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New Teacher Attrition: The Case of Louisiana.

Carl Daniel Frantz
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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New teacher attrition: The case of Louisiana

Frantz, Carl Daniel, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1994
NEW TEACHER ATTRITION:
THE CASE OF LOUISIANA

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The Department of Administrative and Foundational Services

by
Carl D. Frantz
B.S.E., Emporia State University, 1967
M.A. Ohio State University, 1969
May 1994
This dissertation is dedicated to my much appreciated wife Janet.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been a labor of love for me. Much to my surprise, I did not weary of the project before its completion. It was like a mystery novel with questions being raised at every turn and answers surfacing almost as fast as the questions were produced. The study went almost without a hitch just as it was planned. For this, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Lawrence Pierce, my major advisor, and to Dr. Abbas Tashakkori who helped me think through the strategy of the inquiry, and made a number of methodological suggestions that, in retrospect, were crucial. Dr. Charles Teddlie provided important methodological guidance regarding the qualitative part of the study.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores district public policies and approaches in Louisiana that are likely to be effective in retaining new public classroom teachers. It does this by looking both at reasons for, and solutions to, new teacher attrition. It employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. These include quantitative analysis of the teacher attrition experience in Louisiana parish school districts as well as relationships of district, teacher and student variables to new teacher attrition rates. The qualitative analysis uses information from teachers and administrators in one rural and one non rural set of school districts with widely differing new teacher attrition experiences. This information includes new teacher ratings of teacher attrition reasons and solutions on questionnaires, teacher comments on the questionnaires and in focus group discussions, and interviews with district officials.

District two-year new teacher attrition ranges from 22% to 70%. The study finds that urbanization is a major factor in understanding new teacher attrition. Surprisingly, rural districts are more likely to lose teachers than urban districts. The problem of student discipline is clearly another major factor in new teacher attrition, especially in urban and suburban districts. Other major factors relate to inadequate school and district leadership, the low-rated quality of life in some districts, and disillusionment with teaching. Low salary and the availability of other job opportunities are two additional factors that affect new teachers' decisions to leave, but in an indirect way. The study concludes that district and school leaders can take steps to keep more of the new teachers they hire. Among the categories of steps they should consider are to address student discipline problems, increase chances for teacher success in other ways, raise salaries, and treat teachers professionally.
The study presents a model whose purpose is to assist in understanding the difference among districts in their new teacher attrition experience. It examines the application of the model to the four districts selected for the study.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Teacher supply and demand has been a topic of considerable interest and attention by researchers and practitioners alike in recent years. The flurry of scholarly works in the mid to late 1980s has been supplemented by a continuing flow of research. Many researchers seek to understand better the factors that affect why teachers leave the classroom and some focus on what public officials can do to mitigate the problem.

This study addresses the latter question—particularly what can be done by school districts to increase the chances that new teachers will stay in the classroom. Knowing the causes of teacher attrition may be important in its own right, but this knowledge is much more interesting as part of the quest to find ways of reducing teacher shortages where it is a problem. The literature is replete with research about causes, frequently concentrating on a few potential causes per study. Unfortunately, relatively little research has focussed on the actual or potential effects on teacher attrition of approaches that school districts have taken beyond raising salaries.

The interest in the topic of teacher attrition has been driven by a commonly accepted premise that teacher shortages are and will continue to be a serious problem nationally (Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1989), or at least for some geographical and subject matter areas. Over half the states have some mechanism for estimating the extent and nature of teacher shortages within their boundaries, with teacher attrition usually being a, if not the, major factor in the calculations.

Thus, teacher supply and demand (TSD) estimation and teacher attrition continues to be significant topics not only to the research community but to policy makers and educational administrators. The tide of interest may ebb and flow according to the latest
predictions of teacher shortages or surpluses, but there is an underlying understanding that improving the ability to predict teacher attrition and to mitigate its occurrence are reasonably important research activities. As further evidence of this, major regional efforts have been launched to develop an ongoing capacity to make predictions concerning the number and types of teachers who are likely to leave teaching, and the effects on TSD of enacting public policies. These efforts in the Northeast and South use the Miser estimation model. (see Coelen and Wilson, 1987; 1992)

In the process of determining reasons for, and solutions to, new teacher attrition, this study examines some important sub-issues already addressed by researchers. Included in these is whether new teachers are more likely to leave in urban, suburban, or rural districts, what role salary plays in decisions to leave, and whether teachers from more wealthy and more well-educated districts tend to leave at a higher or lower rate than teachers in other districts. Also of interest is the role that the type of students and teachers in a district might play in the attrition rate of teachers in that district. Moreover, to what extent do district or school leaders seem to make a difference in whether teachers decide to leave?

**NEED FOR THE STUDY**

The research proposed here should increase understanding of which public policy approaches, especially at the district level, might contribute to increasing or reducing the attrition rate among new teachers. This increased understanding is important for education in general, but is even more important for states and localities that have significantly more difficult problems in attracting and keeping qualified teachers. For reasons elaborated below, this study is important in four respects because of its focus. The focus is on 1) a state with major teacher attrition problems, 2) school districts, 3) new teachers, and 4) solutions to teacher attrition not just causes of such attrition.
Louisiana as a Focus

The study uses data from Louisiana. This choice is particularly well justified if teacher shortage-related problems are used as a selection criterion. Louisiana has an uncommonly high teacher attrition rate, proportion of newly hired teachers, and percentage of teachers who are not fully certified to teach their assigned courses. Frantz, Kochan-Teddlie, Tashakkori, and Pierce (1991) found the Louisiana teacher attrition rate to be over 13% per year, which is more than twice the 6% annual figure used nationally over time (Hammer and Rohr, 1992; Gerald, Horn, & Hussar, 1990) and also found in Illinois, New York, Michigan, and Utah (Grissmer and Kirby, 1987).

Moreover, Louisiana ranks near the bottom in percentage of newly hired teachers and percentage of all full time equivalent teachers who are certified to teach the courses they are teaching. Analysis by Hammer and Gerald (1991) using the Schools and Staffing Survey done in 1987-88 shows that Louisiana is next to last among the fifty states in both categories. The problem in the state is becoming steadily worse. According to Louisiana State Department of Education figures, the number of temporary certificates and permits issued to teach in the public schools has more than tripled in ten years to a number in 1991 that is over 10% of the work force.

The School District as a Focus

Another value of the study is that it analyzes teacher attrition at the district level. As Theobald (1990) indicates, there is a paucity of research at this level—research that has value to district policy makers who are interested in promoting a stable teaching force and are key actors in making decisions that matter to teacher retention. Theobald contends that at least some factors that seem to affect teacher attrition for new teachers can be influenced by actions taken at the district or school level. Thus, for Louisiana and other areas facing teaching shortages, further research is needed to understand more thoroughly
what actions can be taken at that level to convince those to stay who would otherwise leave teaching or move to another district.

**The New Teacher as a Focus**

It seems worthwhile to focus on attrition of new teachers especially because new teachers have such high attrition rates. As researchers in one study conclude, "Teaching is a high turnover, early exit occupation." (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986, p. 98) This conclusion seems to be amply supported in the literature. Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1988) discuss research findings that show that resignations are most common during teachers' early years on the job. These findings are supported in other studies. Grissmer and Kirby (1987) found attrition rates among young, inexperienced teachers to be in the 20-25% range—considerably higher than the 1-5% range for mid-career teachers. Wise, Darling-Hammond, and Berry (1987) report that approximately 40% of new teachers leave the profession within the first two years in some school districts. Similarly, Jacobson (1988) discovered that teachers were most vulnerable to leaving within the first five to seven years of teaching. Moreover, once younger teachers leave they are less likely to return than older teachers. (Beaudin, 1993) Heyns (1988) found that 30-40% of those who became teachers were not teaching after five years.

**Public Policy as a Focus**

Much of the literature on teacher attrition is directed to understanding causes of the phenomena. Even those researchers who make suggestions for public policy responses largely base their suggestions on causal research. While this approach has its merits, this study goes a step beyond. It builds on this existing literature to determine if any district public policy approaches might increase or decrease new teacher attrition. It examines what effects district policy approaches have had, or are believed by school officials or teachers to have, in reducing (or increasing) new teacher attrition. It particularly focuses
on those effects beyond what might be expected given the demographic and other characteristics of the residents, students and teachers.

Grissmer and Kirby (1987) believe that further inquiry is needed into fruitful public policy responses to the high attrition rate of new teachers. Although several factors will tend to push attrition higher, policy changes can have an important influence. Developing policies aimed at retaining younger teachers who perform well will be important. The number of young teachers will be increasing and they usually make career decisions during the first five years of teaching. Policies that carry more of these teachers into mid career could have high payoff. (p.xv)

If a significant percentage of new teachers could be influenced to stay, then the projected teacher shortage in Louisiana (Frantz, Kochan-Teddlie, Tashakkori, and Pierce, 1992) could be mitigated. Presumably, what we would learn from research on Louisiana school districts and their teachers might be useful in other districts regarding teacher shortage concerns, particularly in those districts most at risk of new teacher attrition. Although some turnover is inevitable, and sometimes desirable (Dworkin, 1987), a high rate of turnover is disruptive and costly (Theobald, 1990). Hopefully, the research in this study will lead to viable options for district policy makers. According to Hafner and Owings, we do not know enough about teacher career patterns including, "...what incentives may induce them to stay in the field...." (1991, p. 3) Similarly, Berry (1985) points out that,

the variables affecting the teacher labor market and, thus, teaching are far more complex and subtle than most researchers, analysts, and decision makers may believe. Ensuring an adequate supply of competent teachers may involve more factors than providing higher salaries and career ladders. (p. 41)

What is it that policy makers at the district level should do that would have the most value in convincing teachers to stay in teaching? If the answer is not just to raise teacher salaries, what is it? This study is intended to assist in learning more about the
complexities and subtleties of the teacher attrition problem and to assist in the process of considering possible public policy solutions.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

For these reasons, this study will address the question of, "what public policies and approaches at the district level are likely to be most effective in helping to retain new public classroom teachers?" By examining this population of teachers, the study will focus on those who are much more at risk of leaving than experienced teachers. They also are among those who have the highest potential service years loss.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature regarding teacher supply and demand, and teacher attrition is extensive. As mentioned above, however, recommendations in the literature concerning steps that school districts can take to mitigate teacher attrition are frequently presumed from research regarding the causes of teacher attrition. The primary focus of research directly on the efficacy of district solutions has been usually on the effects of teacher salary increases or higher levels of salary.

In the first section, this study addresses primarily those studies that are most useful in understanding the reasons, causes or factors related to teachers leaving the classroom. The last section of the Chapter discusses research findings related to potential solutions to teacher attrition, particularly concerning new teachers. The literature described in this section was identified through an ERIC data base search and through bibliographies of recent articles on teacher supply and demand and causes and solutions to teacher attrition in particular.

TEACHER ATTRITION FACTORS

In the literature relating to causes or factors associated with teacher attrition, Dworkin's (1987) discussion of the role of job satisfaction and viable options seems particularly useful. Dworkin presents a model that is helpful in conceptualizing factors relating to causes and conditions associated with individual teacher's decisions to leave the classroom.

Dworkin points out that teachers do not generally quit when they do not have alternatives -- "they are more willing to tolerate a dissatisfying job than abandon a paycheck." (p. 59) Moreover, those teachers who stay when dissatisfied will not be
enthusiastic workers. Of course, a dissatisfied teacher from a financially secure family that does not depend on that teacher's salary may very well have the luxury of leaving when dissatisfied with the job.

Implicit in Dworkin's analysis is the proposition that those teachers who have both attractive opportunities outside teaching and are dissatisfied with teaching are the most likely to leave. Those teachers with such opportunities who are satisfied with teaching are more likely to leave than are those teachers who are dissatisfied but who do not have viable options for whatever reasons. These reasons might include high investment in their profession, tenure, and personal traits. Of course those who are satisfied in their current job and who do not have viable options would have little incentive to leave.

However useful Dworkin's analysis might be, it seems reasonably clear from the literature reviewed below that the factors that lead to new teacher attrition are varied. As Grissmer and Kirby (1987) note, "Higher rates of attrition during the first 10 years of teaching are not the result of a single factor but tend to result from the confluence of several different factors." (p. xii) Consistent with this phenomenon, it is interesting to note the interaction of factors as each is described in this chapter. It is hard to discuss the effects of one factor without mentioning the interactive effects of others.

The literature contains a multitude of factors that are conjectured or found to have a relationship to teacher decisions to stay or leave. Obviously, a district with a high proportion of teachers who stay in its classroom will have a low percentage who leave, and vice-versa. Thus, the retention rate and the attrition rate are inversely related. That is not to say that teachers who stay do so for the inverse of reasons that teachers leave their jobs. This study considers both those who leave teaching and those who move to a teaching position outside the district's public classrooms as part of district teacher attrition rate calculations.
Researchers have found a whole variety of factors that play some role in the decision of teachers to leave or stay in their jobs. Some of these factors relate to the demographic and other characteristics of the district or the teachers and students with whom the teacher works. A second category of factors relates to the difficulty of the teaching experience. Another category includes those personal and family needs that teachers may have beyond feeling successful on the job. A fourth category encompasses more policy related factors including administrative support and flexibility given to the teacher. These factors within and among these categories have interactive effects on each other.

A final category of factors relating to factors associated with teacher attrition consists of the availability of reasonable options for the teacher who has decided to leave a school district. Each of these categories of factors is discussed below.

**Demographic and Related Factors**

Previous studies have found characteristics related to the school district, its teachers, and its students that are related to teacher attrition. To arrive at district policy related factors that might make a difference in reducing attrition of new teachers, these characteristics and relationships need to be better understood. Thus, this section discusses the literature that has addressed the question, "Are there characteristics of a school district, or the district's teacher or student population, that might affect the likelihood that a teacher (especially a new teacher) will remain in the classroom?"

**District Demographic Factors**

The literature is lean on the topic of characteristics of the district itself that are related to teacher attrition or retention. An unpublished study by Murmane and Olsen cited in Hafner and Owings (1991) found that only two district related variables were significantly related to staying in teaching. These are the residents' median education level, which was positively related, and the percentage of black residents in a school
district, which was negatively related. In other words, the higher the residents' median education level and the lower the percentage of black residents, the greater is the rate at which teachers in the district stay in teaching.

Another possible district-related factor affecting teacher satisfaction and attrition is the urbanicity of the district. Haberman (1987) believes that the real teacher supply and demand issue relates to the desirability of suburban and rural districts over urban districts. Urban schools, in this line of reasoning, have more difficult student situations with much more threatening environments and, consequently, have a more difficult time attracting and retaining qualified teachers. Rural areas have fewer discipline problems, more parental involvement, and "overwhelming job satisfaction" for teachers (Berry, 1985).

While Heyns' (1988) research supports the lower rural attrition rates that Berry's research would predict, it seems to contradict the expectation about suburban versus urban schools. Heyns found that suburban schools lose more teachers every year than do urban schools and that rural schools lose the least of all. Also different from what we might expect, Heyns reports that large schools tend to have lower rates of attrition than do small or medium-sized schools.

Theobald (1990) did a study of school districts to learn what variables might explain teacher retention differences among those districts. He found among other things that assessed valuation per pupil was negatively related to teacher retention. Property poor districts surprisingly had the higher retention rates. Theobald surmises that this phenomenon has various explanations including the "relative deprivation" principle. Those in poor districts might be relatively better off as teachers compared with their reference groups than those in more wealthy districts. Another explanation Theobald advanced was the broader recruiting area that more wealthy districts might draw from, thus hiring teachers who have less loyalty, including family ties, to the area in which they teach. Another factor could be the relationship between property wealth and urbanicity.
Many urban districts have higher property wealth per student than other districts and urbanicity is a factor in teacher attrition rates as has already been discussed.

**Teacher Related Factors**

Research has found factors concerning teachers themselves that are related to the likelihood of their leaving or staying in the classroom. These factors related to leaving include high academic test performance (Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1989; Heyns, 1988; Schlecty and Vance, 1983), race (Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1989; Dworkin, 1987), age (Dworkin, 1987; Grissmer and Kirby, 1987), and gender (Rickman and Parker, 1990; Heyns, 1988; Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1988; Charters, 1970a). Districts that tend to employ higher proportions of white, younger, or female teachers might have higher rates of attrition than other districts.

Another type of teacher related factor concerns whether the teacher was "cut out" to be teaching. This might not be known by the teacher or the district until after he or she enters the classroom. At least theoretically, those districts that are astute enough to identify and acquire individuals with the highest probabilities of performing long and well as classroom teachers will be ahead of the game. Chapman and Green (1986) have identified commitment to teaching as an important variable affecting likelihood of retention. In addition, Haberman (1987) would add the suitability for the particular challenges of that environment of a teacher selected to teach in an urban school. Haberman argues that it is important to choose teachers 1) psychologically equipped to handle the stresses of urban education situations, and 2) trained to do so.

Many teachers leave because of initial difficulties in teaching. (Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1988; Heyns, 1988; Chapman, 1984) Some of these teachers may not be particularly well suited to classroom teaching demands, particularly of the students they are asked to teach. Others may perceive that they are not receiving the administrative support they need, or may be adversely affected by other factors associated with the
community, including how they perceive inadequate financial or other community support.

Student Related Factors

Smith, et al. (1983) found that the type of student the teacher faces in the classroom affects retention. Among the problems listed for teachers are those dealing with student attitudes and with those students who are mainstreamed. Moreover, Dworkin (1987) reports that teachers who work in an environment with a majority of students and peers of a different race are more likely to leave teaching than are teachers who work with students and peers of their own race.

Different from what we might expect is the relationship between performance of students and teacher attrition. Heyns (1988) reports that former teachers are more likely than current teachers to report that students they taught were of high or average ability and from upper or upper-middle class families. This counter result might be explained by other factors operating. For instance, those who teach upper to upper-middle class students might have more employment options. They might also be those with more latitude to leave teaching temporarily or permanently. For instance, their salary might have relatively less importance to their families than those of teachers who generally taught other types of children.

Personal and Family Related Needs

A new teacher well suited to teach, and with high job satisfaction might still leave teaching if the position did not meet his or her personal or family needs. The teaching profession has various strengths and weaknesses when it comes to fitting in to an individual's or family's situation. Salary and fringe benefits are important especially for some teachers, but so are other factors such as the teaching schedule, which might be favored by those concerned about raising small children. Some of these factors might be related to types of districts. As an example, Berry (1985) reports that qualitative
research found that teachers who came from rural areas tended to regard teaching as providing a good income, and a chance to step up the social and economic ladder in their communities. Theobald's (1990) study concerning the increased retention rates of property poor districts might support this finding.

Family-related Flexibility

The schedule associated with teaching was found by some teachers to afford time for vacation and to be with families, while still providing a good second income. (Berry, 1985) This is further support for the idea that teachers should not be considered a monolithic whole for the purposes of public policy formation. Different teachers appear to have different priorities that should be considered in attempting to employ solutions to mitigate the teacher attrition problem.

In addition, teachers seem to have more flexibility to leave the profession for a period of time such as to have children without suffering the damage to their professional careers that they might encounter in other professions (Mumane, 1987), especially those in more highly structured office situations.

Salary

Of all of the types of public policy solutions to teacher shortages that are discussed in the literature, those related to compensation are by far the most commonly addressed and recommended. Surprisingly, however, some debate exists concerning the importance and nature of the effects of teacher salaries and salary increases.

In Grissmer and Kirby's (1987) model, salary and certain fringe benefits are important for new teachers. Many other studies confirm that salary is an important factor relating to teacher attrition. Mumane and Olsen (1989a, 1990) discovered that in North Carolina and Michigan, relative salaries played a significant role in the length of time teachers stayed. Zabalza (1978) found that differentials in salary and expected future earnings were important factors in teacher retention (and attraction). (1985). Hafner and
Owings (1991) concluded that maintaining adequate salary levels is a priority for the retention of teachers.

Moreover, Jacobson (1988) discovered that salary levels make a difference, particularly in the early years of a teacher's career. Jacobson found that those districts in New York that had improved teacher salaries were among the highest in teacher retention. In suburban regions, those who improved the middle of the salary schedule had the highest retention rates. In rural areas, however, increases made little difference because those districts that maintained their already higher salaries had the best retention records.

Mumane, Singer, and Willett (1989) confirm the difference salary makes in the early years of a career. They found that secondary school teachers with low salaries were twice as likely to leave teaching after their first year of teaching, as were their high paid counterparts. The effects of salary on elementary teachers were present but not as pronounced.

On the other hand, Dworkin (1987) argues that money does not usually drive teachers away or help retain them since, "public school teachers tend to be drawn into teaching either by a sense of calling or a desire to help children." (p. 58) He asserts that teachers are different from those in other occupations where a small difference in salary could persuade them to switch jobs.

Thus, with some caveats, that salaries make a difference in teacher attrition is generally accepted. Whether the impact of salary on retention and attrition of teachers is uniform in all family situations, subject matters, and urbanicity of districts is discussed below.

One reason for the difference between men and women in teacher attrition may be that the impact of the level of salary may be different for one group than the other. Rumberger (1987) recommends that the gender differences in the financial attractiveness
of teaching be considered in studies of salary effects on attracting and retaining teachers. This difference was also noted by Grissmer and Kirby (1987) who attribute at least part of this difference to males having a greater desire for higher salaries in their more likely role as primary wage earners. They see males' higher mobility rate among districts as related to this factor.

With the changes in our society that cause higher likelihood of families being headed by single mothers, it may be that a key factor operating here is not as much gender as it is the impact that the salary has on family income. Single mothers or women who are the primary wage earners may be just as likely, if not more likely, to value higher salary levels than do men. As Rickman and Parker (1990) suggest, those teachers who are the most likely to leave for salary reasons are those for whom the net change will have the greatest relative impact on family income.

The differences among the races in teacher attrition found by Dworkin (1987) may be partially explained by the difference between the dependence on salary for single mothers. The effects may go in both directions. It seems likely that black teachers who are mothers are more likely to be single parents, and are less likely to be able to take a leave of absence to raise small children. Although salary may be more important to those black women who are single parents, those women might not have the same latitude to undertake an occupation outside teaching as their white or brown counterparts.

Differences between the sexes in salary effects were found also in certain areas between mathematics and science teachers. Rumberger (1987) noted that in those geographical areas with a high concentration of engineering jobs, the differences between salaries offered teachers and those earned by engineers made a difference in the retention of female mathematics and science teachers. Interestingly, this difference in retention was not found for their male counterparts.
Partly for the reason mentioned above, in examining the effects of salary on teacher attrition, it might make sense ideally to consider teachers in the mathematics and science areas separately. Rumberger (1987) found generally that "... the labor market for mathematics and science teachers operates differently from the labor market for teachers generally." (p. 397) The salary differential in mathematics and science between teaching salaries and engineering salaries was a significant factor in the shortage of teachers in those areas. He also found that districts that were located in areas that employed a higher percentage of engineers than other areas were also the ones that reported the greater shortages of mathematics and science teachers. This was true even controlling for the overall turnover rate for teachers.

