventually able to earn a good living, but in Arizona even the best paid teachers don’t make a lot.
An Uncommon Profession

All my friends who also have a master’s degree in other fields are paid twice or even three times as I am. Although I love teaching, I have to be practical. As a bilingual, working as a translator for big companies is a much better choice than working as a foreign language teacher.

– Charter School Teacher

Median pay for elementary and high school teachers in the state has declined by ten or eleven percent since 2001. I’d like to point out that there probably are few, if any, teachers in the state that have seen their paychecks cut in the last 15 years.

Instead, there are a couple of more subtle things going on:

- First, many teachers have not seen increases in pay, and when the effects of inflation are considered, they see a net decrease in purchasing power from their paycheck.
- Also, remember what I said a couple of slides ago: over a third of our teachers have less than 5 years’ experience. So if the turnover of teaching jobs is increasing as most people say it is, then we are paying a larger percentage of our teachers entry-level wages.
- High levels of turnover will result in low overall wages.
- Note that median pay for all occupations has been essentially flat.
- If you’re wondering why the All Occupations pay is so much lower than teacher pay, remember that essentially all district school teachers have college degrees, as do the majority of charter teachers.
- That All Occupations number includes a large number of unskilled workers who don’t have degrees and can’t command high salaries.
- So how do teachers compare to professions that do require a bachelor’s degree? Let’s look.
“Teaching in general is a challenging, yet exceptionally rewarding job if you love kids. It takes a remarkable skill set to do well. The problem is that people who have that skill set also have the skill set to be tremendously successful in any industry, and most industries that require a college degree reward their employees much better than we do.”

–School Superintendent

- There aren’t a lot of professions that require a bachelor’s degree for even an entry-level position.
- A kid straight out of high school can get started working with computers, and there are many positions in health care that only require an Associates’ degree.
- Engineers and upper-level medical professionals require a 4 year degree, though.
- Here we’ve compared median salaries in Arizona and the US for several professions.
- School teachers make less than other occupations that require a four-year degree. That’s not really a surprise.
- Nobody goes into teaching thinking that it’s the path to great wealth.
- But what we see in Arizona is that teachers make a lot less than other professions.
- I think it’s possible that the erosion of teacher pay, in relation to these other professions, has been great enough that young people are now discouraged from entering teaching.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
“[Teaching] takes a remarkable skill set to do well. The problem is that people who have that skill set also have the skill set to be tremendously successful in any industry, and most industries that require a college degree reward their employees much better than we do.”

– School Superintendent

Source: ABOR, US Census

- We can see that reluctance to take up teaching in this chart.
- We've graphed the number of bachelor's in education from the three state universities per 100,000 children under 18 in Arizona.
- You'd expect this to be a relatively flat line, showing a consistent output from our universities to match the demand in terms of the number of school kids.
- However, we've seen a pretty serious drop in output over the last 10 years.
- Now I realize that this isn't a perfect measure of our teacher supply.
- We don't have data from Grand Canyon University, for example, and we're ignoring those who enter the teaching profession with a master's degree.
- But bachelor's in education degrees from the three state universities is a major part of our education workforce pipeline, so this is a reasonable indicator of the potential for a teacher shortage.
- Also remember, in addition to decreasing numbers of young people entering the profession, there are a large number of teachers from the baby-boom generation that are at or near retirement age.
- So the teaching profession is really getting squeezed from both the top and bottom of the experience scale.
“Recruitment problems have increased dramatically over the last five years, especially in the last two or three years. Ten or 15 years ago there was no problem hiring teachers. In fact, positions rarely came available.”

– School Board Member

Source: Morrison Institute Survey (n=258)

- So it shouldn't be much of a surprise that 81 percent of the school administrators we surveyed said that hiring new teachers is somewhat or extremely difficult.
- Administrators in rural schools reported more difficulty in hiring.
- Hiring teachers is tough.
"I would say we have come into an era where it is more difficult to find teachers, especially in special education, math, and science."
- School Superintendent

What types of teaching positions do you have the most difficulty filling?

- Math: 40%
- Science: 20%
- Special Ed: 50%
- English: 10%
- Social Studies: 5%
- CTE: 5%

Source: Morrison Institute Survey (n=369)

- It's important to realize that this shortage is not uniformly distributed.
- English and Social Studies positions seem to be relatively easy to fill, but Math, Science, and Special Education teachers are scarce.
- I suspect that the CTE number is low because most schools don’t have much experience in hiring Career and Technical Education teachers.
- Probably if we interviewed people at JTEDs they’d have a different opinion.
“Pay is only one element of the reason teachers leave. I think lack of respect from students, heavy workloads, lack of support from admin, etc., have equal impact. It gets to that point where a teacher thinks, ‘I’m doing all this work, get no respect or support, and I’m only paid this much? That’s the point when they leave.’”

-High School Teacher

Source: Morrison Institute Survey (n=1,487)

- In addition to the shortage of new teachers, we also looked at teachers leaving the profession.
  - We’ve already seen that 40 percent of the district school teachers that first appeared in the department of education dataset in 2013 were gone by 2016.

- We wanted to know why this is happening and through a lot of surveying, interviewing, and focus group sessions, we identified four themes that consistently appeared.
  - Three of them are on this chart and mentioned in the accompanying quote.

- We’ve talked a little about pay and it’s obvious that inadequate pay is a major reason people leave any job.
  - Not surprisingly, 93 percent of the respondents rated pay as a Very Important or Important reason why teachers leave the profession.

- It was a little surprising to see that heavy workload was rated almost as important at 92 percent.
  - This perception was echoed in the survey comments and focus groups as well.

- There’s a sense that the workload is steadily increasing from year to year.

- The third theme that emerged was that teachers are not feeling valued and supported.
  - You can see this in the strong responses under Problems with Administration and Lack of Support from the community and parents.

- But there was final theme that accompanied these three – the passion that teachers feel for the profession.
Four Themes From the Classroom

“It’s not a job. You can’t see it as a job. Those are my kids. I’m invested in everything about them.”

- High School Teacher

Source: Morrison Institute Survey (n=1,487)

- So, despite all the difficulties associated with low pay, increasing workload, and lack of support, 69 percent of the those we surveyed are either somewhat or very satisfied with their teaching careers.
- That’s pretty incredible, considering all the bad news that we’ve been over.
- They love their work, but still, many of them are looking to get out of the profession.
- These people are really committed to their profession and they love what they do.
- I’m going to leave you with one final piece of good news that hasn’t gotten a lot of attention and I think it should:
Four Themes From the Classroom

National Assessment of Educational Progress

“\[quote\]
I love to see students grow and succeed. It’s a calling.\[quote\]

- Special Ed Teacher

Arizona is the only state to have statistically significant increases in Grade 4 and Grade 8 scores for Math, Reading, and Science for 2009-2015

- Arizona is the only state to have statistically significant increases in NAEP scores across all categories.
- That’s Grade 4 and Grade 8 scores for Math, Reading, and Science from 2009 to 2015.
- This is a pretty remarkable achievement for a state that has struggled with funding for years.
- Let’s be clear though, we’re still not above average in any of these areas with the exception of 8th grade math which is just a little above the average.
- But the trends are all good. The state is gradually improving, and improving at a rate greater than the nation as a whole.
- We’ve still got a long way to go, but it appears we’re headed in the right direction, if we can just keep our classrooms staffed with qualified teachers.
For a PDF copy of the report:

MorrisonInstitute.asu.edu

- The project covers much more information than I’ve described in this brief presentation.
- I encourage you to visit the Morrison Institute website and download the full report.
- Also keep an eye out for follow-up blog posts and further research in this area.