Part of the reason that salary makes more of a difference in the mathematics and science areas for new teachers is the relative difference in salary with non teaching professions compared to other subject areas. (Murnane, 1987; Beaudin, 1993) Levin (1985) reported that graduates in the humanities only had an $1,100 to $1,300 advantage in the private sector over what they would be paid to teach, chemistry majors would make almost $9,000 a year more, and earth sciences majors would make about $11,000 more.

Another part of the difference may be the higher expectations regarding non pecuniary benefits of the job that those in mathematics and science who go into teaching might have. If they can draw higher salaries elsewhere, the argument goes, something besides salary must be drawing them to teaching (Murnane and Olsen, 1988).

Are the effects of raising salaries any different for urban, suburban, and rural districts? One might expect that certain teachers might prefer a rural setting. The cost of living might be less and the status of teachers higher in those areas. One might also expect that others would prefer to live in an urban setting and to teach the specialized courses that large, urban schools probably could offer, although safety and high stress might be concerns.
Some evidence exists to support portions of these expectations. Bruno (1986) found that the increase in pay (combat pay) that would be necessary to attract teachers to inner city schools was so great (1.43:1) that it was not surprising that such pay differentials have been found to be largely ineffectual. As part of his study, Bruno discovered large inequalities in teacher shortages among schools with similar compensation.

**Policy Related Factors**

The discussion thus far has dealt with many factors as possible causes of individual teachers making decisions to leave the districts' classrooms. Most of these factors are not easily addressed directly by changes in public policies at the district level although some might be indirectly addressed. Teachers' concerns about student discipline and perceptions of inadequate administrative support are examples of factors indirectly amenable to district or school solutions. This section addresses potential policy related factors themselves beyond teacher salary levels that might help account for new teachers leaving the classroom or moving to other districts. These factors are grouped into the categories of general support, school leadership, and teacher empowerment.

**School/District Support**

Many variables have been found to lead to job dissatisfaction and stress and subsequently to teacher attrition. Hafner and Owings (1991) found that job satisfaction was one of the human capital variables that best predicted teacher retention. Moreover, Darling-Hammond (1984) found that conditions that undermine a teacher's ability to be effective in his or her work contribute to dissatisfaction and teacher attrition. School districts and schools can affect many of these conditions such as inadequate preparation and teaching time, inadequate facilities, materials, interruptions, and assorted non-teaching assignments. Beaudin (1993) concluded that many among the teachers who left after only one or two years could have been good teachers if their working conditions had
been more supportive. Lack of administrative support such as this may cause stress that in turn could lead to attrition (Cedoline, 1982) especially when the principal is perceived by teachers to be not supportive (Dworkin, 1987).

**Leadership**

How important is the principal in the length of time that teachers stay in the classroom? Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) identify a number of ways that the school and district may need to support the new teacher. They found principal "buffering" was an especially important organizational quality that led to higher commitment in new teachers. Buffering protects teachers from the full effects of extraneous forces that require teachers to devote excessive time to non-teaching tasks. Smith, et al., (1983) include respect of administrators and Darling-Hammond (1984) cites lack of support by administrators and conflict with administrators as factors relating to teacher retention.

**Teacher Empowerment**

A variety of studies have concluded that a sense of ability to shape the conditions under which they teach affects teacher satisfaction that in turn might affect teacher attrition. Mohrman, Cooke and Mohrman (1978) report that teacher satisfaction was strongly related to their involvement in decisions that directly affect teachers like instructional activities. Darling-Hammond (1984) found a similar relationship.

On the other hand, any such impact may not be felt as much by new teachers. For instance, Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) noted that "task autonomy and discretion are . . . apt to have greater import for the commitment of experienced than of inexperienced teachers." (p. 247)

**Knowledge of Viable Option Availability**

It may not be enough to cause attrition that a teacher did not feel successful at teaching, did not receive the support he or she was warranted, or did not feel that his or her teaching position or career met personal or family needs. A recently graduated teacher
who wants to leave teaching still might need at least one viable option to be likely to leave. These options seem to include teaching in another district, accepting a position outside of education, or dropping out of the labor market temporarily or otherwise. It would do a teacher little good, of course, to have such options if he or she did not know they were available. The final factor associated with teacher attrition is knowledge of availability of viable options. Various categories of such options are discussed below.

These are 1) leaving career employment, 2) changing careers, and 3) changing districts.

**Leaving Career Employment**

A recent National Center for Education Statistics' study found that 34.7% of those who left temporarily or permanently reported that they did so for personal family, health care, pregnancy and/or child care reasons. Another 8.9% left because of dissatisfaction with the job. (Hammer and Rohr, 1992) Of those who left for these reasons, it is not known how many moved into another position within any given period of time. A reasonable presumption is that most likely did not immediately move to a different job. Of course not everyone has the financial well-being to leave voluntarily without being confident they would secure another job.

Presumably, a teacher would know if the family income was sufficient for him or her to no longer be gainfully employed temporarily or permanently. Presumably also, teachers who come from financially secure families who are dissatisfied with teaching, or teaching in particular situations they could not avoid would have a greater likelihood of leaving teaching than other teachers. These presumptions would seem to be supported by research done by Heyns (1988). In addition, Heyns found that those teachers who had waited a year or more before starting teaching after graduation were more likely to have come from more financially secure families -- those with higher than average family incomes. What is true of these teachers, would seem to be especially true of dissatisfied
teachers or teachers with a high level of unmet personal and family needs, and those who come from families in which his or her salary is a small portion of the family income.

It would appear that Heyns' findings support Dworkin's model concerning factors associated with teacher attrition. More specifically, it supports the concept that those who know that they have a viable option of leaving the work force might be more likely to leave than those who do not. Districts who hire teachers who are from economically more secure families might therefore experience a higher than expected attrition rate, all other factors being equal. The quantitative data used in this study does not reveal what happened to those 28.5% of new teachers who left the districts' classroom teaching force after one year but did not move to another school district.

Changing Careers

Teachers do change careers, especially younger teachers who have not made the career investment associated with a particular location or position. Hammer and Rohr (1992) report that 14.8% of teachers who left public teaching jobs did so to pursue another occupation outside of education. Again, currently collected data in Louisiana do not reveal the extent to which teachers leave for another occupation.

Changing Districts

A school district can suffer teacher attrition, when a teacher leaves to teach in another district within or outside of the state. This phenomenon is not very pronounced nationally. NCES data show only 2.6% of teachers in public schools made such a move and only 5.8% of them did so to improve salary or benefits (Hammer and Rohr, 1992). The more important reasons for such changes identified in this NCES study involved a school staffing action (32.1%), family or personal move (31.6%) or a desire to improve their lot through a better teaching assignment or to move from a district in which they were dissatisfied (30.6%). Data in Louisiana show that 5.6% of new 1989 public classroom teachers moved to another district after one year. When added to those who
are recorded as no longer teaching in public schools, this amounts to over a quarter of all new teachers who were no longer teaching for the district in which they originally started teaching.

**POTENTIAL PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS**

Thus far, the study has examined the findings of a number of researchers who have investigated the causes or factors associated with teacher attrition. This background is useful to understand the context of potential public policy solutions, particularly at the district level. Many of these researchers and others have discussed the ramifications of their findings for public policy decisions designed to deal with the teacher attrition problem.

What is it that states and school districts can do to reduce teacher attrition, particularly among those who are recent graduates of teacher training institutions? Whatever they might do, many researchers seem to agree that the solutions are not simple or unidimensional. As Darling-Hammond (1984) concludes, the solutions involve more than marginal changes—fundamental reform is required in the teaching profession.

The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) proposes a comprehensive plan for the improvement of education and warns against the "time-honored response to teacher shortages" of lowering professional teacher standards. It recommends, instead that the standards be raised and that a number of other steps be taken as a package, including those that policy makers might be tempted to avoid because they are more costly and cause the greatest organizational trauma. Berry (1985) also sounds the call for carefully considered and interrelated policies that involve understanding the nature of the teaching environment. Teachers have different values and priorities and effective district solutions may need to address different subgroups of teachers with different needs to be the most successful. This supposition is consistent with the analyses by Grissmer and Kirby (1987) and others.
Thus, the following strategies found in the literature are not necessarily effective when taken by themselves, nor might they be effective for most recently graduated teachers. However, they could be part of a package of effective approaches taken by a school district. The efficacy of many of these possible strategies is pursued with focus groups and others when doing the district qualitative studies part of the study. Potential public policy solutions include those relating to selecting and placing teachers more effectively, raising salaries, making the classroom teaching positions more flexible, maintaining standards, empowering teachers, improving working conditions and assisting beginning teachers.

**Select and Place Teachers to Promote Retention**

Some categories of teachers like those involving age, race, and gender, have been shown to have different probabilities of staying in teaching. Younger teachers, females, and whites are more likely to leave than their colleagues. Districts may have used some of these factors, even unknowingly, to their advantage when they have selected teachers, although certain legal and moral prohibitions exist.

Aside from these choices, districts concerned about teacher attrition, might do well to place more weight in their selection process on teachers who have a high initial commitment to teaching than they do on high NTE or other academic measures. When they have the option, they might also place teachers in situations more suited to their personal experience. Dworkin (1980) notes that in urban districts, teachers who have backgrounds and expectations very different from those of their students are more likely to experience culture shock and leave. He found that of those teachers in his sample who left, 76.6% were assigned to schools they classified as undesirable. He noted also that teachers from families with high occupational status were more likely to have such concerns than those from working class backgrounds. Similarly, Heyns' (1988) research would seem to suggest that school districts that hire teachers whose families depend more
heavily on that salary will be more likely to retain teachers than those who hire teachers from financially secure families.

Districts that place new teachers in the least well behaved classes with the most parental problems, are risking jeopardizing these new teachers' level of commitment to teaching and their performance. Administrators would do well, instead, to protect teachers during their early years (Rosenholz and Simpson, 1990).

**Raise Salaries**

The most commonly cited solution to the teacher attrition problem is to pay a higher wage, particularly to pay a wage that is more competitive with other occupations that teachers leave the profession to join. (Murnane and Olsen, 1989a; Rickman and Parker, 1990; Carnegie, 1986; Purkey and Smith, 1985; Linda Darling-Hammond, 1984). The fact that teacher salaries are not competitive is consistently mentioned in the literature. For instance, the Carnegie Commission found that "Teachers' salaries rank below those of most occupations requiring a college degree, and, in a number of instances, are no better than the salaries that can be earned in occupations requiring only a high school diploma." (1986, p. 37) Hawley (1986) predicts that teacher salaries will not be raised the 40% that would be required to make teaching economically competitive with other professions.

Of course, another problem is that by raising teacher salaries, school districts might have even a more difficult time upgrading their teacher corps. Deaton and McNamara (1984) believe that by raising salaries, districts will cause fewer teachers to leave in the short run. If those teachers are less than adequately qualified, they note, fewer opportunities will exist to replace them with more potentially effective teachers.

**Focus of Salary Increases**

Recommendations regarding raising teacher salaries frequently focus on one or more groups of teachers, instead of teachers as a class. Given that sufficient resources
are not frequently available to raise teacher salaries to appropriate levels, and given specific teacher shortage problem areas, researchers have frequently called for selective salary increases. The targets of these selective increases have included teachers who are at the beginning of their career, who teach in specific, less desirable locations like the inner city, or who teach mathematics or science.

Jacobson (1988) believes that the early part of salary structures should be made more attractive, since this is the time in teachers' careers when they are more likely to leave. Jacobson believes that those districts that have taken this approach are the most likely to have higher retention rates. This view is supported by Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1989) who point out that the more academically able graduates who go into teaching tend to teach for a few years and then drop out. They found that these students are particularly influenced by salary in making their decisions to stay or leave teaching in their beginning years. They suggest that one way of raising salaries in those crucial years is to permit districts in a shortage situation to place new teachers at any step of the salary grid, as some districts already do.

A number of school districts, about 8% of those in the Schools and Staffing Survey (1987-88), use some type of pay incentives to induce teachers to stay or teach in less desirable locations. (Hammer and Gerald, 1991) Similarly, Murnane and Olsen (1988) note that some districts pay teachers more to compensate for difficult working conditions. However, Bruno (1986) cautions against expecting that increases in teacher pay would make much difference in attracting (or by extension, retaining) teachers. Bruno found that the increase in pay (combat pay) that would be necessary to attract teachers to inner city schools was so great that it was not surprising that such pay differentials have been found to be largely ineffectual.

Presently, there exist large inequalities in the distribution of teacher shortages across schools while salary and other pecuniary benefits are held constant. One can safely conclude there, that the importance of
addressing non pecuniary benefits of teaching at inner city school sites may have more of an impact on the shortage phenomenon than merely raising pecuniary benefits. (1986, p. 458)

A third type of focussed salary increases that researchers mention is for mathematics and science teachers (Guthrie and Zusman, 1982). Levin, (1985) argues that we should provide special increments to attract mathematics and science students. The type of money that it would take to attract or keep mathematics and science teachers, however, might be significant. Rumberger estimated that "to eliminate the reported shortage of mathematics and science teachers would require eliminating the existing salary differential of $10,000 (in 1979 dollars)." (1987, p. 393)

Conditions on Salary Structure Increases

Various experts recommend that salary increases be linked to other reforms. The Carnegie Commission, for instance, believes that just raising teacher salaries is an inefficient use of resources, if such increases are "not accompanied by a fundamental restructuring of teacher compensation policies." (1986, p. 99) Similarly, Dworkin (1987) calls for school districts to make other reforms beyond salary increases.

Berry (1985) also warns that increases in salary may not have the effects in addressing teacher shortages for which policy makers are looking, given the myriad of problems that teachers face including "undisciplined students, incompetent administrators, uncooperative parents, bureaucratic intrusions, burdensome paper work, and a myriad of extracurricular duties for financial gain . . . " (p. 45).

Thus, while moving to ensure competitive salaries appears to be important for districts generally, various researchers recommend making non pecuniary changes part of the package. In fact, Bruno (1986) believes that such benefits may be more important that pecuniary benefits in addressing the teacher shortage problem in inner-city schools.
Make Professional Service More Flexible

A general recommendation advanced by Berry (1985) is that school districts become proactive and remain flexible in providing incentives to attracting and retaining teachers. He lists a wide range of options for schools and others to consider to attract and retain quality teachers. Included in this list are becoming "more knowledgeable of and sensitive to labor market forces indigenous to their locales." (p. 43) He believes that by learning about such matters as the relative importance of teacher supply sources and reasons teachers leave, school systems can more effectively compete in their own labor market.

Aspects of the teaching profession that are drawbacks for some are advantages for others. Many teachers would prefer to work through the summer for more salary. Others appreciate the advantage of being home with their children after school and during the children's vacations. This is a particular advantage, especially for those who are single parents with child care concerns. It is also an advantage for those with children who do not have to depend on their income to make ends meet, but who would still like to be professionally employed.

Policy makers might build upon the advantages of teaching as a profession for those teachers. Districts might use flexible, innovative approaches to make it even easier for those to teach who would like a professional job, but who would also like to be home when their children arrive home from school, or who would like quality child care provided for their sons and daughters who otherwise would be "latchkey" children. It may be possible to find high quality teachers who are willing to work if the hours were less than full time or were arranged to fit in with their spouse's schedule.

Another advantage of teaching is the relative ease of taking a year or two off for family or other reasons and still being able to continue a career because of the
"uncoupled" nature of the profession. In more structured organizations such absence is generally much more difficult professionally.

One set of recommendations for retaining teachers, therefore, is to capitalize on these types of strengths, in addition to addressing the salary gap mentioned above. Thus, policy makers might, "focus on investing in the teaching career for females, and . . . advertise the flexibility of the career for women who wish to get married or have children." (Hafner and Owings, 1991, p. 31)

Heyns (1988) makes a somewhat related recommendation that would give teachers time off from the classroom for renewal and revitalization, such as by providing paid sabbaticals. Interestingly, in Heyns' study those teachers who used sabbaticals most often were from the "least stressful or discouraging educational environments." (p. 28) Thus, somehow, teachers in more stressful situations might particularly benefit from the opportunity for renewal.

**Maintain Standards**

Another recommendation for public policy makers is consistent with the call mentioned above by the Carnegie Commission to maintain or increase standards for the profession. Hafner and Owings (1991) would support such a position based on their study of the School and Staffing Survey results. They found a relationship between the number of education credits and continuing education requirements and the likelihood of leaving teaching. They hypothesize that more traditionally trained teachers may have more invested in teaching and are thus more likely to remain. Dworkin points out the converse argument. If teachers' training does not permit them to compete for jobs other than teaching, they may become trapped. Thus, while they may not leave, they may become increasingly disgruntled in their work.

A large percentage of teachers enter the profession blindly, unaware of the nature of the job and its expectations. Many quit early in their careers, but many more become entrapped because they can offer no other skills than
the teaching of children to prospective employers. One difficulty is that colleges of education, by mandating so many pedagogical courses, heighten the likelihood that their students will be 'fit in an unfit fitness'. (1987, p. 65)

Dworkin argues that school districts should not only make teachers sense of meaningfulness and collegiality high but should help equip the teacher who is not satisfied to move on.

Important ramifications of maintaining or increasing standards must be considered. The Carnegie Commission notes the "serious consequences" for minority teachers unless "a massive effort" is made to improve their education and attract many more minority students into the profession. At the same time, the Commission recognizes that the profession itself has to be made more attractive for even these steps to work.

**Empower Teachers**

The literature is replete with findings that one important ingredient to retaining and attracting teachers is to increase the voice that teachers have in matters that affect them, particularly those matters that affect how they teach in the classroom. This is particularly true if teachers are to be held accountable for their performance. (Carnegie, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1984)

Hawley (1986) stresses that teacher empowerment is even more important to those teachers who have career options other than teaching. Heyns (1988) would agree, but makes the counter argument, however. If the current teaching force is less competent because the best teachers have left, then why should more resources and responsibility be given to those who remain?

Furthermore, research by Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) would caution that new teachers are more concerned with what they term "boundary issues" that have to do
more with survival. Any impact of empowering teachers, therefore, may be felt more by more experienced teachers.

**Improve Working Conditions**

Another policy related solution for retaining teachers is to improve working conditions. (Carnegie, 1986; Purkey and Smith, 1985) This is particularly true if school districts are interested in attracting and retaining top level teachers. Chapman and Green (1986) found that improvement in working conditions by school administrators can have a positive effect on teacher retention.

A whole host of suggestions made by researchers might be listed under the rubric of improving working conditions, including, hiring paraprofessionals to do paperwork and giving teachers more planning and teaching time (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Dworkin (1987) found that many teachers look to their working environment to provide a social setting. He thus urges school districts to attend to concerns in addition to salary like social support, isolation, and solidarity.

Lowering pupil/teacher ratios might be one way of improving working conditions in a way that has a positive effect on teacher attrition. Theobald (1990) did a study of school districts to learn what variables might explain teacher retention differences among those districts. He found among other things that a lower pupil staff ratio was significantly related to teacher retention.

**Assist Beginning Teachers**

District policies to give special assistance to beginning teachers might reduce new teacher attrition. The San Diego Unified School District in conjunction with San Diego State University works with new teachers to make the transition into teaching more successful and less stressful. Cooper and Moreyu (1989) describe this collaborative project to retain first year teachers. This program is built on the premises that assistance must 1) provide continued acculturation to the profession of teaching and acclimatization
to the school and the school district, 2) allow the teacher to understand and bring to the
teaching situation the knowledge and skill that he or she possesses, and 3) encourage
teachers to work through problems including using shared problem solving techniques.
The project includes mentor teachers, seminars, release day workshops, and discussion periods. There are scholarships and materials stipends. This approach seems based on
the proposition stated by McLaughlin et. al. (1986) that,

Teachers whose initial assignments are frustrating or stressful seem more
likely to experience decreased commitment, confidence, and satisfaction in
later years than those whose initial strategies are supportive and satisfying.
Thus, all the strategies designed to restructure the work place for teachers
are even more important in the case of the beginning teacher. (p. 426)

SUMMARY

This chapter contains a discussion of many of the conditions and factors that have
been found in the literature to have a relationship to teacher attrition. Some of these
conditions and factors are specifically directed to attrition among relatively new teachers
and other factors related to general teacher attrition, but which seem to be as applicable to
new teachers as to other teachers. The chapter also contains suggestions concerning
public policies and approaches that might reduce teacher attrition in those jurisdictions
where attrition is a problem.

The discussion in this chapter has two specific purposes. The first is to help
identify factors that can be used when making the decision about which districts to select
for the qualitative part of the study. The second is to identify possible factors and
solutions to explore with those in the districts selected.

Both of these tasks are made more difficult by the number, complexity and
interrelatedness of factors and policies that were identified as affecting teacher attrition. How can all of this diverse research be brought to bear on these tasks and the research
question, "what public policies and approaches at the district level are likely to be most
effective in helping to retain new public classroom teachers?" Looking at the research
question another way, from a district policy maker's perspective, what does this research have to say about district policies and approaches that are likely to reduce such attrition significantly? What follows is a discussion of the significance of the research for the tasks of selecting districts for the qualitative study and shaping the focus of the study.

**District Selection**

Teachers' salary levels have an effect on new teacher attrition. We need to be alert also to other factors in selecting the districts for the study and for understanding better the conditions in which policies to reduce new teacher attrition might be effective. Those district factors that seem to affect teacher attrition the most are percentage of black residents, median education level for residents, assessed valuation per pupil, and urbanicity. Suburban and urban districts with predominantly black residents, low median resident education level, high assessed valuation per pupil should be expected to have high attrition. Following this research, districts should be selected which are similar to the extent possible on these factors.

Also, research has found a relationship between teacher attrition and teachers' characteristics. Again, to the extent possible, districts should be selected for the study that are similar on these factors for their new teachers. Teachers' academic test performance, race, age, and gender have all been found to relate to attrition. Moreover, a higher level of student discipline problems has also been found to increase teacher attrition. Thus, a composite profile of a prime candidate for leaving based on attrition research might be a young, female, white high school teacher with high academic performance who teaches in a predominantly black school with predominantly black teachers. This might be especially true if that teacher was working in an urban environment and was not psychologically equipped nor trained to handle the stresses of an urban environment.
The probabilities of convincing her to stay would be difficult, to say the least, if that teacher were teaching large classes in mathematics or science for a low salary, did not perceive that she was receiving adequate financial and educational resources to do her job, and had other viable employment options. They would be bleak, indeed, if she were also having to deal with frequent interruptions, assigned to assorted non teaching duties, having conflicts with school administrators whom she did not respect, excluded from involvement in decisions that affected her teaching, and experiencing difficulties with her students.

**District Policy and Approaches**

The review of previous research helps shape and give perspective to the qualitative study of district solutions to new teacher attrition. A number of potential solutions and factors that have some relationship to solutions were identified in the chapter. Many of the factors seem to be interrelated. The conclusion reached by Grissmer and Kirby (1987) seems well supported that a confluence of several factors affects teacher attrition. Some researchers call for solutions to be multidimensional and fitted to a district's particular situation.

Thus, while raising salaries might be an important part of any public policy strategy, other factors may be just as, if not more, important in the policy mix. Whatever the concerns of sets of new teachers in that particular district (e.g., discipline and safety), the district might benefit from understanding them more thoroughly and by taking appropriate steps to address them.

It also seems that there are factors that are beyond the ability of districts to influence or even respond to well. Dworkin's (1987) inclusion of reasonable occupational or other alternatives available to teachers being an important example of such a factor. Some of the factors which districts can affect, including the level of teacher salaries, are summarized below.
Teacher Salary Levels

Certainly, raising teachers' salaries, particularly during the first few years of teaching seems to be an important part of the answer for keeping teachers, especially for some districts and for some teachers. However, not all teachers are as motivated by salary as others. For instance, research has found men to be more influenced by salary than women and whites more than blacks. Research has also shown that secondary school teachers seem to be more heavily influenced by salary considerations than are their elementary school counterparts.

At the same time, however, it might be difficult for districts to provide enough "combat pay" to compensate inner city teachers for the risk and stress they face. In addition, increased salary will likely not make as much of a difference in those districts, many of which might be suburban, which have a higher proportion of teachers whose families do not depend on their salaries for basic support.

The relationship between teacher pay and salaries for comparable positions in the district may make a difference in the efficacy of salary levels on teacher attrition. While this may be generally true, it may relate specifically for science and mathematics teachers. It may be hard to provide enough increased compensation for those teachers to compete with the private sector in industrialized areas.

Teacher salary levels, thus, need to be factored into both the selection of districts and the qualitative study of possible factors and solutions. During this study, special efforts are made to distinguish what conditions and what teachers’ salary increases will make a difference in teachers’ decisions to leave, move, or stay.

District Support of New Teachers

Teachers with initial difficulties in teaching are more likely to leave than other teachers to leave. Districts benefit by selecting teachers with a commitment to teaching and other characteristics related to success. Careful placing of those teachers so they are
in positions where they are more likely to be successful also appears to help. Districts appear also likely to benefit by providing special support and attention to new teachers in those early years of highest vulnerability.

In addition, it appears that teachers are less likely to leave when they receive at least an adequate level of 1) general support like provision of materials and support services, 2) support by school leaders generally and specifically in discipline situations, and 3) opportunities to be involved in decisions that affect them. Reducing standards to keep new teachers appears to have the opposite effect.

**Concluding Observation**

With the variety of factors and solutions identified in previous research, it is useful to have more insight into what it is that school districts might do that would have a significant level of efficacy in reducing new teacher attrition. Previous research on specific policy topics has identified specific individual steps and approaches that might help in reducing attrition. No study was identified which examines what a "package" or "mix" of policy options might be that would be effective. This study builds on previous research but with a broadened scope. It looks at potential mix of policy options that selected school districts might piece together to keep teachers in their classrooms. It is precisely for this reason that the research described in the next chapter is undertaken.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As discussed previously, the ultimate purpose of this study is to understand better, "what school district policies and approaches are likely to be effective in helping to retain new public classroom teachers?" New public classroom teachers are much more likely to leave than are other teachers. Thus, knowing more about how to keep new teachers seems particularly useful in school districts in Louisiana and elsewhere where teacher shortages generally and teacher attrition specifically is a significant problem.

INTRODUCTION

The methodological issue involves how to identify the more promising solutions from the myriad of potential solutions discussed in the literature that are available to school districts. We are not only interested in discrete solutions that might make the most difference but which, if any, combinations or "mixes" of solutions might be particularly useful. This study goes beyond the assumption that the way to reduce new teacher attrition is to remedy the conditions that research shows is somehow related to such attrition. The study identifies district policies and approaches that already seem to have made a difference in reducing attrition or which teachers believe would make the most difference.

As mentioned previously, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative techniques to understand the efficacy of district solutions. The remainder of this chapter, 1) outlines the methodological logic of the study, 2) defines key concepts used in the study, 3) describes in more detail the methodology employed in both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study, and 4) explains limitations of the study.
The Logic of the Study

The research question is addressed by using three methods: 1) quantitative analysis of teacher attrition experience in school districts in Louisiana, 2) qualitative analysis of the policy and other differences between two pairs of school districts with widely differing new teacher attrition experience, and 3) qualitative analysis of new teacher and, to a lesser extent, administrator, insights into causes and solutions to new teacher attrition. Such diverse approaches seem useful in understanding the complexities that arise in addressing the research question.

District quantitative data analysis provides a foundation for the qualitative analysis. It 1) helps to understand factors at that level that seem to affect districts' new teacher attrition experience, 2) allows comparison of the teacher attrition experience in Louisiana with that found elsewhere in previous studies, and 3) provides a basis for selecting the districts that are the focus of the qualitative part of the study.

Two pairs of districts are selected for the qualitative analysis of the study. The school districts in each pair are selected for their similarity in beginning teachers' salaries and on those non policy factors that seem to make the most difference in new teacher attrition. In each pair, one district has much higher than expected new teacher attrition and the other much lower. By matching the districts on these non policy factors, a much higher likelihood exists that the teacher attrition variation is related to public policy differences. Policy differences and approaches that might explain teacher attrition differences between the districts in each pair are identified and explored in interviews with school officials and questionnaires and focus group discussions with teachers.

The qualitative analysis of new teachers' insights into the causes of and solutions to new teacher attrition in their own districts is based on responses to these questionnaires and opinions expressed in the same focus group discussions in each district. Focus groups are a good method for determining the "perceptions" of user
groups about a product or service among other things (Krueger, 1988), in this case teachers about the attractiveness of their jobs. Focus group discussions seem to be particularly helpful for this study because of the likelihood that public policy solutions are complex and interrelated, as previously mentioned.

Interviews with two district administrators from each district provide additional information. This information concerns the nature of public policy approaches in the district that might affect new teacher attrition. It also provides an additional perspective on other causes and solutions.

**Key Concepts**

Before proceeding further, a brief discussion of what constitutes a new public classroom teacher and teacher attrition for the purposes of this study is in order. Methodological techniques are used which reasonably well, although not perfectly, identify which teachers are new. The techniques also identify teachers who have left the district in which they were teaching, and identify those of that group who have moved to another Louisiana public school district.

This methodology is possible because of the availability of information from the Louisiana State Department of Education (SDE) and the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana (TRSL). SDE collects and maintains usable information on individual public classroom teachers in Louisiana beginning for the 1987-88 school year. The study also uses TRSL retirement data to determine state public classroom teachers' years of credited service.

**New Classroom Teachers for this Study**

The target population of new public classroom teachers for the quantitative part of this study includes those who taught in the 1989-90 school year in Louisiana public classrooms but who did not teach in those classrooms before that time. The new teacher may have previously taught in public or private schools in another state, or in private
schools in this state. We have no reasonable way of eliminating all or even most of those teachers with outside experience from the quantitative part of the study. Because the Annual School Report data base, the major quantitative data base used in this study, is usable for data only beginning in 1987, a new teacher for this study is one who did not teach in Louisiana public schools in 1987 or 1988 but who did so in 1989.

One problem with this selection strategy is that it would include teachers who had previously taught in Louisiana public schools but who had not taught in Louisiana public classrooms in 1987 or 1988. To reduce the chances that these teachers would be included in the study, any teachers who have more than four years of annual service credit in the TRSL 1991 data file are eliminated from the study. This improves the degree to which the quantitative data analyzed are only for "new" 1989 teachers.

For the qualitative part of the study, it is not necessary to determine whether "new" teachers have stayed, left or moved in the two years after they began teaching. Therefore, for this part new teachers selected for the focus groups are those still teaching who taught in Louisiana public schools in 1991 or 1992 but did not teach in the 1987 to 1990 school years. They are also those who have no more than two years of annual service credit in the TRSL 1991 data base.

For the remainder of this dissertation, any mention of "teachers" refers to public classroom teachers in Louisiana unless specifically stated otherwise, or unless the context of the discussion would suggest otherwise. Any references to "new" public classroom teachers in the state are specifically made.

Teacher Attrition

As discussed in the previous chapter, this study is directed toward understanding Louisiana district public classroom teacher attrition and what districts can do to mitigate such attrition. The concept of teacher attrition in this study refers to not only those teachers who leave the classroom (leavers) but those who move from one district to
another (movers). The reason for including both leavers and movers is that it makes little difference to a district's efforts to educate its children that a teacher leaves teaching, or teaches in another state or another district. For that year, the result is the same—the teacher will not be teaching that district's children.

The two components of attrition—movers and leavers—are operationalized as follows. A new teacher in 1989 is considered a "leaver" in this study when he or she 1) was not a classroom teacher in Louisiana in 1990 or 1991 or 2) taught in 1990 but was not a Louisiana classroom teacher in 1991. A new teacher in 1989 is considered a "mover" when such teacher 1) was a classroom teacher in another Louisiana school district in 1990 and did not return to the original district in 1991, 2) taught in the same district in 1990 but in another school district in 1991, or 3) did not teach in 1990 in Louisiana public schools but taught in a public school in another Louisiana school district in 1991.

One caveat should be added to this definition of attrition. While attrition of new teachers is defined above as their leaving and moving behavior for the two-year period after their initial year of employment, other definitions of attrition are used when comparing the Louisiana experience with those of other states in previous studies. Most commonly, attrition in these studies is considered teachers' leaving behavior after any given year.

School Districts

Louisiana has 66 school districts in 64 parishes. In Louisiana, a parish is equivalent to a county. Of these school districts, 64 are parish school districts and two (Monroe and Bogalusa) are incorporated municipalities in two of the parishes. This study examines quantitative data for the 64 parish districts only. Much of the demographic and socioeconomic data used in the study is collected at the parish level and is not readily broken out for the two municipal school districts.
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Analysis of the Annual School Report data bases confirms early expectations that wide variations exist among Louisiana school districts concerning new teacher attrition. New teacher attrition rates, including both movers and leavers, after two years of teaching range from near an almost incredible 70% in two school districts to a low of 22% in the district most successful in keeping its new classroom teachers. This study attempts to explain as much of the district differences in attrition rates as possible by considering how districts rate on various salary and non policy factors.

Factors

The study analyzes four categories of district factors to learn to what extent they might be related to new teacher attrition. The first category consists of district socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. This is followed by a second category that involves district student demographic and performance characteristics. The third category relates to demographic information about the district teacher population itself. The final, policy related category consists of a) two measures relating to the factor of the districts' beginning teachers' salaries, and b) district per pupil expenditures. Each of these categories is explained below.

District Characteristics

Researchers have identified various district socioeconomic and demographic factors and relationships with leaving and staying behavior of teachers. These include the following.

The higher the district's residents' median education level, the higher is the percentage of teachers who stayed.

The higher the percentage of black residents in a school district, the lower is the percentage of teachers who stayed. (This study combines black and Hispanic as a category of residents.)

Teachers who work in urban districts are more likely to leave than teachers who work in suburban or rural districts.
Alternatively, teachers who work in urban districts are more likely to leave than teachers who work in rural districts, and are less likely to leave than teachers who work in suburban districts.

Teachers who work in districts with lower assessed property valuations per pupil are less likely to leave than are teachers who work in districts with high assessed valuations.

This study examines the statistical relationship between each of these factors and Louisiana school districts' new teacher attrition experience to determine if, and to what extent, similar relationships exist. It also examines whether measures of the percent of black and Hispanic and percent of rural residents in a district are related to new teacher attrition. It does the same for the urbanicity of the district and the percent of district residents in poverty. Data for these district-related factors is obtained from the U. S. Bureau of the Census (1991a, 1991b, 1980), except the assessed property valuation per student. This last set of data is obtained from the Annual Financial and Statistical Report (Louisiana State Department of Education, 1992a).

Districts are urban, suburban, and rural according to their proportion of residents in the 1990 U.S. Census data categories of urbanized area (central place), urbanized area (urban fringe), and rural (both farm and non farm). An urbanized area contains at least 50,000 residents. The central place is the, or one of the, dominant center(s) for each urbanized area. The urban fringe is the contiguous area to a central place with at least 1,000 residents per square mile and other similar connected outlying territory. Rural is all of the territory not counted as urbanized area.

For the purposes of this study, parish school districts are determined to be urban, suburban, or rural based on the following decision rules. A district that has more than 50% of its residents counted as urbanized area (central place) is determined to be urban. A district with more than half its residents found to be in an urbanized area (urban fringe) is counted to be suburban. Finally, a district with more than half its residents in a rural
area is determined to be rural. Those two districts, Lafourche and St. Tammany, that do not have over 50% in any of these previous categories are determined to be suburban, since over 50% are non rural and by far the highest percentages of those in each district are in the urbanized area (urban fringe) classification. Based on these decision rules, Louisiana has twelve urban school districts, eight suburban districts, and 44 rural districts. (See Appendix A for a listing of the classifications of the various parish school districts in the state.)

The percentage of district residents who are rural is calculated by taking the sum of the number of residents in the parish who are classified as living in rural farm and non farm areas and dividing by the total number living in the parish. This study uses an urbanicity index as another measure of its urbanization.

This urbanicity index is calculated according to the following formula using U.S. Census Bureau data (1991a). First, find the sum of four times the number of district residents in urbanized area (central place), two times the number of such residents in urbanized area (urban fringe), and the number of residents in rural non farm area. Then divide this sum by the total number of district residents. By doing so, the study generates a district urbanicity index from zero to four. The most urban district possible according to this index would be one that had all of its residents living in areas classified as urbanized area (central place). That district would, thus, score a “four.” In theory, a district with all of its residents living on farms would score a “zero.”

The urbanicity index, thus, is related to, but not just the inverse of, the percentage of district residents in rural areas. It gives relatively higher scores to those districts whose residents live mainly in the central urban areas instead of the outlying suburban areas, and gives relatively lower scores to districts with higher percentages of residents living on farms, instead of non farm rural areas.
This study explores other district demographic factors besides these factors as possibly related to teacher attrition. These additional factors are 1) percentage of district residents in poverty, 2) median years of school completed by district residents, 3) percentage of black and Hispanic district residents, 4) median household income, and 5) percentage of district residents 25 years of age or older who completed high school. All of these factors are taken or calculated from data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980, 1991a, 1991b).

Student Characteristics

In the literature review, various factors were found in studies relating to student performance which affect teacher attrition behavior. This study determines if any statistical relationship exists between these factors and district teacher attrition experience. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, ideally, it would be useful to analyze these factors at the school level. Nevertheless, such factors could be found to make a difference in district teacher attrition behavior. The variables examined as potential factors influencing teacher attrition are student discipline, academic performance, percent of students in private schools, percent of black and Hispanic students, and total number of students. All of this data, except for student academic performance, was obtained from the Annual Financial and Statistical Report (Louisiana State Department of Education, 1992a)

Student discipline problems were identified earlier as a factor in teacher and new teacher attrition behavior. An imperfect indicator of such problems is the percent of students suspended in each district. This figure is calculated by dividing the number of students suspended by the total number of students listed for each district. Such indicator is imperfect mainly because it may reflect policy and other differences among the districts as much as it reflects the behavior of the student population. Some districts may
not tend to suspend students as easily, or may have in-school suspensions that are not counted in state statistics but reflect discipline problems in the school.

The academic ability of students was listed as a teacher attrition factor. Somewhat surprisingly, one study found teachers with students of above average or high ability and from upper or middle class families were more likely to leave than are other teachers. One indicator of the students' ability in each district is the percent of 9th grade regular education students scoring above the 50th percentile on the California Achievement Test total battery. This information is taken from the 1992 Summary Report of the Louisiana Statewide Norm-Referenced Testing Program (Louisiana State Department of Education, 1992b).

Besides these two factors, three other student related variables are examined to see if there is any relationship between them and teacher attrition. These are the percent of black and Hispanic students, the percent of students in the district attending private schools, and total number of public school students in the district. These data are obtained from the Louisiana State Department of Education's Annual Financial and Statistical Report (1992a).

**Teacher Characteristics**

As indicated above, teachers who are young are more likely to leave than those who are older, those who are female are more likely to leave than those who are male, and those who are white are more likely to leave than those who are black. It is useful to determine if any variation in these factors occurs at the district level that will help explain district variance in attrition rates.

Teachers' age and gender information is contained in the study's Annual School Report quantitative data set for almost all public classroom teachers in the state and can thus be also generated by district for teachers or the subset of new teachers. Race data for all teachers, but not "new" teachers, by gender at the district level is available in the
District Public Policy Characteristics

The study examines two district public policies. As explained in the last chapter, the effect of salary on teacher attrition is reasonably significant. Teachers with higher salaries and expected future earnings are more likely to stay than other teachers. The relationship between salary and retention was found particularly true of new teachers. In fact, one study was cited earlier as showing that secondary school teachers with low salaries are twice as likely to leave teaching after their first year than are their higher paid counterparts. (Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1989) The effect of higher salaries was found by previous research to vary by type of district, and the gender of the teacher.

Thus, to more fully understand factors relating to new teacher attrition at the district level, salary must be addressed. The study uses two salary statistics to approach the question of the effects of salary. The first is the beginning salary of the school districts for a bachelor's degree and no experience in their salary schedule as reported in 1992 by the State Department of Education. Presumably, those districts with higher beginning salaries will experience less new teacher attrition than those districts with lower beginning salaries. A second way of addressing salary is to focus on the difference between the starting salary of a district and those of contiguous districts. By determining the relative standing of a district's starting salary with the starting salary of the highest paying contiguous district, the study uses one more tool to explore the issue of whether some new teachers move to nearby higher paying districts. The study also examines the moving patterns of new teachers from the four selected districts to other Louisiana districts to learn to what extent teachers move to higher or lower paying school districts.
Quantitative Data Analysis Methodology

Three purposes exist for analyzing district quantitative data. The first is to attempt to identify factors that might help explain the difference in attrition rates among Louisiana school districts in new teachers and recently graduated new teachers. The second is to develop expected attrition rate values to use in the selection of four districts for the qualitative part of the study that score either significantly higher or lower than what might be expected. The final purpose is to gain a better understanding of those four districts selected.

Analysis of Factors

The study attempts to find out which of the district factors described above might help explain the major differences in attrition rates among the districts. It does this by examining the strength of the relationship of quantitative measures of the suspected factors and attrition rates in Louisiana school districts. As mentioned above, the study examines each parish public school district's percent of attrition for its new 1989 public school teachers. The strength of the relationship of these quantitative measures to teacher attrition, is determined by using regression and multiple regression statistical techniques with an F test for significance.

In addition, the study uses a stepwise selection multiple regression (SW) technique as an inferential technique to explore the relationship of the various combination of possible factors to teacher attrition. This technique combines the power of the forward selection (FS) and the backward elimination (BE) procedures to multiple regression. It iteratively eliminates variables that seem to explain the least variance and selects variables that explain the most variance until certain given criteria are met. For each iteration the variable with the highest probability of F is removed as long as that value is greater than a given level, .10 in this case. Variables with the lowest probability of F are selected.
iteratively as long as the probability of F is smaller than another given level, .05 in this study. (Gunst and Mason, 1980).

**District Selection**

The study selected two pairs of districts, one rural and one non rural, for the qualitative part of the study as follows. It employed the stepwise selection procedure just described on data for the 64 parish school districts. This procedure yielded the variables of urbanicity and percent of students suspended as statistically related to new teacher attrition at the .05 level. The multiple regression also included the amount of difference (residual scores) from the predicted district new teacher attrition rates based on the two variables identified.

Within each category of rural and non rural districts, the study then compared those districts with very high residual scores with those with very low scores. The goal was to select within each set a high and a low new teacher attrition district that were as similar as possible on beginning salary and non policy factors that seem related to new teacher attrition. Besides beginning salary, the factors considered when matching districts were percent rural residents, percent black and Hispanic teachers, median school years completed by district residents, property valuation per pupil, percent black and Hispanic residents, and median household income.

Using this process, the study selected two rural districts as one set and one urban and one suburban district as the other set. The two low attrition districts both had the best residual new teacher attrition scores in their category. The two high attrition districts both had near the worst. By checking with the personnel directors, the study found out that none of the four districts experienced a particularly high non voluntary attrition rate during the period the attrition rates were calculated (Singer and Willett, 1988). Also, neither high attrition district is located near Texas, a state whose school districts pay their teachers more than do Louisiana districts.
Comparison of the Rural Districts. Because of the larger number of rural districts (44), it was easier to find two similar districts than with the non rural districts. Eighty percent of the residents of both selected rural districts live in rural areas with the remainder living in suburban areas. They have identical median education levels and both have a little less than half of their residents classified as black or Hispanic. Their property valuation per pupil is very similar. About 80% of the teachers in both districts are female and a higher percentage of teachers in the high attrition district are black or Hispanic than in the low attrition district. The median household income of the low attrition district is about 20% less than that of the high attrition district and its poverty rate a little higher. Its beginning teacher salary is 8% higher. The student suspension rate is a third lower in the low attrition district.

Comparison of the Non Rural Districts. The high attrition district selected is suburban and the low attrition district is urban. The median education levels of their residents are identical. The poverty rate of the low attrition district is a little higher and its median family income is almost 30% lower than that of the non rural high attrition district. The high attrition district has a considerably higher property evaluation and a 4% higher beginning teacher salary. The percentage of black and Hispanic teachers is more than twice as high in the high attrition district and the percentage of its female teachers is a little higher. The student suspension rate of the high attrition district is around 14% higher than that of the low attrition district.

Follow-up Data Analysis

For the four districts selected, the study noted the destination of any teachers who moved to another Louisiana public school district. Any pattern discovered might provide the basis for additional insight into the reasons why new teachers leave the district in which they were originally hired. Of particular interest are any beginning salary differences between the district selected and the districts to which new teachers moved.
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The study uses three main techniques in the qualitative side of the study. It uses them to gather information about 1) district characteristics that might explain its new teacher attrition experience, 2) policy-type approaches and steps it has already taken which might affect new teacher attrition, and 3) reasons teachers leave and steps districts might take to substantially reduce the attrition rate among its new teachers.

The first technique involves distributing a questionnaire to potential focus group participants. Responses to that questionnaire help structure and augment the focus group discussions. The second and most crucial technique for this study is the conduct of the teacher focus group discussions themselves. The final technique is to interview two district officials knowledgeable about factors and district policies that might have an effect on teacher attrition in that district.

These three steps are part of the triangulation process. Qualitative analysis of this data, along with the quantitative analysis of district level data, is intended to create a higher likelihood the study will help improve understanding of the complex and interrelated causes of new teacher attrition and the structure of the potentially multi-faceted solutions needed to reduce such attrition. The "confluence of factors" that Grissmer and Kirby (1987) concluded cause the higher rates of attrition in the early years presumably call for more than simple solutions.

Questionnaires were distributed to each teacher selected for the focus group discussions in the four districts selected for study. As indicated above, these four school districts were selected because they vary considerably in their teacher attrition record in ways that cannot be readily explained by their rating in beginning salary, and non policy related factors found in the literature and the district quantitative analysis to make a significant difference in teacher attrition.
The discussion first turns to how the teachers were selected for the focus groups, and thus the questionnaires. It then describes the procedures used to administer the questionnaire and the questionnaire response rate of teachers. It then outlines the process used in the focus group discussions and the administrator interviews. Finally it examines the way that the qualitative data was analyzed.

**Teacher Selection**

In each of the four districts selected, 15 teachers were selected for potential participation in the focus groups. All teachers but two who were selected in the four districts are certified to teach. In one of the two low attrition districts, certified teachers were selected randomly from those new teachers who had been hired in 1991 with two or fewer years of experience. In the other, all teachers hired in 1991 who met the requirements were selected, and five more out of the 13 eligible teachers hired in 1992 were chosen randomly.

Regarding each of the two high attrition districts, not enough new teachers were still employed by the district to select 15 teachers who met the criteria fully. In both high attrition districts, the personnel directors were asked to identify the five additional teachers needed to make fifteen. They were asked to identify additional teachers hired in 1991 or 1992 who most closely met the criteria for selection. To reach the 15 teachers in the two districts, the personnel directors needed to include a total of three teachers who were hired in 1993.

**Teacher Questionnaires**

As noted previously, using questionnaires for teachers has many advantages. It provides information helpful in structuring focus group discussions in the four districts and to solicit additional information about reasons and solutions to new teacher attrition. It also helps group participants focus on the topic and organize their thoughts.
Questionnaire Response

A questionnaire was distributed with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the 60 teachers selected. Of those teachers, a total of 42 teachers (70%) returned their completed copies. Most teachers mailed their responses in an envelope designed to ensure the anonymity of the teacher. Different colored questionnaires were used, however, to identify the teachers' employing district. A few teachers brought their completed questionnaires with them and a few teachers who participated in the focus group discussions had lost their questionnaires and were allowed to complete them before the focus group discussions began. Though the information from the questionnaires submitted on the day of the focus group was not available for planning the focus group discussion session, it was still part of the analysis and served the purpose of helping focus those participants' thoughts.

Of the 42 teachers who completed and returned questionnaires, six had more than four years of experience in any public or private school. No appreciable difference was noted in the questionnaire responses of those six compared with those of the other 36 teacher respondents. Their responses, therefore, were included in questionnaire rankings of reasons and solutions to new teacher attrition.

The sample of teachers who returned their questionnaires is similar to the statewide distribution of teachers in three respects. Slightly over 80% of the questionnaire respondents were female, which matches well the percentage of new female teachers in the state. Moreover, about 80% of the questionnaire respondents are white, which is only a little higher than the 69% percent of teachers who are white statewide according to SDE figures. (Louisiana State Department of Education, 1992a) Finally, the 70% of respondents who are at the elementary school level mirror the 70% of teachers statewide in the elementary schools.
**Questionnaire Content**

A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix B. It seeks demographic information about the teacher, information about the teacher's teaching career, opinions about the relative value of various listed factors and solutions to the problem of new teacher attrition. It also asks about the likelihood of the teacher leaving or moving to another district and asks about steps that the district have taken or could take to increase the likelihood of the teacher staying. The questionnaire was field tested on a group of teachers attending a graduate level class at Louisiana State University to help ensure that the questions were understandable and that they elicited the type of information that the study sought to gain.

**Focus Group Discussions**

A focus group discussion is moderator led and typically consists of seven to ten members who have somewhat similar interests or perspectives. The moderator encourages a free-flowing, non-judgmental interchange of ideas and reactions to a set of general questions designed to elicit the information needed in the study in question.

Krueger (1988) lists many advantages of using focus groups that seem to fit very well with the exploratory nature of this study and the complexity of the research topic. First, focus group procedures are natural, socially oriented procedures that typically are relaxed. They mirror real life situations in which people interact and develop insights based on the comments of others. The second advantage is that this procedure, different from more structured approaches, allows the researcher to probe ideas and trains of thought that develop in the discussion. Krueger mentions other advantages, as well, including face validity, low cost, and speed of results. Many methodological procedures described below used in planning, conducting, and analyzing focus group discussions follow Krueger's suggestions.
Focus Group Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix C) consists of seven questions and four follow-up questions that cover both reasons why new teachers leave, and potentially efficacious policy steps that school districts can take to mitigate the teacher attrition problem. As reported earlier, findings from the quantitative analysis supplement information from the literature review in formulating the key questions. These seven basic questions were essentially used for all of the focus group discussions, with follow-up questions dependent on the nature of the discussion. The design of the interview guide is to move in each of the two dimensions—causes and solutions—from the more general to the specific in a sequence logical to participants. The purpose of the discussion these questions induce is to seek understanding, not necessarily reach consensus.

The interview guide was field tested with a group of seven high school teachers in Lafayette, Louisiana to ensure that the questions were understandable and solicited the type of information intended. Two of the questions were also field tested on a group of 20 teachers in an educational methodology class at Louisiana State University. In both cases, the questions asked seemingly produced very frank, useful responses. Following the advice of Krueger (1988) the first focus group discussion in a district tentatively served as a field test of sorts. Since that group discussion seemed to accomplish its purposes well, the results were used in the study and no additional focus group was selected.

Participation in Focus Group Discussions

Included in the mailing of the questionnaires to the new teacher participants, was a note inviting them to attend the focus group discussion for their district and urging them to return the attached form in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Following Krueger, it was hoped that around 7-10 participants would be interested and available from each district. In two districts, it was necessary for follow-up calls to be made to solicit
attendance in the desired range (seven and nine teachers). In the other two districts, ten and nine teachers respectively volunteered to participate and showed up for the discussion.

**Conduct of Focus Group Discussions**

Each of the focus group discussions lasted approximately an hour and a half. In two of the districts, focus groups met in meeting rooms in local libraries close to the central school district office. In the other two, the meetings were held in a school district meeting room. Although, the location of the latter two meetings was not ideal, the rooms were entirely adequate for the meeting, and conducive to the confidential conversation that took place. In none of the four focus group discussions did it seem that the teachers were in the least bit reluctant to share their thoughts. If anything, it seemed as if they were anxious to contribute to the study findings.

Each meeting was moderated by the author following the general guidelines listed by Krueger (1988). An assistant moderator kept notes, was responsible for the tape recorder, and helped orient any latecomers so the discussion could continue without interruption. Because of last minute scheduling conflicts, two assistant moderators were used. The Dean of the College of Education at Louisiana State University assisted with both rural focus group discussions, and the Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Southwestern Louisiana assisted with both non-rural focus groups. Both assistant moderators were briefed on their roles following guidelines specified by Krueger.

Based on the surprisingly frank nature of the discussion in all four focus groups, the change in assistant moderators did not seem to affect the findings of the study, with one possible exception. Some comments about the inadequacy of preservice teacher training regarding student discipline may have been made because the Dean of the LSU
College of Education could affect what is done. On the other hand, the same types of comments were made even more forcefully in a focus group that he did not attend.

**School District Officials' Interviews**

Interviews were held in each district with the personnel director and one other key central office official knowledgeable about district policies and reasons for new teacher attrition. In two districts, the other official was the Superintendent. One of the interview's purposes is to determine any characteristics of the district and specifically, any public policy steps they have taken that might explain their new teacher attrition experience (whether high or low). In addition, the interviews are intended to find out the officials' feelings about the reasons for and solutions to new teachers leaving. These solutions include the efficacy of other policy steps that could be taken. The findings of these interviews help shape some focus group follow-up questions and comprise part of the data analyzed in developing the conclusions of the study.

Interviews were scheduled for an hour each, with each administrator being interviewed separately in his own office, except in one district. In that district, the Superintendent joined the discussion in the Personnel Director's office when it came time for his interview. The questions posed to administrators were taken largely from a prepared list (see Appendix D). For the most part, the officials seemed open and frank, and the study gained much useful information.

**Analysis of Qualitative Data**

Teacher ranking of the most important factors and solutions to new teacher attrition in the questionnaire provided the general framework for the qualitative analysis of data. Most of the in-depth information, however, came from the teacher focus group discussions, supplemented by the administrator interviews.
Questionnaire Responses

Each of 42 teachers who completed and submitted a questionnaire ranked the most important reasons for, and most promising solutions to, new teacher attrition. For each list of reasons and solutions, they ranked the most important ones in their views, from one to five, with "one" being the most important. They also provided other observations concerning reasons and solutions and gave demographic and professional information.

To analyze their rankings, the study recoded the ratings so the most important reason or solution would be a "5" instead of a "1." It coded any factor not rated by a teacher as a "0." The study then calculated the average score for each of the four districts on each reason and each solution. It calculated a total average score for each reason and solution. In addition, it calculated average scores for the two high attrition and low attrition districts, and for the two rural and non rural districts. These average scores simplified comparisons among factors and between types of districts. Teacher comments on the questionnaire were incorporated into the general study analysis.

Focus Groups Discussions and Administrator Interviews

The comparison of the responses within and among the four focus group discussions allows more thorough understanding of the highly ranked reasons for teachers leaving in the different districts. It also gives perspective to the solutions most highly ranked by teachers as likely to make a significant difference in new teachers' career decisions.

An assistant moderator aided the moderator with the qualitative data analysis. The following sequential analysis process is similar, but not identical to that suggested by Krueger (1988). It is modified to reflect the need to consider not only focus group discussion data but administrator interview data as well. The process is used to move from the raw data to a description of the data, and then to interpretation.
Following each focus group discussion, the moderator and assistant moderator for that session held a debriefing session. For each discussion and any administrator interviews they attended together, they shared summary comments and observations and compared field notes. Each then prepared a summary of the meeting or interview including all relevant points. They then shared these summaries with each other. Any disagreements were noted. Among the types of information they captured in these summaries are the themes and sub-themes of the responses to the two key questions. One of these questions involves the reasons for new teacher attrition, and the other concerns which solutions to such attrition are potentially effective. In addition they noted any particular words or phrases used in the responses helpful for interpretation, and any patterns in responses by participants. The moderator incorporated the notes of the assistant moderator into his analysis of the relevant points made in each focus group discussion and administrator interview.

Following all of the focus group discussions and administrator interviews, the moderator read the summaries to decide what potential trends or patterns might exist. For each district, he compared the comments made by teachers in the focus groups with those made by each administrator, on each major theme and sub-theme. He then prepared a chart for each district concerning reasons for new teacher attrition in that district and another chart for recommended solutions. He shared his charts with the assistant moderator, who reviewed them for accuracy.

Based on these district charts, the moderator then prepared two summary charts comparing the districts with each other on the major points regarding the most important reasons and then regarding the most highly recommended solutions. He listened to the focus group tapes to ensure that his analysis of major points in each of the districts was accurate.
LIMITATIONS

The study has two types of limitations. The first relates to the generalizability of the methodology used. The second concerns data limitations.

Logic of the Methodology

The advantage of qualitative studies is that they generally allow a much deeper understanding of complex phenomena. At the same time, the question of generalizability arises. In this study, four districts from one state were selected because their new teacher attrition record considerably varies from what might be expected. Even if all of the data sources from these four districts point to the same causes and solutions, further study would be necessary to confirm these findings in other jurisdictions and with other types of school districts. Moreover, although the responses to the questionnaires are helpful in this regard, more confidence in generalizability of findings would be generated if these findings were incorporated into closed ended questionnaire responses in later studies.

Also, part of the study's logic is to ask selected teachers about the motivations of other new teachers who had left teaching in the district. It would be preferable to ask those teachers who had left directly, instead of relying on the impressions of remaining teachers concerning why those other teachers left. However, considerably more expense and time would be involved in locating, contacting, and arranging for former teachers to attend focus group discussions. Moreover, it is likely that the study would have to contend with a lower response rate for questionnaires and a lower attendance rate for the focus group discussions.

Data Limitations

The study benefitted greatly from the Annual School Report data bases which allowed complete records of which classroom teachers taught in which districts for which years. While it was fortunate, in some respects, that the data was available from 1987, the study was limited by that situation as well. To identify "new" teachers, the study
stipulated that only those teachers who did not teach in 1987 and 1988, but did teach in 1989 would be eligible for inclusion in the quantitative data analysis portion of the study. This left only 1990 and 1991 as years in which teacher attrition behavior could be judged.

Thus, this study has the same type of limitation as does most of the teacher supply and demand literature that contains only two waves of data. Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1988) discuss their concerns with the limitations of using this type of data. As more years of data become available, studies such as this for Louisiana can use more sophisticated attrition statistical methodology.

Another, related problem is that this study uses teacher employment patterns as the major way of deciding who is a "new" teacher for the purposes of the quantitative part of the study. A teacher who taught in 1989 but not in the two preceding years was included in the new teacher category if his or her number of credited years for retirement were not over four. This process should do a reasonably good job of identifying new teachers although it has its limitations. Some teachers were included who should not have been, especially those experienced teachers who moved to Louisiana from out of state or from private sector teaching and did not buy into the teacher retirement system. On the other hand, a few teachers may have been excluded who should have been selected. Those teachers would be any who had more than four years service credit as something other than a public school classroom teacher but who just started teaching in 1989 in the state.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has outlined the methods followed by the study in identifying causes of new teacher attrition, and more importantly, the more promising solutions and mixes of solutions available to school districts to reduce the likelihood that new teachers will leave or move. The study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help understand the efficacy of district solutions through triangulation
of data produced by different sources. This triangulation involves quantitative analysis of teacher attrition experience in school districts in Louisiana, and qualitative analysis of 1) policy and other differences between two pairs of school districts with widely differing new teacher attrition experiences, 2) information and perspectives of district officials obtained from personal interviews, and 3) new teacher insights into causes and solutions to new teacher attrition expressed in responses to questionnaires and focus group discussions. Interviews with school officials and teacher questionnaires also help structure the focus group discussions and provide additional data for analysis.
CHAPTER 4: REASONS FOR NEW TEACHER ATTRITION

New teachers leave their district classrooms for a variety of reasons. This chapter explores these reasons by first examining public school career patterns of new 1989 teachers in Louisiana. It then analyzes the relationships between district characteristics and their new teacher attrition rates. Finally, it examines information from the two high and two low attrition districts described in Chapter 3. Information about these four districts includes data from teacher questionnaires and focus group discussions and from administrator interviews.

TEACHER CAREER PATTERNS

The study finds a high proportion of new Louisiana public school teachers leave the districts in which they were first hired. Moreover, new teachers leave some districts at a much higher rate than they do others. The study also uncovers unexpected differences in the leaving behavior of male and female teachers.

State Level Attrition

Just under a third (30.5%) of the state's new 1989 public school teachers left the parish that hired them the first year. More new teachers left the following year. Four out of five of those new 1989 teachers who left their original district's employment did not teach in any Louisiana public school system in 1991. Thus, after two years, only about half (55.4%) of the 1989 new teachers remained in their original district and less than two-thirds (64.5%) remained in state public schools.
The percentage of new 1989 teachers who leave their original hiring districts will likely continue to increase. Frantz, Kochan-Teddlie, Tashakkori and Pierce (1992) found that about half of a sizable new teacher subset had left the Louisiana public school system after four years. By adding teachers who left to teach in another Louisiana district, the total percentage lost to the original hiring district might well exceed 50% in the state by 1993.

**District Level Attrition**

Some districts experience a much greater percentage loss of new teachers than do others. In one small district, all new 1989 teachers left within the first two years. For the other districts, two-year attrition rates for new 1989 teachers range as low as 22% and as high as 70%. This "worst case" attrition percentage is much higher than the 40% attrition rate that Wise, Darling-Hammond and Berry (1987) found some districts to approach in other states. Even the median, two-year new teacher attrition rate (44.5%) among Louisiana school districts is higher than 40%.

**Gender and Age as Factors**

Unlike the pattern found in previous research (e.g., Rickman and Parker, 1990), a higher percentage (45%) of new male teachers than female teachers (37%) have left Louisiana school districts after two years. Even new male teachers under 25 years of age leave at a higher rate than their female counterparts (47.5% to 40.4%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: 1989 New Public Teacher Two-Year Attrition Comparison by Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculations based on Annual School Report data bases (missing gender data for 509 teachers)
The study found, as did Dworkin (1987), that younger teachers were more likely to leave than older. This is also true of the population of new teachers in Louisiana. Figure 4.1 shows the 55 year-old and older age group as the only exception. In that age group, females are much more likely to leave than males (55.2% to 37.5%).

Figure 4.1: New Teacher Attrition by Agegroup

The study explores possible reasons why male teachers, and young male teachers leave at a higher rate in the teacher focus group discussions and administrator interviews. Most important, however, it explores reasons for the tremendous district variation in new teacher attrition. To do this, the study now turns to analyzing the relationships between new teacher attrition and various district level factors.

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

Research has identified several factors, measurable at the school district level, that influence teacher attrition or new teacher attrition. Four categories of these factors are the districts' 1) demographic and socioeconomic status, 2) teacher characteristics, 3) student characteristics, and 4) public policy. The study first explores the new teacher attrition
effects of factors in these categories. It then examines whether some combination of factors might help explain district variation in new teacher attrition.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Status

Previous research identifies at least four demographic and socioeconomic status factors that influence new teacher attrition. One of these factors is the districts' degree of urbanization. As mentioned earlier, urban school districts lose a higher percentage of teachers than do rural districts (Haberman, 1987, Berry, 1985). Heyns (1988) discovered that suburban districts lose the highest percentage of teachers followed by urban and then rural. Louisiana suburban school districts also lose the highest percentage of new teachers (54.6%). Surprisingly, however, urban districts lose a lower average percentage of new teachers (38.4%) than do rural districts (49.2%). The more urban a district, the lower is the percentage of teachers it loses. Similarly, the more rural a district, the higher is the percent of new district teachers who leave (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Correlation between District Urbanization Factors and New Teacher Attrition among Sets of Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>All (n=64)</th>
<th>Rural (n=44)</th>
<th>Urban (n=12)</th>
<th>Suburban (n=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urbanicity</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.84***</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Rural</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>-.75**</td>
<td>-.72*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*F significant at .05 level; **F significant at .01 level; significant at the .001 level)

The relationship between urbanization and new teacher attrition is more complicated than it appears on the surface, however, and needs further analysis. As Table 4.2 indicates, in Louisiana new teachers are less likely to leave in the more rural of suburban and urban districts. This is unlike the pattern for the population of all parish districts. Thus, whether districts are urban, suburban, or rural may make an important
difference in what effect different factors will have. Thus, as factors' relationships to new teacher attrition are examined, the study looks at any differential effects in the various subsets of districts.

The three other demographic and socioeconomic factors related to new teacher attrition, besides urbanization, are the districts' percent of black residents, property wealth, and median education level of residents. In addition to these factors, other similar factors of the poverty rate, median household income, and percentage of residents completing high school might also affect new teacher attrition rates. However, as Table 4.3 shows, none of these first three relate significantly to new teacher attrition. The only factor that is related is percent of residents completing high school.

### Table 4.3 Correlation between District Demographic and Socioeconomic Factors and New Teacher Attrition among Louisiana Parish School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>All (n=64)</th>
<th>Rural (n=44)</th>
<th>Urban (n=12)</th>
<th>Suburban (n=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pct. District Black/Hispanic</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Valuation</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Poverty</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Graduated High School</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Median Education</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*Significant at the .05 level)

### Teacher Characteristics

A second category of district factors relates to teacher characteristics. As reported previously, in Louisiana new younger teachers are more likely to leave the district than new older teachers, as expected. New male teachers and young new male teachers are surprisingly more likely to leave in Louisiana than their female counterparts. District characteristic analysis, reported in Table 4.4, however, does not detect any significant
district level effects of age or sex in hiring. Districts that hire older new teachers or a higher percentage of female teachers do not have lower attrition rates.

Table 4.4: Correlation between Teacher Related Factors and New Teacher Attrition among Louisiana Parish School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>All n=64</th>
<th>Rural n=44</th>
<th>Urban n=12</th>
<th>Suburban n=8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Black/Hispanic Teachers</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Female Teachers</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, for the state as a whole, districts that hire more black and Hispanic teachers do not have lower attrition rates, as might be predicted based on research showing differences between black and white teachers by Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1989). If anything, their attrition rates are higher, especially in urban and suburban districts.

**Student Characteristics**

The third category of district factors which might help explain new teacher attrition variation is student characteristics. Three student characteristics help explain the variation in new teacher attrition in at least one of the subsets of districts. One of these relates to student performance. Districts with higher student test scores experience a lower rate of new teacher attrition than do districts with lower scores. As reported in Table 4.5, this is true for the population of all districts and for the subset of urban districts. This finding is opposite from what one could expect from Heyns' (1988) research. Heyns discovered a higher level of student performance was related to teachers leaving.

Another student related factor previously found to be related to teacher attrition is student discipline. In Louisiana urban districts, those with more difficult discipline
problems have higher new teacher attrition. The study uses the percent of students suspended as an indicator of discipline problems (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Correlation between Student Related Factors and New Teacher Attrition among Louisiana Parish School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=64</td>
<td>n=44</td>
<td>n=12</td>
<td>n=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Test Scores</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.71**</td>
<td>-.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Black/Hisp.Stu.</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Private Students</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Suspended Stu.</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.62*</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*Significant at the .05 level; **Significant at the .01 level)

Also for urban districts, the higher the percent of students attending private schools, the higher is the new teacher attrition rate. Further study is needed, but it is possible that districts with higher discipline problems would have higher percentages of students in private schools. This possibility is supported by the strong, significant relationship between the percent of district students attending private schools and percent of public school students suspended, especially in urban districts.

Public Policy

One of the more surprising findings of the study is the lack of relationship to new teacher attrition of the two policy-related variables for which data was available. These two factors are beginning teacher salaries and district per pupil expenditures. Most surprising is the lack of effect of district beginning salary (see Table 4.6). Of all of the factors that seem to make a difference based on previous research, salary seems at or near the top. Not shown on the table, the comparative level of a district’s beginning salary with that of its highest paying neighbor district also does not explain variation in new teacher attrition.
Table 4.6: Correlation between School District Policy Related Factors and New Teacher Attrition among Louisiana Parish School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>All n=64</th>
<th>Rural n=44</th>
<th>Urban n=12</th>
<th>Suburban n=8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Salary</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditure</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combination of Factors

The preceding sections explored relationships between individual district factors and new teacher attrition. The study found two factors relating to urbanization and two other factors to be most related to new teacher attrition for the 64 parish school districts. These are urbanicity, percent of residents living in rural areas, student test scores, and percent of residents with at least a high school education. Moreover, the study identified discipline problems and percent of students attending private school as additional factors related to new teacher attrition in rural areas. The next section examines the possibility that some combination of variables might increase the extent to which district factors might explain new teacher attrition variation among the districts and among subsets of districts.

All Parish Districts

For the 64 parish districts, two variables (degree of urbanicity and percent of students suspended) are found to be the most highly related taken together to new teacher attrition (see Table 4.7) using the stepwise regression method. The more urban the district and the lower the percentage of student suspensions, the lower is the expected new teacher attrition rate.
Table 4.7: Factors Selected by Stepwise Regression Method Related to New Teacher Attrition (pin=.05; pout=.10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish Districts</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Multiple R</th>
<th>Signif. of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All (n=64)</td>
<td>Urbanicity</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.0034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural (n=44)</td>
<td>Percent Rural</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.0402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban (n=12)</td>
<td>Urbanicity</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.0007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban (n=8)</td>
<td>Percent Rural</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>.0457</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding urbanicity, teachers in the more urban of the 64 parish school districts have some advantages over those in less urban districts. Table 4.8 shows that more urban districts pay higher teacher salaries and their residents who are 25 years or older are more likely to have graduated from high school. They are also likely to have higher median levels of education. Their average household income tends to be higher than those in less urban districts and a lower percent of residents in those districts live in poverty. It might be understandable that teachers in those districts would be less likely to leave than other teachers.

As is explored below, the explanation is not that simple, however. These district characteristics relate to urbanicity differently in urban districts than they do in rural and suburban districts. This relationship in urban districts of district characteristics and urbanicity is of particular interest due to the high correlation in those districts between urbanicity and new teacher attrition.
Table 4.8: Correlation between District Urbanicity and Selected Factors for All Parish School Districts in Louisiana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>All Districts (n=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>.77**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation</td>
<td>.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School Students</td>
<td>.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>.59**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Education</td>
<td>.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Percent</td>
<td>-.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Salary</td>
<td>.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Test Scores</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Wealth</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Hispanic Teachers</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditures</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Hispanic Students</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(**F significant at .01 level)

Urban Districts

For the twelve urban school districts, the stepwise regression procedure selected only one variable -- urbanicity (see Table 4.7). Unlike the state as a whole, the more urban of the urban districts have the more difficult time keeping their new teachers. The degree of urbanicity explains so much of the variation in new teacher attrition that little room exists for other variables to play a role. Analysis of other factors' relationships to urbanicity in urban districts, however, may provide insight into reasons new teachers are more likely to leave in more "urban" of these districts.

Table 4.9 indicates that in urban districts, urbanicity correlates most highly with the student related variables of the percent of students in private schools, student test scores, number of students in the district, and percent of students suspended. Thus, for
urban districts the student dimension is potentially very important in understanding the reasons for new teacher attrition.

Table 4.9: Correlation between Selected Factors and District Urbanicity for Urban Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Urban (n=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$r$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School Students</td>
<td>.87**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Test Scores</td>
<td>-.71**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Students Suspended</td>
<td>.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditure</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Black/Hispanic Teachers</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Black/Hispanic Students</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Property Wealth</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents' Median Education</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Teacher Salary</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Residents High School Grad.</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Percent</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*F significant at .05 level; **F significant at .01 level)

Rural Districts

Over two-thirds of school districts in Louisiana are rural. The stepwise regression method again selected only a single variable--percent of residents living in rural areas--to explain new teacher attrition rates (see Table 4.7). The more rural the district, the higher is the new teacher attrition rate. No other variable could significantly add to the statistical explanatory power of that one factor.

Clearly, as Table 4.10 shows, the population size of the district is most closely related to its "ruralness." The districts with the smaller resident, and accompanying smaller student, populations are the more rural. Beginning salary is also related to its "ruralness." The more rural the rural district, the more likely is the district to have a lower beginning teacher salary.
Table 4.10: Correlation between Percent of Residents Living in Rural Areas and Selected Factors for Louisiana Rural Parish School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Students</td>
<td>-.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Salary</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditure</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct Private Students</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Test Scores</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Valuation per Pupil</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Students Suspended</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*Significant at the .05 level; **Significant at the .01 level)

Suburban Districts

For suburban school districts, the stepwise regression procedure, again, selected the percent of district residents living in rural areas as the single variable (see Table 4.7). Opposite from rural districts, however, the more rural a suburban district, the less is the new teacher attrition it experiences.

Table 4.11: Correlation between Percent of Residents Living in Rural Areas and Selected Factors for Louisiana Suburban Parish School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Private Students</td>
<td>-.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditure</td>
<td>-.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Salary</td>
<td>-.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Student Suspended</td>
<td>-.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Valuation per Pupil</td>
<td>-.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Students</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Test Scores</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other factors may help explain the strong relationship between "ruralness" and new teacher attrition in these suburban districts. As Table 4.11 shows, the more rural of
these suburban districts tend to have less per pupil expenditure, lower per pupil property evaluation, lower beginning salaries, lower percent of student suspensions and lower percent of students in private schools than the less rural of the suburban districts. None of these relationships is statistically significant since only eight districts are in the population of suburban districts.

Overview of District Characteristics

For the state as a whole, the more urban the district and the lower the rate of student suspensions, the less likely it is that new teachers leave. More urban districts in Louisiana are the ones which tend to pay higher beginning teacher salaries and their residents are more well educated. Their average household income is likely to be higher and a lower percent of their residents likely live in poverty. It might be understandable that teachers in those districts would be less likely to leave than other teachers. These characteristics might help explain the reason teachers are less likely to leave in more urban districts than in other districts. Based on district characteristic analysis, however, reasons for new teachers to leave likely vary among urban, suburban, and rural districts.

Unlike the state as a whole, new public school teachers in the more highly urban of the urban districts are more likely to leave than are teachers in the less urban of those districts. The more highly urban districts are the ones with lower performing public school students, more disciplinary problems, more students being sent to private schools, and larger numbers of students. Thus, faced with this situation, teachers in the more urban of the urban districts may be more likely to leave.

For rural districts, the more "rural" the district, the more likely it is that new teachers will leave. The more rural districts have fewer residents and students than the less "rural" of the rural districts. Such smaller population size might well be a disadvantage in keeping new teachers in rural areas. Less populated rural districts may not function as well without a "critical mass" of students. On the other hand, teachers
may be looking for a different quality of life than what the more rural of the rural areas might provide. Other possibilities might exist which also will be explored in the teacher focus groups and administrator interviews.

Less well populated rural areas also tend to have lower beginning teachers' salaries. Because of its weak relationship to new teacher attrition in rural districts, however, the effects of beginning teachers' salaries, if any, may be mitigated by other factors.

Teachers in suburban districts have a different situation. A higher percentage of teachers leave in the less rural of those districts. Teachers may leave in suburban districts for reasons related to the lower financial well-being of the less rural of the districts. Or they may leave for reasons related to the lower student performance and higher discipline problems found in these districts.

One final note is in order. District characteristic analysis found little support that the relative level of their beginning salary is a reason for new teachers to leave. Teachers from districts with lower beginning salaries were not much more likely to leave than those with higher beginning salaries. Moreover, districts with much higher paying neighbors have similar new teacher attrition rates to other districts. It might well be that beginning level of teachers' salary does not play as important a role in new teacher attrition as was anticipated based on previous research. On the other hand, it may also be that salaries do play an important role that is being somehow masked by other factors at play in the different subsets of districts.

To help make sense of this district characteristic analysis and better determine the reasons new teachers leave, the discussion now turns to the final sources of information in the study. These pertain to information gathered from the four districts selected for more intense analysis.
SELECTED DISTRICT ANALYSIS

Teachers and administrators in two sets of districts provide additional information and insight to reasons why new teachers leave. They not only provide their personal perspectives, but also information that allows us to see if differences between high and low attrition districts affect new teachers leaving. The rural and the non rural sets each contain one district that has lost a high percentage of teachers and one that has lost relatively few teachers. The three sources of information analyzed in this part of the study are teacher questionnaires, teacher focus group discussion comments, and administrator interview results. Based primarily on the questionnaires, but also on the focus group discussions and interviews, a grouping of reasons in order of importance seems reasonable.

Each potential focus group participant who completed the teacher questionnaire rated the five most important reasons why new teachers in his or her district left the district's classrooms. The highest possible rating a factor could receive by any teacher is a "five." A reason rated the highest by all teachers would average a "five" and one not rated in the top five by any teacher would average a "zero."

Table 4.12 shows that the 15 reasons or factors seem to divide naturally into three groups of five. The most important group of reasons for new teachers to leave is composed of discipline problems, low salary, availability of a more attractive job, inadequate support from school leadership, and disillusionment with teaching. The second, less important group of reasons consists of inadequate community respect and support, teacher burnout, critical or non-supportive parents, excessive paperwork and classroom disruptions, and inadequate level of supplies and equipment. Finally, the lowest rated group of reasons is composed of concern about personal safety, families moving, lack of confidence in their own ability, latitude to teach, and home responsibilities.
Table 4.12: Average Teacher Response Index Scores to Reasons for Attrition (Scale 0 to 5, with 5 = highest possible score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>All Teachers (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Problems</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Salary</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Job More Attractive</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Leadership Support</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disillusionment with Teaching</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Community Respect</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Parental Support</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Paperwork</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Supplies</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Safety Concern</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Moving</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Ability</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Amount of Latitude</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Responsibilities</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher questionnaire and focus group comments and administrator interview comments are surprisingly consistent with this grouping of factors (See Appendix E). However, based on these comments, two additional factors should be added. "Quality of life" is added to the top group and "teacher quality" is added to the middle group.

The first group, then, is composed of reasons that teachers believe play an important role in new teachers leaving in these four districts. The second is composed of reasons that might contribute to teachers' decisions to leave, but not usually be reason enough to leave by themselves. The third category consists of those reasons that do not seem to play much of a role in teacher attrition. The categories are labeled 1) most important reasons, 2) contributing reasons, and 3) negligible reasons.
Most Important Reasons

The five top reasons rated by teachers on the questionnaire are as follows.

1. Maintaining discipline in the classroom or school was too much of a problem.
2. Salary was too low.
3. Another job was available to them which was more attractive.
4. They believed that leadership in the school did not support them adequately.
5. They became disillusioned with teaching.

Table 4.13 shows how teachers in high and low attrition districts, non rural and rural districts, and all districts on average rated each of these reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>High Attr (n=23)</th>
<th>Low Attr (n=19)</th>
<th>Non rural (n=20)</th>
<th>Rural (n=22)</th>
<th>All (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Problems</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Salary</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Attractive Job</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Leadership</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disillusionment</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned above, to this list is added the factor of the quality of life in the district.

Each of these factors or reasons is considered in turn.

**Discipline Problems**

Teachers rated discipline problems in the classroom or school highest as a reason for their fellow teachers to leave. This rating is not too surprising given the study's findings, reported in the last section, about student suspension rates as an important district factor in new teacher attrition. As high as it is generally, teachers in the two high attrition districts rate it considerably higher than do teachers in the other two districts, as Table 4.13 reveals. Even in the district with the lowest score for discipline problems, 70% of the teachers listed it in the top five reasons for new teachers leaving.
From the district characteristic analysis, variation in student discipline difficulties between urban and suburban districts is likely to have more impact on new teacher attrition rates than discipline variation between rural districts. Questionnaire results seem to support this finding. The widest variation in student discipline ratings occurs between the two non rural districts. Teachers in the non rural district that loses the highest percentage of teachers gave student discipline the highest scores of the four districts as a factor influencing teachers to leave. Moreover, teachers in the non rural high attrition district were clearly the most frustrated with student discipline of the teachers in any of the four districts. Conversely, teachers in the non rural district with the lowest percentages of teachers leaving scored student discipline problems the lowest of the four districts.

Teachers especially made numerous comments which provide insight into the nature of teachers' feelings about student discipline problems and their assessment of the causes for such problems. Administrators' comments add to this insight. This information in turn provides a better understanding of student discipline as a reason for new teacher attrition.

High Frustration. As high as the ratings are for student discipline problems, they still do not capture many teachers' strong emotions. Teachers spent more time, emotion, and energy in all four teacher discussion groups discussing student discipline than any other factor by far. One high attrition teacher group had difficulty moving from the topic, even when asked three times what other problems might affect teacher attrition.

Even so, the high teacher frustration related to discipline evident in high attrition districts was not matched in the low attrition districts. Words like "desperate" cropped up in the high attrition district with the worst discipline problems. Teachers talked of being hit in the stomach by elementary children (and the administrator not doing anything about it.) As one teacher described it, "There is no control over the students, then teachers give up--then there is chaos." Some of those teachers who have not given up have taken
aggressive discipline measures. As one stated, "I feel like a drill sergeant instead of a teacher."

Nevertheless, some low attrition district schools apparently also may be pretty tough environments for teachers. Teachers from those schools were "extremely tired of disrespectful students" and cited children's lack of "fear for authority figures." One special education elementary school teacher from a low attrition district decided to never teach in a regular classroom based on what she saw in one of the schools.

The behavior from the regular student body was beyond words. I witnessed children hitting, cursing, etc. I could not believe what I witnessed. It made me physically ill! . . . I would rather go to work at Wal-Mart.

Teachers and administrators list many reasons why student discipline is such a problem. In many cases these reasons are common in all four districts. However, important differences exist between high and low attrition districts. These differences provide an important clue to understanding discipline as a reason for new teacher attrition.

Lack of Leadership Support. The most commonly accepted reason by teachers for student discipline problems was lack of support by principals and other administrators. In the highest attrition district, one teacher preferred to label the student discipline problem as a "lack of leadership" problem. For the most part, this administrative failure in the eyes of the teachers was due to the principal, and to some extent the assistant principal.

Lack of support when teachers sent disruptive students to the office was the most commonly cited problem. As a high attrition district teacher put it, "If you write up a child, nothing is done. Teachers' hands are tied." Another teacher said that students could, "hurl chairs across the room. You would send them to the office and they would send them right back to you." In one high and one low attrition district teachers seemed to unanimously agree with a teacher statement that students would be smirking when sent
back to the classroom from the principal's office after no discipline was meted out. One teacher in describing the situation, said that she did not know the legalities, but students won, "they would come back and laugh at you." Although a pattern of lower principal support in high attrition districts seems evident, it is not universal. Teachers in high attrition districts praised some principals for supporting teachers well, and teachers in low attrition districts criticized some principals for poor support.

An administrator in a high attrition district added a different dimension to the discussion. He pointed out that teachers in some schools sent so many students to the office that the principal could not deal with all the problems.

Teachers also placed considerable blame on the school board and central office. In all four districts, teachers felt that school board members unwisely intervened on behalf of parents in school level disciplinary decisions. Teachers complained of parent "end runs" to the board without even talking to the teacher, "They don't bother going to the teacher first, or the principal first. They go directly over your head." From teacher comments, board intervention seemed particularly true in the case of the two high attrition districts, and one of the low attrition districts. An administrator in one of the high attrition districts would likely agree noting, "The school board is on your case if you suspend the wrong kid." In both of these districts also, teachers cited board and central office pressure on principals to hold down the number of suspensions and expulsions as a cause of discipline problems. On the other hand, administrators in the two low attrition districts cited infrequent Board involvement in individual student disciplinary matters as a district strength.

Teachers cite inconsistency of discipline as another facet of poor leadership support in disciplinary matters. Especially in the two high attrition districts, new teachers seemed to have little confidence in the type of disciplinary measures administrators would apply to unacceptable student behavior. One teacher commented that the mood of the
principal was the determining factor in discipline decisions. Another teacher cited cursing as a particular irritant to one central administrator, while more serious behavior went unpunished. She said the joke going around the school was that the message to students was, "Go ahead and stab a teacher, but don't curse while you are doing it."

**Poor Parental Support.** In addition to poor leadership, lack of parental support is a second commonly cited reason for school discipline problems. In the teachers' view, parents provided a) inadequate training and discipline at home, and b) low support, and even criticism, for teachers trying to cope with their children. As a high attrition district teacher put it, "Kids who curse and fight in the home, will do it at school also." Teachers also felt that low parental expectations for their children was a problem for which society unfairly expected teachers to compensate.

In one high attrition district, poor parental support seemed to be a particular problem in one area of the district. The area was a blue collar area with high unemployment and high percentages of parents on public assistance. A teacher commenting about the effects on children of this area stated that discipline was terrible and the school discipline problem was "completely a reflection of where they are coming from." The teacher explained that parents fight and one cannot expect model behavior from a child from this type of environment.

Added to that problem in this area is the lack of support for, even opposition to, teachers (and the administration). As one teacher from the area observed, "In (the town in question) the parents are so adamant against the administration and the teachers . . . You do get help from some parents. Parents do not help you out in trying to get kids to act right in the classroom." Two other teachers express the frustration of dealing with parents in that town. The first teacher commented, 

I deal with more (parents) who don't want to know anything. It's not the child's fault. I don't blame anything on the child, I blame it on the home
life, because you got--we had two parents that got into a fight today over their kids--in the hallway. So look what the kids are looking at.

A second teacher expressed the reaction she received from parents when she tried to solicit their support in dealing with their children, "I try not to call parents because I don't like to deal with them--after two years of being belittled by parents and called all of these different names because you try to get their child to act right in your class."

**Poor Teacher Control.** Administrators, and some teachers, cite a third factor helping cause discipline problems. This factor is the ability of teachers to handle discipline problems. While they knew discipline was a major problem in the school, some teachers made it clear that they personally could handle discipline in their own classrooms. The implication was, apparently, that part of the responsibility lies with the teacher. As one teacher put it, "Teachers don't know how to handle students . . . I've seen too many kids go to the office now." Some teachers had trouble, either because of poor pedagogical or inadequate classroom management techniques, or both. The central office administrators with whom we talked all seemed to believe that some new teachers just do not have the personality to keep control in their classroom. A few teachers cited the advantage of local teachers in maintaining control because these local teachers knew the parents and saw them in church and the supermarket every week.

One administrator in a high attrition district cited the reluctance of new teachers to use necessary force to keep the students under control. He referred to a clash of cultures, especially for teachers who were imported from other parts of the state or other states. In his view, these "outsiders" did not understand what was necessary, and expected by parents, to control the students. By contrast in the same district, new teachers seemed in substantial agreement that excessively harsh disciplinary methods by some elementary teachers made it more difficult for them when those students moved up to their classroom. New teachers complained these more experienced teachers verbally deprecate students,
"secretly paddle" students, and hit kindergarten students on the back of the legs with yardsticks. They complained that this physical and verbal abuse rendered ineffective their control efforts when those students were promoted.

**Inadequate Preservice Training.** A somewhat unexpected agreement among teachers developed, especially in three of the four districts, concerning a fourth reason for discipline problems. This reason is the poor job university preservice teacher training programs do in preparing the prospective teacher for the difficulties that teachers face in the classroom. The programs particularly do not equip them to handle discipline problems and relationships with parents. A teacher from a low attrition district reflected the sentiments of the group when she said,

> Our teachers in college made it sound like it was wonderful out there. You could put them in timeout and you would have it made. That is the only problem you are going to have... I have a kid you have to drag with a whip to timeout.

Teachers complain that the assignment of student teachers to lab schools was particularly not helpful. They felt that the lab school environment was "unrealistic" and did not prepare them for what they faced in the real world. One administrator in a high attrition district mentioned that those teachers who did their student teaching in an environment poorly related to the difficult student situation they would be facing in his district were much more likely to fail. One teacher captured the sentiments of many when she said, that teachers need more than "a two hour lecture about discipline."

**High and Low Attrition District Differences.** One of the differences between low and high attrition districts with regard to discipline has already been mentioned. That is the degree of desperation noted in the high attrition districts, especially in one of them. Even though all four regular focus groups stressed discipline problems as a major factor in new teacher attrition, the problems seemed much worse in high attrition districts.
A second difference concerns who owns the discipline problem. In both low attrition districts, the central administration saw student discipline as its problem. These administrators saw the district's responsibility was to support teachers and principals generally, but particularly with regard to discipline. This was particularly true in one district. One of many similar administrator's comments captured some of the sense of that ownership, "Teachers need to go to a place where they do not feel intimidated . . . I do not feel that we put up with too much." In addition to psychologically taking ownership of the discipline problem, district administrators set up "detention centers" and a "boot camp" to remove particularly disruptive students from the regular classroom without putting them on the streets.

In both the high attrition districts, by contrast, administrators 1) were not as aware of teachers' concerns about discipline and 2) placed the responsibility for student discipline clearly on the shoulders of the teachers. In effect, the district seemed not to accept that student discipline problems were anything that the district itself should accept responsibility for solving. One comment is reflective of this attitude, "the single most important factor (in student discipline) is (the teachers') inability to discipline in the classroom . . . if they don't improve they know they will be terminated . . . This is nothing to do with the administration." This administrator ownership difference between the two sets of districts is also reflected in the fact that during the period covered by the study both low attrition districts had a strong district discipline policy, unlike the other two districts.

Low Salary

On the questionnaires, teachers scored low salary close behind discipline problems as a reason new teachers leave. This high rating is in sharp contrast to the weak, non-significant relationship among Louisiana parish school districts between beginning teacher salaries and new teacher attrition rates. Comments from teachers and
administrators help shed light on the reasons for this seeming inconsistency between the negligible salary effects in district characteristics results and the high teacher ratings.

Teachers who commented on salary as a factor in new teacher attrition emphasized four main points.

**Stress for Single Teachers.** First, teachers knew when they took teaching positions what the salary levels were. Thus, for the most part, even though they believed that the level of compensation was low, they were prepared to accept that level. This was not true of some teachers, particularly single teachers, who discovered that they just could not live on the salary offered. Single teachers in the study were forced to live with roommates, and make other sacrifices. One of those teachers mentioned she and others like her have had to take a second job to make ends meet. Obviously, as she noted, it would be hard for a teacher to continue teaching for any length of time having to work two jobs, "My life is stressed enough without having to do that." This problem may be one which impacts single women more than men, given the reported increased difficulty that female teachers have in finding higher paying alternative employment.

**Inequity Belief.** A second point gives more perspective to the first. Even though teachers knew what the job paid when they took it, they still believe that salary levels are inequitable. When they started, they may not have fully understood how inequitable they would come to think it would be. It is clear teachers believe that it is just unfair what teachers are paid. This feeling is strongly shared by one of the administrators, from a low attrition district, who called the salary "chicken feed."

This sense of unfairness involves perceptions of inadequate compensation for the work involved in and outside of the classroom, comparison to the pay of other comparably trained professional jobs, and even comparison with the pay of other teachers in their schools who do not work as hard. As one teacher put the argument for the
salaries being too low, "The job never ends—unless you've taught, no one can comprehend the physical, mental, and emotional work involved."

**Inadequate Compensation for Frustration.** The third point new teachers made regarding salary related to their level of stress and frustration. Teachers generally seemed willing to accept the level of salary paid, even though they believed it was unfairly low, if they had not become so frustrated and disillusioned. Teachers related salary levels to the sense of the high frustration and stress of teaching given the discipline problems discussed above and other factors that are discussed below. They seem to be saying that for many teachers, this frustration and stress was too great to endure given the low amount of compensation they received. One teacher seemed to capture the feeling of many. She felt that salary was not the major factor by itself. She said that she knew what the salary paid when she took the job. On the other hand she said with the all of the frustration, she had to decide how long it was worth the salary to deal with the aggravation. A teacher in another group echoed those comments when he said, "It comes down to, 'is it worth it?' Am I making a decent living being this frustrated all the time."

**Reflection of Community Esteem.** The fourth and final point made by teachers in the focus group discussions relating to salary has to do with the esteem they receive from the community. In two different focus group discussions, the point was made and supported that salary was an indication of such low esteem. They perceived that their competence was subject to question by the community because after all, as one teacher stated, "who would work for such low salary if they were competent." One teacher used as an example of community credibility, her student questioning why would she put up with all she had to deal with given her low pay.

**Incentive to Move.** One additional point should be explored. It seemed fairly well accepted among administrators and teachers in the four districts, that teacher salary comparisons with surrounding districts would make a difference in the attrition rate.
Salary comparisons were used by low attrition district administrators as partial explanation of why they lost relatively few teachers to surrounding districts. It was also used by high attrition district administrators to explain why their attrition rate was so high. However, such faith in the importance to new teacher attrition of relative salary in high attrition districts is not borne out by new teachers' moving patterns.

Losing teachers to higher paying neighbors is not much of a problem for the districts in this study. In fact, only a total of four new 1989 teachers from the two high attrition districts were lost to a neighboring district within the state in two years, and one of those was to a lower-paying district. The low attrition district with a higher paying neighbor did not lose any teachers to that neighbor.

Whatever the arguments, it remains that teachers do leave teaching and do move to other districts. From the discussion above, it seems like relative salary differences have to be considered in relationship to other factors such as availability of other opportunities to leave, level of student discipline problems, and the level of teachers' dissatisfaction with teaching positions. Consistent with Bruno (1986), higher salary is not necessarily sufficient to keep teachers in high stress districts. The fact that relative teacher salaries do not seem to make much difference in teachers' decisions to move to other districts is consistent with the Hammer and Rohr (1992) finding that only 5.8% of teachers moved to another district to improve salary or benefits. This compares to over 30% in that study who moved because they desired a better teaching assignment or other reason relating to moving from a district in which they were dissatisfied.

Availability of a More Attractive Job

In the questionnaires, teachers rated the availability of another, more attractive job as the third most important reason for new teacher attrition. As with discipline problems and low salary, teacher ratings vary importantly by type of district. As might be expected, teachers from high attrition instead of low attrition districts were more likely to
rate this factor more highly. Somewhat surprisingly, however, teachers from rural areas considered this factor to be much more significant than did teachers from non rural areas.

Based on the comments in the focus group discussions, this "more attractive job opportunity" reason appears to be a special case--important in a different way than other factors. To evaluate its influence, one would need to know the answer to a significant question. Did teachers who left the district's classrooms leave a satisfactory job because a more attractive job was available, or did they look for another job because of dissatisfaction with their teaching position? If the answer is the former, then the factor is important in its own right. If it is the latter, then its importance is tied to other factors. In other words, in the latter case, other factors would have to be present causing dissatisfaction with the teaching position for the "more attractive job opportunity" factor to impact teacher attrition rates in any important way.

Teachers and administrators alike, when asked this question, responded that the latter explanation was more likely. Basically, they contend, teachers chose the teaching profession because they wanted to make a significant difference with children. For most teachers, it was only when they became convinced that this goal was unrealistic, that they decided to look for another job.

The issue of factors which might cause someone to leave the profession for a more attractive position outside of teaching received little attention from teachers in comments on the questionnaires or in focus groups. The comments that were made related to teachers' perceptions that jobs in other fields would have less stress and would pay more. Again, the perception teachers gave was that they would prefer a teaching job under more acceptable than present conditions than a non-teaching job.

Administrators in three of the districts mentioned the difficulty that teachers have in finding reasonable non-teaching jobs in the area--particularly for female teachers. This was particularly true in the rural districts. They asserted that teaching was the highest
paid professional position available in those districts for persons with their training. Male teachers, therefore, were more likely to leave for salary reasons than female teachers. Among the examples mentioned of occupations that teachers did take were those of painting contractor and casino card dealer (the latter at three times their salary as teachers). This assertion may help explain why in Louisiana a higher percentage of new men teachers leave than new women teachers, unlike the expected pattern. Male teachers may be more likely to have other options.

Inadequate Support from Leadership

The fourth factor selected by teachers as most important among reasons new teachers leave is inadequate support by leadership. This, of all of the factors, had the greatest variation among teachers' ratings in the district. High attrition districts' teachers were more likely to consider this an important problem than teachers in low attrition districts. The same is true of teachers in urban versus rural districts.

Teachers made various comments which help provide insight into what they were thinking when they chose this as one of the most important factors. It is clear that in the eyes of many teachers the leadership role of principals is crucial. One teacher in a low attrition district stated that one of the reasons she stayed was that, "Principals respect teachers and have good working relationships with them." Another teacher, however, in the same district wanted the district to provide a "new principal--one that supports the teachers." It is also clear that the ratings also apply to those above the principals. In some responses, similar to the one above, the central office is held responsible for choosing unsupportive, ineffective principals. One teacher captured the sentiments of many, although not all, teachers,

I think the major problem not only in this district but in all districts is that teachers are not supported by anyone, frankly. They are not supported by their administration. They really are not supported by their school board and they are definitely not supported by parents.
Comments about leadership support from teachers in all districts, but particularly ones from the high attrition districts, seemed to revolve around a few themes. These are how administrators support the teacher in discipline situations, how they treat teachers generally, the types of student and teacher assignments they make, and the type of training and resources they make available to teachers.

**Support in Discipline.** When asked in what ways leadership did not support them, teachers generally cited inadequate support in discipline first. When asked if that was what teachers were thinking of when they marked inadequate leadership support, they responded that while that was part of the reason, more was involved. Since leadership support in discipline has already been discussed as a part of the section on discipline, the other facets that teachers mentioned are discussed below.

**General Support.** A second concern about leadership support as a factor in new teacher attrition relates to administrators' general attitude toward teachers. This concern was captured by one teacher who complained that "(administrators) operate within the best interest of the budget, not the teacher or the students." Another teacher comment zeroed in on central administration. "Administration--higher than principals--often treat teachers as non-professionals who are valued little more than a warm body ."

A closely related factor to this general attitude toward teachers is the need expressed often in the focus group discussions for positive reinforcement for their good work. It was surprising how much difference this seemed to make. Even if teachers cannot be compensated financially for their contributions, they seem to be saying, they could at least feel appreciated by principals and other administrators. Teachers seemed impressed when one teacher related how her vice-principal put "happy notes" into teachers' boxes when they did something for the school over and above what was necessary. Teachers seem hungry for confirmation instead of "lack of recognition for effort."
Teacher and Student Assignments. A third way in which teachers felt not supported was the type of classes to which the new teachers were assigned, and the students who were assigned to their classes. In three of the four districts, as well as in the pilot focus group discussion, teachers noted that new teachers were given the worst classes, making it that much more difficult for new teachers to succeed. In one of the districts, a union contract gave teachers a right to bid on any vacant job, with the most senior teacher given the position. This process almost assures new teachers assignment to the most difficult classes. In other districts, experienced teachers appear to be given preference of assignments leaving less preferred classes to new teachers.

The effects of student assignment practices on new teachers seemed particularly sensitive in the two high attrition districts. In one district, apparently, the superintendent assigns students to classes with little or no input from teachers or others at the school level. This creates situations in which one teacher may have more than his or her share of the "problem" children. A teacher related how much she wanted to resign when the principal assigned her two more problem children to augment the four she already had, as a first year teacher. In the other district, a very high percentage of children are determined to be special education students, thereby placing additional burdens on the new teachers who are already assigned to difficult classes. According to one teacher, the student assignment problem is compounded also when parents of the better students pressure the principal to assign their children to those teachers with successful experience, thus not to new teachers.

As might have been predicted based on previous research (Smith et al., 1983), quite a few teachers felt that the problems posed by mainstreamed special education children, and the special attention they require, increase teacher attrition. As an example, a teacher from the high attrition district with a high percentage of special education
children cited having four children in her class each requiring "one-on-one" attention. She asked how that was possible, even ignoring the other 24 children in her class.

**Training and Resources.** Provision of resources might be viewed as the fifth and final category of ways in which teachers were frustrated by what they viewed as inadequate leadership support. These resources ranged from inadequate supply money to support from other teachers and the principal in handling difficult and varied ability groupings of students. From the comments about solutions, this desired support seems to include release time to work with other teachers, smaller class sizes, better inservices, and new teacher mentoring.

Large class sizes were an obvious concern for teachers, especially given the discipline and other problems mentioned above. One teacher commented that times have changed, the students are more difficult, and teachers can no longer be expected to handle 30 or more students, like they once might have been able to do.

In addition to class sizes, however, teachers were very strong in their opinions that they needed more in-service training and direction. They would prefer that principals give them more assistance, but if they could not, teacher mentors would be helpful. Districts in the study had a half day or day of orientation at the district level for teachers in which the new teachers were introduced to some of what they needed to know. However, the strong sense from the teachers was that was not nearly enough, nor did it include what was required in the individual schools. District administrators indicated in all four of the districts that new teacher orientation to the school is left up to the principals. Fairly uniform agreement seemed to exist among teachers that principals did not provide that leadership. As one teacher stated, "We were thrown to the wolves."

The two low attrition districts had a program that might compensate for any shortcomings in their new teacher orientation program. Administrators in these districts cited a "buddy teacher" program for new teachers. This was designed to help orient and
assist in the first year of teaching. In this program, experienced teachers were assigned to help the new teachers adjust to the school and its requirements. Although teachers in the focus group discussions in these two districts did not seem to believe the programs were very successful, this type of support was felt needed by new teachers in the high attrition districts, given their perception of the small amount of time that many of their principals set aside to help new teachers.

Disillusionment with Teaching

Thus far, four reasons for new teacher attrition in the "most important" category have been discussed. These are discipline problems, low salary, more attractive job options, and inadequate leadership support. The fifth problem rated in the questionnaire is disillusionment with teaching.

Disillusionment is consistently rated in the fifth position by teachers in low and high attrition districts, as well as in rural and non rural districts. This factor is more difficult to capture than many of the others, since it likely relates to most of the other factors. However, one major theme seems to emerge from the teacher comments. This central theme is the difficulty in making a difference in educating children. Various explanations are offered by teachers which relate to this difficulty.

One explanation in the eyes of quite a few of the teachers relates to the characteristics of the children they are assigned. Various teachers' comments are illustrative. One observed that they were faced with, "Children who don't seem to care." Another similar comment also related to student attitudes, "Students . . . don't care about their grades and they don't really want to be there. They seem to be 'unteachable'." Teachers were particularly convinced they had the most difficult assignments. As one teacher stated, “What I don’t understand is, why they have a new teacher come fresh out of college--why they give you the worst children?”
Another problem affecting the teachers' ability to make a difference, also concerning student assignments, is the wide range of abilities of children in classes. Two comments are among those which capture this frustration. A high attrition district middle school teacher stated, "The various grade levels that students are at when you receive them make it nearly impossible to meet individual needs without receiving support. You are expected to work 'miracles' without the 'wand'." The second comment from another middle school teacher from the same district is similar.

Teachers aren't supported in decisions concerning student retention; therefore, students are passed on without mastering skills needed for a particular grade. Teachers are expected to instruct on many different grade levels while maintaining complete classroom control. The teacher is belittled if he/she fails to do so.

The special education mainstreaming problem discussed above obviously relates to this concern about teaching students with multiple levels of ability.

Low Quality of Life

One reason not listed on the questionnaire for teacher attrition emerged from focus group discussions and administrator interviews as one of the most important reasons. This reason is the variation among the districts in the quality of the life for the teacher. Those teachers who live in communities that hold a special attraction for them are less likely to leave than those who do not. Quality of life factors are cited positively by teachers and administrators in those districts with low attrition and negatively in those districts with high attrition.

Local Hiring. In both of the low attrition districts, administrators and teachers alike made the point that many of the teachers were from the area originally and preferred living around family and old friends. Even if you are frustrated with the job, you are likely to stay if you have roots, especially if no other suitable job is available. As one teacher remarked, "If you live here, you put up with it." This contrasts vividly with the situation in the other two districts, where many teachers were brought in from the
"outside." In one high attrition district, an administrator noted that not enough teachers are produced to allow the district to hire certified teachers from the area. A shortage of local, certified teachers appeared to be true in the other as well. In either case, the teacher turnover was so great in these districts that it might be hard to produce enough qualified locals to keep pace.

**District Attractiveness.** Teachers and administrators from low attrition districts also identified positive characteristics of their parishes as reasons that teachers would be less likely to leave. "A good place to raise a family," proximity of recreational areas including good hunting and fishing, good library, and safe environment were cited among the reasons teachers would not want to leave. On the other hand, teachers from the rural, high attrition district indicated that, unless family lived nearby, there was little to recommend the area. A substantial portion of teachers commuted from outside of the district. As one teacher put it, "there is rural, and there is backwoods." Boredom was a reason that teachers gave for not wanting to live there. Moreover, commuting grew old as well for many of the substantial number of teachers who lived outside of the district.

**Contributing Reasons**

Thus far, the discussion has focussed on six reasons for teacher attrition which have been identified as the most important. Many of these reasons are interrelated (e.g. disillusionment with teaching) with each other as well as with other factors. Teachers also identified six other reasons which seem less important. With one exception, they seem less likely to be a cause of new teacher attrition by themselves, but instead sources of general frustration which could contribute to the decision of teachers to leave. The one exception is teacher "burnout." Although no comments were included about "burnout" as a factor in the questionnaires, focus group discussions, or interviews, it could be a sufficiently important factor by itself for some type of career move.
Of these six reasons, five received teacher rating scores which placed them in this second tier of new teacher attrition reasons. These five reasons, in order of their average scores are as follows.

1. Teachers believed that they had inadequate respect and support from the community.
2. They became "burned out" with teaching.
3. They felt parents were too critical or non-supportive.
4. They were frustrated with paperwork and classroom disruptions.
5. Supplies and equipment were inadequate to teach properly.

Table 4.14 lists the index scores for each of these reasons for the various categories of districts.

**Table 4.14: Average Teacher Response Index Scores for Contributing Reasons for Attrition by Type of District (Scale 0 to 5, with 5 = highest possible score)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>High Attr (n=23)</th>
<th>Low Attr (n=19)</th>
<th>Non rural (n=20)</th>
<th>Rural (n=22)</th>
<th>All (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Respect</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Burnout</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Parental Support</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive Paperwork</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Supplies</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To this list, another reason is added based on comments made on the questionnaires, focus group discussions, and administrator interviews. This reason for new teacher attrition is teacher quality and attitudes. To better understand new teacher attrition, therefore, one might benefit from examining these six contributing reasons. Thus, each of these reasons is briefly discussed in turn.

**Inadequate Community Respect and Support**

The amount of support and respect they receive from the community is on the minds of teachers, especially those from non rural districts. Based on the few comments in the questionnaires and the focus group discussions, teachers seem sensitive to this
issue. This sensitivity may be especially true of teachers in Louisiana because of the almost uniformly low ratings on educational indicators the state receives in comparisons with its sister states.

**Teacher "Burnout"**

As indicated earlier, little or no discussion occurred regarding teacher "burnout" in the focus group discussions or administrator interviews. Moreover no comments were made in the questionnaires directly on this point. Indirectly, the factors of high amount of stress, heavy workload, difficult students, and feeling they are not appreciated may all contribute to teachers rating of this factor.

**Critical or Non-supportive Parents**

One factor which seemed relevant to the discussion of reasons for new teacher attrition, but not crucial, related to the lack of support received in the home. Clearly, teachers placed much of the blame for student discipline problems on lack of training in the home, but also on lack of support for teachers by parents when their children got in trouble at school. It is hard to know how much of this parent factor rating relates to discipline (discussed above) and how much to other concerns. Nevertheless, concerns with parents besides discipline are on the minds of teachers. Teachers identified low expectations of parents as one of the problems which leads to lack of concern about grades.

Even in a low attrition district, teachers decried the fact that parents in their district do not seem to value education. Either their involvement is not constructive, or teachers had the opposite problem. One teacher said, he never "laid eyes on a parent." He went on to say that he couldn't get a parent to come to the school. He pointed out that at a recent parents' night, only 40 parents showed up, which is not too good considering 680 students attend the school.
Excessive Paperwork and Classroom Interruptions

An irritant for teachers which those particularly in one of the focus groups claimed related to the likelihood of teachers leaving was the amount of required paperwork and the insensitivity of the administration in interrupting classes with unnecessary announcements. One teacher cited an example of an administrator standing at her door while she was required to fill out a lengthy special education form during class for a transferring student.

Inadequate Supplies and Equipment

Teachers complain about having to spend much of their personal money for classroom work. Three of the districts in the study provided an allotment ranging from $50 to $100 per teacher for supplies. The teachers without an allotment, and an art teacher and math teacher who had special needs for supplies beyond the allotment expressed the unfairness of being expected to spend their own money. An administrator from the district which did not provide supply money, in fact, commented that the “good” teachers are the ones who spend their own money for classroom supplies. In essence, he was being critical of those teachers who did not care enough to do so.

Teacher Quality and Attitudes

One of the surprising findings of the study was the critical nature of some teachers’ comments about their more experienced colleagues. This was especially true in one of the two high attrition districts. Teachers, and one of the administrators, perceived a real animosity by many experienced teachers toward the new teachers. This may well have been caused, at least partially, by the district’s commitment to replace their non-certified teachers who were the experienced teachers’ neighbors and friends with certified teachers. To make matters worse, because of the shortage of local certified teachers, many of these new teachers were hired from out of the district or even out of state. One of the new teachers in this district comments, "other (experienced) teachers are not
inspired by their (the experienced teachers') work and have a very negative attitude towards their students and peers." It is these teachers who were referred to in the section on discipline as being excessively physically and verbally harsh on students (by hitting them and calling them, "stupid"). The point made was that it was very difficult for a new teacher who was interested in doing well to stay in that type of environment. As one teacher from the district put it citing this and other problems, "there is no excellence anywhere (in the district)."

Negligible Reasons

The final category of reasons addressed in this study were those relatively few teachers marked in the top five reasons for new teachers leaving. They were also not particularly emphasized in the focus group discussions or interviews. Because they do not seem important, they will be very briefly addressed. The rating scores for these factors for the various categories of districts is listed in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15: Average Teacher Response Index Scores to Negligible Reasons for Attrition by Type of District (Scale 0 to 5, with 5 = highest possible score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>High Attr (n=23)</th>
<th>Low Attr (n=19)</th>
<th>Non rural (n=20)</th>
<th>Rural (n=22)</th>
<th>All (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Safety Concern</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Moving</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Ability</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Latitude</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Responsibilities</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two of these five reasons were marked far lower than might have been expected based on previous research. These are family moving and home responsibilities. A recent NCES study found over a third of the teachers who left teaching did so for personal, family, health care or pregnancy reasons (Hammer and Rohr, 1992). It also found that almost a third of those who left to teach in another district did so because of a
family or personal move. No discussion occurred which would shed light on the seeming disparity between those findings and the questionnaire results of this study.

Concern about personal safety was another factor which received low markings as a reason for new teacher attrition. As might be expected, however, it was marked most highly by teachers in the non rural high attrition district, and not marked as a reason at all by any teachers in the low-attrition, rural district. This difference is not surprising given that even elementary teachers in the high attrition district cited cases of being hit by students with little retribution being meted out by the administration. The only mention of "youth gangs" was by teachers in this district.

The two other factors in this group of relatively unimportant factors is restrictions on latitude to teach and lack of confidence in their own ability. Both received uniformly low scores and were not mentioned in the discussions or interviews.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The study found that new teacher attrition is a major problem in Louisiana. Approaching half of the new teachers hired by school districts were no longer teaching in their districts' classrooms two years later. Moreover, the problem of new teacher attrition strikes some districts harder than others. Districts have attrition rates ranging from 22% to 70%, and even higher in the case of one small district.

Important variation in attrition rates and factors that relate to new teacher attrition occur among urban, suburban, and rural districts. The state cannot be considered a monolithic whole with regard to losing new teachers. The variation in new teacher attrition is directly related to its level of urbanization. The more "urban" urban districts, less "rural" suburban districts, and more "rural" rural districts are all likely to lose more teachers than their counterparts in their respective categories. Moreover, rural districts are more likely to lose teachers than urban districts, a pattern different from findings of previous studies.
The study found student discipline problems to be clearly a major factor in new teacher attrition, especially in urban and suburban districts. Although teachers in all four districts and cited this as the major factor, it seemed much more of a problem in high than low attrition districts. Teachers listed a whole series of reasons for the discipline problem including lack of parental support and home training. Nevertheless, a high percentage of teachers seemed to agree that it was largely a leadership problem. High and low attrition districts also seemed to differ on the degree to which leaders took responsibility for solving the discipline problem. The two districts that took ownership of the discipline problem were the two that were more successful in keeping teachers. This included providing alternative discipline options. Examples were given of schools with principals who supported teachers in discipline in high attrition districts being successful in keeping teachers and schools with principals who did not support teachers in low attrition districts being much less successful in doing so. Moreover, teachers believed that principals who were not consistent and up front in their support were less successful in both low and high attrition districts.

Discipline was cited as a teacher problem as well. Teachers know that some are less able than others to manage their classrooms. Even then, teacher difficulties in this area may or may not be adequately addressed by district and school leadership through extra support, training, and student assignment. Teachers and administrators cited failure of teacher training institutions to train teachers for the “real world” as a problem.

Closely related to, but extending beyond, discipline problems is leadership. Particularly in the two high attrition districts, inadequate leadership support by principals and the central office was viewed as an important part of the reason for teachers leaving. Two examples teachers gave of non-principal leadership weakness were the political interference of school boards on behalf of parents in the case of specific discipline problems and the selection of principals. Assignment of new teachers to the most difficult
classes, insufficient orientation and inservice training, and even general disrespect was viewed to contribute to the likelihood of teachers leaving.

Another, and somewhat unexpected, reason for new teacher attrition was the quality of life in the district. This reason has two dimensions. The first is quality of life that came from being near family and friends. The other relates to the safety, libraries, recreation and other factors making life otherwise more enjoyable. Districts suffered when they had to hire “outsiders” to teach, especially when the district was not as desirable a place to live as other parts of the state. On the other hand, those districts that were fortunate to be able to hire teachers from the area with roots already established and ties to family and friends had less teacher attrition.

Disillusionment also is a factor. Teachers cited disillusionment that they could not make a difference teaching as one of the most important reasons for new teachers leaving. The “care less” attitude of students and parents in some areas of the districts were particularly cited. The correlation with new teacher attrition in non rural districts by the factors of student test scores and suspension rates seems also to relate to disillusionment. Teachers in higher scoring, lower discipline problem districts may be less disillusioned with teaching.

Despite the ratings by teachers, the study found reasons why low salary and other job opportunities do not have the same direct impact on new teacher attrition as do the other factors of discipline, leadership, disillusionment, and quality of life. Teachers do not generally leave for higher paying districts in the state. Moreover, teachers who were asked felt that most teachers who left for a more attractive job, did so because they were dissatisfied with the teaching position they held. They did not generally leave when they enjoyed teaching. Teachers do seem to want to teach. For many of the teachers in the study, teaching still appears to have at least the potential of intrinsic rewards not matched by other career alternatives. In general, teachers asserted that it is when they become
disillusioned and/or frustrated given other problems that they even start exploring other alternatives.

Although some teachers find that the salary is not as adequate as they thought it would be when they took the position, salary’s impact was found to relate more to which teachers are selected originally and to the general dissatisfaction of teachers. Teachers made several comments in the nature of, “Is the salary worth it to put up with the frustration? Does the community and even the school system really understand what we do and appreciate us, if they are willing to pay us so little?”

The study identified other factors which, while not sufficient in and of themselves appear also to contribute to frustration. These include inadequate supplies, low community esteem, unsupportive parents, inordinate amount of paperwork and interruptions, and colleagues with negative attitudes toward the children and toward them. This latter factor was a major problem in one high attrition district.

This look at reasons for new teacher attrition provides an important foundation for the final goal of the study, explored in the next chapter. This goal is to identify solutions, particularly at the district level, which may well reduce the likelihood that new teachers will leave.
CHAPTER 5: SOLUTIONS TO NEW TEACHER ATTRITION

This chapter explores steps that districts, and to some extent others, might take to reduce the problem of new teachers leaving, particularly solutions useful to high attrition districts. A set of potentially effective solutions does seem to emerge from the responses and comments of teachers and administrators in the questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. These responses and comments are helpful in two ways. First, they provide information about any differences in policy or approach between districts that might explain why new teachers are more likely to leave high attrition than to leave low attrition districts. Second, they reflect the personal feelings and wisdom of individuals in a position to know what steps might be most helpful. Teachers have had first hand experience in the same schools and school districts as have had many teachers who left and have a perspective on steps that might have influenced them to stay. Administrators from those districts are very familiar with district policy and have practical experience useful in providing overall perspective on solutions to new teacher attrition.

The chapter first examines which solutions teachers from the four districts rated on their questionnaire responses as most likely to have a significant impact on teacher attrition. It then further analyzes questionnaire results and teacher and administrator comments from these four districts about each of the more highly rated solutions to gain additional insight and perspective on what districts and others might do. Finally, the chapter provides an overview discussion of solutions to new teacher attrition.

QUESTIONNAIRE RATINGS

The teacher questionnaire lists a set of potential solutions based largely on the literature review, but also on comments by teachers in the questionnaire pilot testing stage. Teachers selected and ranked five solutions that they believe were most likely to
have a significant effect in persuading new teachers to stay. As Table 5.1 reveals, all
groups of teachers rated resolving discipline problems, increasing salary, and lowering
pupil teacher ratios as the most important steps districts could take to reduce new teacher
attrition.

Table 5.1: Average Teacher Response Scores to Solutions to New
Teacher Attrition (Scale 0 to 5, with 5 as the highest possible score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOLUTIONS</th>
<th>HiAtt</th>
<th>LoAtt</th>
<th>Non rural</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Conditions</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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The average ranking by teachers in the two high attrition districts is particularly
noteworthy. These districts' efforts to find effective solutions to new teacher attrition are
most crucial since their average new teacher attrition rate is almost three times as high as
that of the two low attrition districts. As Table 5.1 shows, high attrition district teachers
rated reducing discipline problems most highly and placed less weight than other teachers
on increasing salaries and improving pupil/teacher ratios.

Teachers in all districts ranked improving working conditions and establishing or
upgrading teacher mentoring programs in a second tier of solutions. High attrition district
teachers added two other solutions to this second tier. These are providing additional
support for dealing with mainstreamed special education students and developing more
effective relationships between the principal and teachers. High attrition district teachers rated giving them more say-so in school governance and providing additional community support lower in their list of priorities.

Teachers' comments in the focus group discussions were consistent with these ratings (See Appendix E), with the following exceptions. The first is that teachers supported two solutions in focus group discussions more strongly than they rated them on the questionnaire. Those solutions are placing new teachers in less difficult assignments and providing more effective preservice training in teacher training programs. Second, a solution and a solution category emerged in the focus groups that were not adequately covered by the questionnaire solution list. The solution involves more thorough new teacher orientation. The solution category contains solutions relating to treating teachers professionally.

The list composed of both the more highly rated solutions on the questionnaire and these other solutions identified in focus group discussions, can be divided into four categories. These are discipline policies and procedures, other teaching conditions, compensation, and professional treatment. Each of these will be considered in turn, followed by an overview discussion.

**DISCIPLINE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

If high attrition districts are to be more successful in keeping new teachers, one good place to start is to address discipline problems in schools. This conclusion is based on the rankings and comments of teachers from the high attrition districts and lessons learned from the differences between high and low attrition districts. Many of these teachers want districts to provide effective discipline alternatives and effective new teacher support systems even if they did nothing else to keep new teachers. Chapter 4 discussed student discipline as the highest ranked problem by teachers. Reducing student discipline problems is also the highest ranked solution by high attrition district teachers and the
second highest by low attrition district teachers. Specific steps emerge from the study that school districts and schools can take to deal with teachers' student discipline related frustrations. By doing so, they would likely increase the chances that teachers would not leave.

**District Ownership of Discipline Problem**

One important step is for district leaders to take responsibility for solutions to student discipline problems. This is particularly helpful in districts that have serious discipline problems and is a major difference between high and low attrition districts. District leaders can take ownership in three related ways. The first is to adopt and communicate an attitude of support for teachers on disciplinary matters. The second is to ensure the presence of a strong district-wide student discipline policy, and the third is to develop discipline alternatives at the district level.

**Central Administration Attitude**

Both low attrition districts, but particularly the urban district, have taken an aggressive stand to support teachers in disciplinary matters. The low attrition, urban superintendent has taken personal responsibility for ensuring that the disciplinary situation is under control in his school district. As he says, "This district prides itself in having control." Moreover, he uses student discipline as one of two major criteria for evaluating principal performance.

In the other low attrition district, central administrators expressed a similar attitude of support, although teachers seemed not to be as aware of central office support as were the teachers in the other district. One district administrator said that a teacher who believes that a child should not be in his or her classroom gets good support from the administration. "If they (teachers) know they don't have to keep a disruptive student in the classroom, they feel so much better." Central administrators noted that they encourage principals to support the teachers in discipline. "We talk about it all the time."
One administrator feels the primary job of the parish is to support the teacher. He recognizes, however, that the discipline situation is getting worse, "Teachers are beginning to throw their hands up—not being able to control those kids."

The other administrator from this district echoed some of these comments, "No teacher should show up in the classroom and have to put up with disrespect or disobedience . . . The key to learning is a disciplined environment. If you don't have that, you don't have anything." He advised boards interested in reducing new teacher attrition to 1) make sure staff members (teachers) feel comfortable, and 2) provide a safe environment and good discipline. He emphasized that teachers "don't need to dread going to work each day . . . (and that) discipline is the most important thing for young teachers."

As reported in Chapter 4, this supportive attitude toward teachers with student discipline problems is not so easy to find in the two high attrition districts. It is primarily found through teacher comments about a few specific school principals.

The teachers in both high attrition districts seemed to believe that district leaders start to show this attitude of support by taking two steps to avoid making discipline problems worse. First, they recommended that the administration stop looking down on schools with high suspension and expulsion rates. Numbers of suspensions might be more of an indicator of problems instead of the problem itself. As one teacher put it, "The school system should be less concerned about how 'it' (the discipline statistics situation) looks on paper and more concerned with 'education'." Another teacher commented that the district might need to suspend many students to convince students that schools were serious about enforcing the rules. Being strong in enforcing school rules now, in some teachers' views, could lead to fewer suspensions in later years.

Taking this step may be more difficult for some districts than others, however. One low attrition district administrator noted that his district received the support of the
local news media, unlike another district with which he was aware. In one high attrition district, the local media regularly publishes the suspension and expulsion figures for schools in the district. This increases elected officials' pressure on principals to keep the figures down.

By implication, a second step is for school board members to refrain from involving themselves in specific discipline situations. Teachers were particularly concerned about situations where the parents go directly to board members before discussing their concerns with the teacher and then the principal. Board member involvement on behalf of constituents in specific discipline situations is part of a "micro-management" problem, as one administrator put it, that negatively affects the operation of the school system and the schools.

**District Wide Discipline Policy**

Districts can also take responsibility for discipline problems by having a strong, district-wide student discipline policy, and then to follow through and implement it consistently. Teachers in the high attrition district with seemingly the worst discipline problems agreed with their colleague who said the district should "develop a solid, parish-wide policy on discipline and stick with it." Both low attrition districts had district-wide policies, and both high attrition districts did not during the period for which the study calculated new teacher attrition rates. The low attrition urban district has what an administrator describes as "a strict discipline policy" that the Superintendent sees as his responsibility to enforce. Teachers in that district were appreciative of district support, and noted that the "discipline policy has greatly improved," and if anything, wanted the district to do more.

The rural low attrition district has what one administrator sees as a "strong discipline policy," although the approach in this district is for less direct district involvement than that of the urban district. This rural district approach stresses the central
office supporting principals in fulfilling their responsibilities to deal with the discipline problems. Thus, teachers in his district seem more appreciative of discipline support from the principal than do teachers in the low attrition urban district. However, they are less likely to recognize that level of support from the district level.

Community support for adopting such strong policy may be a complication for districts attempting this solution. Differences between high and low attrition districts in discipline policy may partially relate to support by the community for those measures. Though he took leadership in beginning the policy, a low attrition district administrator noted the strong support of the community for taking the strict disciplinary measures adopted. Teachers and administrators in the high attrition districts did not address the issue of whether community support is or would be present for a strong discipline policy. Based on other teacher comments about parental opposition to the administration and teachers, however, such support may be a problem, particularly in some areas of the districts.

**Discipline Alternatives**

A third important way in teachers' eyes for districts, in effect, to take ownership of the discipline problem is to provide discipline alternatives. This step relates closely to a strong discipline policy. Not surprisingly, teachers said that suspending students and sending them home is not a deterrent for many students. Teachers appreciated the low attrition urban district establishing the "detention centers" and the "boot camp" or "redirection academy." These are much appreciated options for schools regarding students removed from the classroom. These alternatives keep students off the streets, and, according to administrators, have a good success record in eventually returning students to the regular classroom.

Teachers note one additional advantage of these discipline alternatives is that students can keep up with their school work. Louisiana has a rule that suspended
students cannot make up work, including any tests, that were missed during their suspensions.

In contrast, teachers from high attrition districts seemed to want an alternate disciplinary system. They felt, as one teacher put it, that, "The public school system should provide alternative programs for 'discipline troubled' students." The point being somehow the troublemakers should be isolated, but not just by suspending them and sending them home. Teachers made the point repeatedly that suspending students to the street is not much of a deterrent. One administrator noted that conditions are different now than when regular suspension might have been a deterrent, "There is no momma at home."

A different but related recommendation of teachers in various districts is to provide students, particularly those who are most likely to get into trouble, with vocational trade learning opportunities. The general point is that many students do not see the point of going to school since so few opportunities exist for someone with a high school education in their area. With more specialized training they might be more employable. As one teacher put their reasoning, "The only place up here you can get a job is working at the 'crazy house' or the prison. 'Hey, what do I need to go to school for to work (there)?'" Students' role models are drug dealers "because they have money." Teachers' logic seemed to be that it would do wonders for other kids with real jobs to serve as role models. It would give otherwise disruptive students an incentive to take school seriously.

School Principal Disciplinary Support

The previous discussion underlines the importance in the eyes of teachers (and many administrators for that matter) of central leadership support of teachers in disciplinary matters. Of equal, if not greater, importance is discipline support by school administrators. The previous chapter documented the frustration faced by teachers who
sent disruptive students to the principal's office, only to have the principal send them back laughing at the teacher.

Teachers have two most common recommendations to help remedy teachers' frustration over student discipline problems. They are for the principal and vice-principal to be 1) more strict with students and 2) more consistently supportive of teachers. This position is consistent with Rosenholtz and Simpson's (1990) point about the importance of principals providing a barrier to protect inexperienced teachers. "It follows that whether the students' behavior is managed partly at the school level is most crucial for novices." (p. 247) Although recognizing that many problems are created outside of the school, many teachers believed that school administrators could overcome the effects of those problems by being more strict. As one teacher commented, "We can't solve societal problems. You can't make parents discipline kids at home, but administrators can get tougher on them." Another teacher added, "Yeah, so at least the kids know they can't do it at school."

They ask principals to have clear rules that teachers and students alike understand, and then "stick by them." Many different teachers echoed the same type of theme. "Follow the 'rules' they set forth about discipline and quit giving the students so many chances." Don't suspend one student for fighting and then fail to suspend another student for fighting three times in a week. Don't allow teachers to be hit in the stomach by an elementary student without a penalty. Don't allow a student to "hurl chairs across the room" without discipline being applied. Don't put up with disrespect. Support the teacher when he or she can no longer deal with the disruption a student causes in class. Make it easier to remove troublemakers.

As an example of the impact on discipline school administrators can have, a teacher reported how the discipline deteriorated when a strict principal and vice-principal team left a school.
He (the principal) didn't put up with anything. If they (students) did one thing, they were out. The limits were set, they were there. . . . If one thing happened, that was it. No one raised their voice at you. There wasn't anything. Now I know the school is having a lot of trouble because of -- those two left.

The level of support that teachers wanted seemed to vary by their level of frustration. As expected, those teachers who were the most frustrated were the ones supportive of the quickest, strongest sanctions. "Desperate times call for desperate measures" was a phrase used by a teacher who announced she has recently decided to leave teaching because of her frustration with student behavior. She cited the need for "severe discipline."

In this same district, other teachers wanted more support from the principals in removing disruptive students from the school.

The principals are afraid to go too far. These kids need to be expelled. They need to be out of the school. And the principals I think are afraid. I don't know why. . . . (Another teacher) They can't, they cannot expel them.

The implication is that they cannot expel them because of pressure from parents and school board members. As noted above, many teachers want school board members to keep out of specific discipline situations. Moreover, they want the principal to stand up for them on discipline cases even when board members, central administrators, or parents apply pressure. This recommendation seemed particularly reflective of the feelings of high attrition district teachers, although teachers in all four districts made this recommendation, in essence.

Sometimes, teachers have given up on their principals and want the central office to provide a "more supportive" principal. From the teachers' perspective, selecting "good" principals is a key part of the solution to reducing new teacher attrition. This is true not only for reasons relating to reducing student discipline aggravation for teachers, but for other reasons as well.
Teacher Training Institution Support

Besides wanting central leadership and school leadership support with student discipline problems, teachers agreed about the need for better preservice training on classroom management and discipline. This solution involves both offering additional classes in these areas and providing more realistic student teaching experiences.

Strong teacher agreement exists that universities need to train prospective teachers for the real world. The two-hour lecture on discipline was not enough. Teachers wanted instruction that told teachers "how to deal with discipline problems before they enter a classroom . . . showing problems teachers may face and how to handle them." Another teacher believes that "universities need a class on behavior management for all education majors."

Other teachers and one central administrator focussed on the student teaching experience universities provide prospective teachers. Prospective teachers need not just a list of student control techniques from which to choose, but real world experiences that prepare teachers for real world problems. One teacher seemed to capture the sentiments of her focus group when she said,

The little schools we were being sent to when I went to LSU--University lab school and Magnolia Woods Elementary--all these good little, wonderful places--it's just not the real world, you know, and then you get thrown into situations where I've had fourth and fifth graders who really belonged in seventh and eighth. We are finding condoms . . . and you say, 'I didn't go to school for this' . . . You have to struggle to keep control because you don't get respect, the parents don't back you up. It all ties in, it's a vicious circle. But the colleges really do need to spend a lot more time on discipline than they are (spending). Don't send people necessarily to these good little model schools. Ship them out in the real world and let them see what it is.

Teachers see these two components of more effective university preservice training, then. The first is more class work on discipline and classroom management. The second, and maybe more important, is more realistic, hands-on, on-the-job training. This latter point is supported by the placement experience of the administrator cited in the
last chapter. He believed that those incoming teachers did better who had student teaching experiences more relevant to the difficult nature of his district's students.

Thus, solutions to student discipline problems discussed by teachers involve more support at the district leadership level, consistent and strong support of school leadership, and more realistic discipline training at the university level. Providing solutions to discipline problems is the first of the solution categories to new teacher attrition. A second, closely related category involves providing other conditions for new teacher success in the classroom.

OTHER TEACHING CONDITIONS

Clearly, reducing the impact of the discipline situations on new teachers is an important potential solution for school districts to new teacher attrition difficulties. Teachers and sometimes administrators believed that school districts and schools should take other steps to ensure that the pressure and stress of the job are at levels new teachers can handle.

Thus, those districts and schools that also successfully attend to other ways of protecting and supporting the beginning teacher in matters that are most likely to cause such stress and pressure are more likely to be successful in keeping those teachers. This conclusion seems consistent with other studies (see Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990; McLaughlin et al., 1986).

Some steps identified in the previous section for supporting teachers in discipline (e.g., selecting better principals) have impacts beyond discipline. Similarly, the five steps in this section that teachers identified for providing other support to teachers also have discipline support value. These steps involve 1) new teacher orientation and training, 2) mentoring, 3) student assignment policies, 4) working conditions, and 5) principal/teacher relationships.
New Teacher Orientation and Training

More thorough new teacher orientation emerged as a solution from discussions with teachers and interviews with administrators, although it was not on the list of solutions on the questionnaire. In none of the four districts did teachers believe that districts give new teachers the type of orientation they need to prepare them for their first year of teaching. In fact, considerable frustration surfaced on this point.

Usually, the orientation programs consist of a day or half day with all teachers. Orientation for new teachers is left to the principals of the individual schools. A few teachers recommended not only more orientation at the outset, but also built in check points during the year. One teacher said that new teachers would benefit from,

Not just a beginning of the year orientation, where you keep them on a couple of days and then feed them to the wolves. Bring new teachers back, maybe at midterm or maybe, on a quarterly basis, then say, 'okay, what kind of problems are you facing and let's take it from here.' I mean, like, act like you care about what is going on.

Another teacher offered a variation on that theme when she suggested that districts "offer them (new teachers) counseling services in which they can discuss the problems and insecurities they are encountering as a new teacher."

This type of support is especially important for teachers hesitant to ask for help. Teachers mentioned they were reluctant to initiate a discussion with their principal about their difficulties. They feared principals would view them as less than fully competent. Thus, they suggested that the district or school use structured ways to identify and resolve new teacher problems.

Mentoring

Establishing or upgrading a teacher mentoring program for new teachers is the fourth highest rated solution among teachers. Teachers in both high and low attrition districts consistently rank this solution in the top five ways of reducing new teacher attrition. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the two low attrition districts already have
a mentoring or "buddy" system. However, teachers in both districts felt that the system did not work as well as the administrators from those systems seemed to think, except for help with the paperwork required of teachers. Teachers in a high attrition district mentioned that the high school in a particularly difficult area also had a teacher mentoring program that they saw as positive.

An advantage of the mentoring system was that "you know exactly who to talk to." Another teacher mentioned the second advantage that occurs "if you have someone to ask without going to an administrator." As mentioned above, "sometimes a new teacher is 'scared' to ask because they do not want to look stupid." Another reason for a mentoring program that teachers mentioned is that principals often do not have time to help new teachers.

New teachers with mentors or "buddies" seemed to believe that the program would work better in reducing new teacher attrition if the district structured them differently. They cited the difficulty these mentor teachers had in handling their own responsibilities without worrying about the new teacher's problems. As one low attrition district teacher put it,

Because of low pay, a feeling of being overwhelmed by paperwork, interruptions, and discipline, many veteran teachers do not mentor new teachers. If there is no positive role models for new teachers, what kind of attitudes will be formed?

Based on new teachers' comments, districts and schools might better integrate mentoring program into the operation of the schools. They should, perhaps, make the mentoring program for veteran teachers something more than another task piled on top of other responsibilities they have. They should take care, as one administrator recommended, in picking mentors who have the personality and commitment to expend the effort. At the minimum, they should work it out so the mentor teacher and the new teacher share a planning period. On the other hand, another teacher believed the districts
ought to provide other times for mentor teachers to help new teachers, since the planning period is a time that the mentor teacher would need for his or her own work.

In addition, administrators might consider how the mentoring program fits into the climate and culture of the school. A school where teachers felt "part of a family" or "a team" would be more likely to have mentoring success than other schools. For instance, it might be particularly hard, without more fundamental changes in many schools, to make a mentoring program work in one high attrition district. In that district, many veteran teachers even felt animosity toward new teachers. For example, it would be hard to make a mentoring program work in the schools described by the teachers who said,

There is no teamwork among the teachers. They (experienced teachers) look at you at you like 'oh, you want us to do something that means more work?' (Another teacher) If you ask them to help you, they think you are crazy.

Teacher and Student Assignment Policies

To keep more new teachers, districts should consider altering their student and teacher assignment policies. Districts could assign new teachers fewer students, or they could avoid assigning new teachers the most difficult students.

Pupil/Teacher Ratio

New teachers ranked lowering pupil/teacher ratios, especially for new teachers as the third most likely way of keeping new teachers from leaving. Seventy-five percent of the teachers completing the questionnaires ranked this option in the top five solutions to the problem of new teacher attrition. This is consistent with Theobald's (1990) finding that the pupil/teacher ratio is related to teacher attrition.

Many teachers who commented on this solution stressed their preference that districts should lower pupil/teacher ratios for all teachers not just new teachers. One reason for this is potential for resentment in more experienced teachers if ratios were lowered just for new teachers. One teacher captured this sentiment by saying,
It might be pretty good for a first year teacher to have a reduced class size. But I know from some of the teachers I have worked with, ooh, that would cause a lot of resentment from the more experienced teachers. Because they would be going back, 'Well, if I had only 15 students, I would have a perfect class, too.' So the new teacher might experience rapport with her students and progress, but she'd be having to deal with the resentment.

Teachers and some administrators believe that lowering the pupil/teacher ratio would make it less likely that teachers would leave. That may be true, but in one high attrition district, the pupil/teacher ratio has been lowered in the most difficult area of the district, without obvious success in keeping teachers. Those teacher and administrator transfers that teachers mentioned within the district were away from the area with high discipline problems and lower pupil/teacher ratios.

**General Student Assignment**

District and school administrators could still increase the likelihood of success by new teachers, if they would assign new teachers to less challenging classes or reduce the number of problem students assigned to them. Despite considerable support for that idea in the teacher focus group discussions, teachers from high attrition districts ranked the solution next to last in questionnaire responses.

Comments in the focus group discussions with teachers help explain this seeming discrepancy. Many new teachers do not believe that new teachers deserve less difficult assignments, as the questionnaire option is worded. It is just that they do not believe they deserve the most difficult ones. Through district practice or union rule, districts or schools frequently assign new teachers the worst classes--the ones left over after more experienced teachers get their pick.

One solution, then, is to work out procedures where the new teacher is not left with the most difficult classes and students. In the unionized district, this would involve negotiating an agreement different than the provision of the current contract. In that
contract, the district must give a vacant teaching job to a qualified teacher with the most seniority who has bid for the job.

Besides not assigning new teachers to the worst classes, administrators should consider to what extent they assign "difficult" students to new teachers. One teacher called for administrators to avoid giving new teachers "known discipline problems." Another teacher said that to reduce here chances of leaving she would want "students who were not illiterate 16 or 17 year olds in 6th and 7th grades." Based on focus group discussion comments, administrators at least should avoid giving new teachers more than their share of such challenges.

**Special Education Student Assignment**

Administrators should also consider assigning fewer special education students to new teachers. At the worst, they should attempt to assign no more special education students to new teachers than they do to experienced teachers. Not only do they otherwise require special attention, but they may also be behavior problem students.

The previous chapter quoted one teacher as questioning how her school could expect her to teach four students requiring one-on-one attention, and still teach the rest of her class. On the other hand, many teachers believed that, instead of mainstreaming some of these students, districts should take them out of their classes completely. One high attrition district teacher seemed to be speaking for many when she said she wanted, "Quicker methods of getting a child into special classes, counselors to help with problems, and special schools for special students."

Another reason exists for administrators to be cautious in the assignment of special education students to new teachers. Teachers in two separate districts noted the problems of applying discipline to special education students because of federal restrictions. "Section 504" provisions limit disciplinary options for a classroom teacher or school when a special education child is disruptive under certain circumstances.
#### Working Conditions

Teacher ratings of the importance of improving working conditions varies considerably by district. In one high attrition district, teachers rated this factor third most important. In the other they rated it only ninth. As should be expected, the district ratings seemed to bear some relationship to how teachers and administrators perceive the quality of the actual physical working conditions and supply provision within the district. Administrators in the high attrition district where teachers did not rank this solution highly were very proud of their new facilities, and mentioned a supply budget for teachers. Administrators in the other high attrition district noted the lack of money in the district, including money for supplies.

Teachers made few comments about working conditions in the focus group discussions, except about the need for adequate supplies and fewer class interruptions. In a high attrition district, two teachers did complain of what sounded like deplorable physical plant conditions (broken urinals causing unhygienic situations, roaches in eating areas, etc.) in one school. Other teachers in that district were disgusted when they heard of those conditions and they seemed unrepresentative of the physical conditions in the district.

Consequently, few clues exist concerning improving working conditions as a solution to new teacher attrition. From what was said, fixing the problem where the situation is bad enough and providing resources for teaching appear to be helpful in keeping new teachers.

#### Principal/Teacher Relationship

The fifth and not the least important step that teachers discussed regarding improving conditions for success among new teachers involves improving the principal/teacher relationship. This solution emerged from the questionnaire ratings and discussions as an important one in reducing new teacher attrition. While teachers ranked
this solution in the second tier of solutions, teachers in three focus group discussions, including in the two high attrition districts, especially noted its importance. In all four districts, teachers and administrators alike understood the integral role of the principal in teachers' decisions to leave or stay. Principals who supported teachers and treated them with respect, not just in discipline matters, were the ones teachers valued most highly.

Teachers in high attrition districts were twice as likely to rate this solution in the top five as were teachers in low attrition districts (43% to 20%). Nevertheless, teachers in each set of districts cited principals who were noteworthy exceptions. Some teachers in low attrition districts were negative toward the support their principals provided. Conversely some teachers in high attrition districts were very complimentary of their principals. A few of these high attrition district teachers were almost gushing in the praise of their principals. They could not identify with the lack of principal support other district teachers cited. After praising her principal, one teacher noted, "The situation where I am right now . . . is about as perfect as you are going to get working in the public schools."

Teachers' attitudes toward teaching, and the likelihood they would leave, seemed to vary considerably based on the support and treatment they received from their principal. One high attrition district teacher's comment captures the principal's crucial role for many teachers.

Last year at this time, I was in hog heaven. It just took one change, one administrator change. Hey, if I could go find me a job over the Christmas holidays, I might not come back.

Teachers, particularly in one high attrition district, felt a good solution to new teacher attrition was for the central office and board to select better principals. As one put it, "Eliminate poor administrators. Hire good administrators." Many, including an administrator, believed that the selection process in this high attrition district was too politically influenced currently for the situation to get much better. One administrator called on the district to select principals based on ability instead of political connections
and give principals inservice training on how to better run their schools. Besides the political influences, many principals still have tenure as principals because of a "grandfather clause" in state law—a situation that reduces district latitude in improving principal/teacher relationships by replacing ineffective principals.

The discussion so far has focused on five ways teachers identified in questionnaires and focus group comments that district and school administrators can use to increase the chances of teachers being successful in their classrooms, besides helping improve discipline. These are to 1) improve new teacher orientation and training, 2) provide or enhance mentoring, 3) ensure fair teacher and student assignment policies, 4) improve working conditions, and 5) improve principal/teacher relationships. Success at these tasks, then, according to the comments by teachers and administrators could well lower the percentage of new teachers who leave the district.

COMPENSATION

Another major type of solution to new teacher attrition is to increase compensation. The top rated solution to new teacher attrition among all teachers completing the questionnaires is increasing salary. Among the high attrition teachers this solution is the second highest rated, following reducing student discipline problems. Focus group discussion and administrator interview comments provide some insight into the efficacy of this highly rated solution.

Many teachers and administrators believed that increasing salary is an important part of the solution to new teacher attrition, though teachers knew what the pay was when they started. Administrators particularly believe that higher salaries are helpful in recruiting. As one administrator observed, "The quickest way to recruit outstanding teachers is money." Another administrator pointed to the district's contributions to a comprehensive health plan as a good recruiting tool.
As generally valuable as teachers and administrators believe it to be, however, increasing salary does not appear as efficacious in all situations or for all teachers. It may even have an opposite effect in high attrition districts where other major problems exist. The discussion below briefly explores the increasing salary option for reducing new teacher attrition.

**Compensation for Stress**

A theme emerging frequently in discussions with teachers is the equity of paying teachers more for the hassle, stress, and frustration they face. Many teachers are assessing whether the salary is worth the aggravation, particularly in the high attrition districts. A teacher in one of those districts had the support of other teachers when, referring to actions of a principal, said, "I am willing to work for this (low) amount of money and you are going to hassle me over something that ain't worth the stress." Another teacher chimed in, "yeah, the money ain't worth the stress."

The issue is how much more money would be necessary to make it "worth the stress." For teachers with high frustration and stress, realistically there may not be enough money. (Bruno, 1986) One teacher frustrated by discipline problems is an example. She responded to the question about the likelihood of leaving teaching altogether by adding the category of 100% and adding "as soon as possible!" Her first four solutions all related to survival for her--reduce student discipline problems, provide lower pupil teacher ratios, develop more effective relationships between principal and teacher, and place new teachers in less difficult teaching positions. Her comments in the focus group were ones of desperation. It would be difficult to pay her enough to stay under the conditions she faced.

From teachers' comments, the higher salary solution to new teachers leaving would likely work best in districts without high teacher frustration, particularly frustration caused by discipline problems. Bruno (1986) found that it is difficult for a district to
provide enough "combat pay" to attract teachers to inner city schools. Similarly, from teacher comments it seems that the non rural high attrition district, especially, cannot provide teachers enough "combat pay" to keep them without improving other conditions. When one teacher in this district answered "salary" to a focus group question about the most important ways to keep teachers in the district, the rest of the teachers disagreed. One teacher, referring to severe discipline problems, said that paying her more would not help. "Then I'd be a crazy woman with money." Another said, "I'd leave the public schools to go to (a) private (school) for less money . . . that isn't the solution." Apparently for that high attrition district, higher salary is not the solution. It already is one of the higher paying districts in the state. This group response contrasts with the group response in the non rural low attrition district focus group discussion. When one teacher gave "more money" as an answer, teachers generally agreed. Thus, from the comments of teachers and administrators, increased salaries could be most effective in keeping teachers who are not too frustrated with their teaching situations. From the discussion in the next section, increased salary might also be more likely to be effective in keeping single teachers, particularly those who have other career options.

**Adequate Standard of Living**

Some teachers otherwise satisfied with their jobs just seem to need the money. From the comments, this conclusion seems to apply most to single teachers. Quite a few single young women commented that the salary level was not sufficient to support themselves at a reasonable level. Asked what the effects would be of raising salaries by $3,000, one female teacher stated, "I would stay. I am planning on leaving because of the money. That is the only reason I am planning on leaving." Another single teacher echoed her need for higher pay, "Increase salary so that I can afford a decent life without
depending on roommates." A third single teacher's comment captures some of the salary frustration felt by these single teachers,

I am single and for me to make my ends meet, and almost every other single teacher I know trying to make it on their own, has to work two jobs. The job is stressful enough without having to go and work another job and still keep up with all your paperwork. It gets degrading. I have a degree and have to work a minimum wage job (another teacher adds, "McDonald's") to have some money to go do something, if I ever get some free time.

From the observations of personnel directors and some teachers, it may be that single young women dissatisfied with their pay have a harder time finding higher paying alternatives than men have. Two personnel directors specifically noted that new male teachers are more likely to leave teaching for salary reasons than are female counterparts, because they have more opportunities to make higher wages in other occupations.

**Effects of Raising Salaries**

Thus, raising teacher salaries would appear to affect new teacher attrition in some districts more than others and some groups of teachers more than others. Those districts with higher levels of discipline problems or other frustrating problems for new teachers would seem to have a harder time using salary as a tool to keep teachers. Moreover, by raising salaries, districts might attract and keep more teachers with more career options, frequently male teachers. Based on previous studies, they may also include mathematics and science teachers (Guthrie and Zusman, 1982; Levin, 1985). Without addressing other problems causing teacher frustration, raising teacher salaries might even increase teacher attrition rates. These new teachers attracted by the higher salaries to the teaching profession might have more career options to explore when their frustration level becomes unacceptable.

The effects of raising salaries also may have some positive indirect effects for those teachers who do not have other viable options. It may reduce the sense of inequity of those teachers, usually single teachers, and create higher effort and lower absenteeism
These teachers, for instance, may not feel compelled to take second jobs or live with roommates.

**PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT**

Treating teachers professionally is a fourth major category of solutions. It is one that surfaced in the focus group discussions, and was not anticipated in the questionnaire design or focus group or administrator interview guide. To some extent, it is a catchall category in which every other solution could be placed. Teachers, either directly or in effect, were asking administrators to pay them as professionals, provide professional working conditions, treat them as professionals in the way that they support teachers in discipline matters, give them supplies like organizations would give their professional staff in any other profession, and so on.

But teachers' comments indicate professional treatment is more than that. It relates to the attitude that underlies how administrators treat teachers. It involves treating new teachers with respect, consideration, and appreciation. The superintendent of a low attrition district touched on it when he stated that principals need to appreciate teachers and encourage them to be innovative. Teachers grimaced at the lack of it when hearing of 1) an administrator who hid in the bushes to catch a teacher doing something wrong, and 2) a principal who told a teacher who expressed frustration that she had people waiting in line for the teacher's job. Besides steps already mentioned, districts with teacher attrition problems might undertake to provide new teachers with positive feedback and expressions of appreciation.

Teachers seem hungry for positive reinforcement for doing a good job, as teachers and administrators frequently indicated in all of the districts. Teachers in one high attrition district became animated when one teacher brought it up in the focus group discussion. As many teachers started talking simultaneously, the importance and relevance of appreciating them as professionals became obvious. The following brief
teacher conversation flurry about what administrators should do to keep new teachers went like this.

Make you feel wanted. Make me feel I am a valuable asset.

Make us feel like professionals, somehow.

We are told that we should give that student praise, but teachers never get praised—seldom get praised, but everyday you are supposed to say 'good job' to a student.

I don’t need it every day, but every now and then . . .

Every once and a while a pat on the back does wonders.

Somebody saying 'good job'.

How about the camaraderie of the faculty? . . . (Two others: "yeah.") (Administration should be in effect saying), 'You are part of our faculty. (Another teacher adds "family") We are taking you in and we appreciate your being here. You are part of our team.’ We don’t have a lot of that.

It's not just the principal and the vice-principal. It starts in the top. The 'top' have got to make you feel wanted. If the 'top' don't make you feel wanted, hey, its time to go.

Not just a number. Not, 'we got somebody else in line if you don’t want to be here.' (Another: "right.")

The effects of administrators showing appreciation for good work in what is a difficult situation for many new teachers may not only be to reduce new teacher attrition, as teachers suggest, but may also result in teachers trying harder to improve their performance (see Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990).

OVERVIEW OF SOLUTIONS

District and school leaders can take steps to keep more of the new teachers they hire. They should attend to student discipline problems, otherwise increase chances for teacher success, raise salaries, and treat teachers professionally.

Any district with significant discipline problems would be well advised to resolve them. The solution might include taking ownership of the problem at the district level. District leaders should be reluctant to interfere with specific disciplinary proceedings,
particularly before the normal administrative process has had a chance to deal with any parental concerns. Districts might craft a strong, district-wide discipline policy. If they already have one, they should ensure that it is clearly understood and consistently enforced. As a part of that policy, they should have district level discipline alternatives for those disruptive students needing more attention than teachers or schools can logically provide. Possibly more important, districts should ensure that schools also have well-defined and communicated discipline policies. They should also ensure that administrators strongly and consistently support teachers within the framework of those policies.

Although almost all of the discipline related discussion was oriented to immediate steps that districts and schools could take to help teachers survive, one administrator mentioned the other side of the coin. Districts can promote more effective teaching and learning strategies for students who would otherwise be discipline problems. Teachers did not address this type of solution in the focus groups particularly beyond their calling for alternative vocationally-related programs.

Besides improving student discipline, districts and schools should explore other ways of improving conditions for new teacher success. Teachers in the study seem to believe, by taking the following steps, districts make it more likely that new teachers will stay. The most important may be to ensure that schools have competent, supportive principals. For some new teachers, having an effective, caring principal was the difference between staying and leaving. Another is to provide more helpful new teacher orientation and training, specifically designed for them. A third is to establish or upgrade teacher mentoring programs. A final step is to assign new teachers classes and students no more difficult than those assigned more experienced teachers.

Raising teachers salaries is another type of solution. Based on teachers' responses, this is an important component of any strategy to reduce new teacher attrition.
However, districts with substantial disciplinary or other problems will likely find that raising salaries will not reduce new teacher attrition as it does in other districts. It might not reduce it at all if districts hire more teachers who can find other jobs more easily when their frustration level became unacceptable.

A final district and school solution, in a way summarizes much of what teachers, and many administrators, have said in the study. Districts and schools should treat teachers professionally. As teachers stated, districts should treat them with consideration, respect, and appreciation. They should make them "feel wanted"-- make each teacher feel like a "valuable asset" and part of a team instead of as an expendable part. Much can be done with few additional funds to make teachers "feel like professionals, somehow."

Teachers believe that teacher training institutions could also play a role in reducing new teacher attrition. Many teachers and a high attrition district personnel director stated that schools of education need to do much more to prepare prospective teachers properly for the "real world"--especially for handling discipline and dealing with parents. Knowing how to control a classroom of difficult students requires more than a two-hour lecture on discipline and a student teaching assignment to a "good little wonderful" suburban school.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Up to 70% of new teachers leave Louisiana school districts the first two years. More research is needed, but based on information currently available, a high percentage of these decisions to leave is voluntary. To have so high a percent of new teachers leaving is costly for their students, those teachers, and society. When teachers leave, society again incurs the administrative and professional costs of educating, recruiting, orienting, and training replacement teachers. Student learning is already affected by the frequent replacement of teachers and their relative inexperience. Many new teachers who leave teaching, and others, pay several financial and emotional costs, including those of stress and frustration. Moreover, these new teachers could have invested their money and time to prepare themselves for another, more satisfying career.

Thus, it is important to understand better what can be done to reduce attrition among new teachers. The study's purpose is to increase understanding primarily of what district and school leaders might do to reduce new teacher attrition from the district that hired them. To do that more effectively, it also seeks to understand the reasons for new teacher attrition in the state. It focuses on new teachers both because of their high attrition rate, but also because of the loss in potential years of service that occurs when they leave.

This chapter places the study's findings in perspective. It first reviews the study's most important findings regarding the reasons for new teacher attrition in Louisiana. Following that discussion, the chapter reviews the most important findings regarding solutions and their implications for school districts and others. It then presents a model that provides a way of viewing those reasons and solutions. To demonstrate the model's potential utility, the chapter applies the model to the four selected school districts in the
study. Finally, it addresses implications for new teacher attrition research and makes suggestions for further research.

**REASONS FOR NEW TEACHER ATTRITION**

The factor that explains the most variation in new teacher attrition rates is their degree of urbanization. How urban or rural a district is in Louisiana makes the most difference. Further district data analysis and teacher and administrator comments help explain why this might be and provide other insights into the reasons why teachers leave school districts.

**Urbanization**

Unlike research findings in other areas of the country, new teachers in Louisiana leave more rural districts at a faster rate than they leave more urban districts. Teachers' leaving behavior differences within categories of districts are even more revealing. The more "urban" of the urban districts, the less "rural" of the suburban districts, and more "rural" of the rural districts are all likely to lose teachers at a higher rate than other districts in their respective categories.

In urban and suburban districts, student related factors are important. Those more populated urban and suburban districts have greater percentages of 1) discipline problem students, 2) lower performing students, and/or 3) private school students. In rural districts, less well-populated districts experience the worst new teacher attrition. Those more "rural" of the rural districts also tend to pay lower beginning teachers' salaries.

**Most Important Reasons**

Teachers identified many reasons why new teachers left the districts that hired them. First among them in non rural areas is the problem of student discipline. This teacher response is consistent with district level findings in suburban and urban areas. However, even in rural areas, student discipline ranked a close second and was a major concern of teachers.
Inadequate principal support is another highly rated factor. Teachers’ concerns relate to inadequate and inconsistent student discipline support, but they relate to other problems as well. These include unfair student assignments, inadequate orientation and training, and lack of respect for new teachers. Teachers, especially in high attrition districts, also believe that central office leadership was also partially responsible for inadequate discipline support. An additional highly-rated factor is disillusionment with teaching. Teachers cited students who did not care and were "unteachable" as a major cause of disillusionment.

Other important factors include low salary, other job availability, and the quality of life of the teacher. These last three factors seem to operate differently than the others, and are treated differently in the new teacher attrition model presented below. While teachers highly rated low salary as a reason for new teacher attrition, the study discovered little, if any, effect of teachers' beginning salary on teachers' district leaving patterns. Low salary does, however, seem to play a role in the quality of teachers districts can hire. It is also a source of frustration for many teachers. Quality of life seemed also to make a difference in teachers staying. Those teachers who lived around family and who otherwise enjoyed living in the district were more likely to stay than were other teachers. Most teachers marked having an attractive job available as an important reason for new teacher attrition. However, they also suggested that teachers seldom looked for or seriously consider alternative jobs unless they were dissatisfied with teaching.

SOLUTIONS TO NEW TEACHER ATTRITION

Based on teacher and administrator comments and the characteristics of the four districts studied, district and school leaders can likely have an impact on their new teacher attrition. They should reduce student discipline problems, provide other support and conditions that increase the chances new teachers will be successful, raise salaries, and treat teachers professionally.
Teachers and administrators recommended short term solutions to support and protect new teachers. Based on their comments, leaders whose districts have significant discipline problems should take ownership of the problem at the district level. To do this, they should ensure that the district has a strong, clearly understood, consistently and vigorously enforced, district-wide discipline policy. Schools should have the same. The district should also have alternative placement opportunities for the most disruptive students. For the long term, districts and schools should promote more effective teaching and learning strategies for these and other students, including alternative vocationally-related programs.

Creating other conditions for new teacher success should also help reduce the number of new teachers lost. Many new teachers who leave have become discouraged and disillusioned about teaching, or may have become overwhelmed with the paperwork and other pressures. Teachers recommended the district ensure schools had competent, supportive principals, more helpful new teacher orientation and training, and effective teacher mentoring programs. Districts should also avoid assigning new teachers the most difficult classes and students.

Raising teachers salaries and ensuring that district and school leaders treat new teachers professionally are two other district steps that will likely make a difference. Teacher training institutions should do much more to prepare prospective teachers properly for the "real world" of difficult students and parents.

**DISTRICT NEW TEACHER ATTRITION MODEL**

The following model, displayed in Figure 6.1, may be useful in explaining or predicting the variance among school districts in the percent of new teachers who voluntarily leave their classrooms. In addition, it may be useful for education leaders interested in reducing such attrition. It utilizes the results of this study and that of other research, including that of Chapman (1984) and Dworkin (1987), about the reasons why
teachers choose to leave or stay, and steps that districts take that affect those decisions. It basically posits three categories, or questions, relating to new teacher attrition. Districts that score low in the first two categories and high in the third are those at the greatest risk of high levels of new teacher attrition.

**Figure 6.1: District New Teacher Attrition Model**

**Model Explanation**

Knowing the answers to the three questions posited in the model would help one make the judgment of how likely it is that teacher attrition would occur in that district. These questions, at the district level, are as follows.
To what extent do conditions exist that are necessary or useful for new teacher success?

How well are district teachers able to meet their personal or family needs?

How available to teachers are reasonable options for those who seek to leave?

For heuristic purposes, the model presents the questions in a simplified "yes/no" format. A district, therefore, that had 1) conditions in place for new teacher success, 2) had substantial numbers of teachers who had their personal and families' needs met, and 3) had few reasonable career options for teachers would be likely to have very low voluntary new teacher attrition. On the other hand, a district whose new teachers were likely to be unsuccessful, unhappy with how their personal needs were met, and had reasonable career options would likely be looking hard for new teachers to replace the substantial number who left.

The following discussion briefly addresses each of the three questions in the model. Immediately following, it examines how the model might apply to the four districts in the study to help explain their new teacher attrition experience.

**Conditions for Success**

It seems logical, and consistent with study findings, that districts that have conditions in place for new teacher classroom success are less likely to have problems keeping new teachers. This also seems consistent with research by Hafner and Owings (1991) that identified job satisfaction as a good predictor of teacher retention. Some districts have natural advantages for promoting new teacher success, such as in the ability, socialization, and motivation of students and parents. Districts with these advantages should be able, under this model, to keep teachers more effectively than other districts, all other factors being equal.

Whether or not districts have favorable conditions for teacher success naturally, they still have opportunities to take steps to increase or enhance the conditions for
success. Districts could undertake a variety of steps identified in the study that could well increase the chances that new teachers will be successful. Some of the steps may require additional resources, but others can be taken within current levels of resource support.

Based on this study, all four districts, but particularly the two high attrition districts, should consider the following steps. The most important steps likely relate to more aggressively and consistently dealing with student discipline problems. Those districts that have a more challenging student population might particularly be concerned with taking such steps to support the beginning teacher, such as altering student assignment practices to remove the extra burden put on the new teacher. Districts and principals can take other steps to create conditions for new teacher success. Other helpful steps involve improving or providing new teacher orientation, training, and mentoring. In addition, districts that improve on their likelihood of hiring able and committed teachers who are prepared for the "real world" also are creating conditions for new teacher success.

Thus, one could use the model to assess the conditions for new teacher success as part of the process of understanding or predicting a district's new teacher attrition rate. Presumably, a district with a student population conducive to success, and who provides quality orientation, training, and mentoring will be less likely to have high new teacher turnover. If that district also takes care not to assign new teachers the worst students, provides discipline problem support when and if needed, and provides adequate supplies and equipment, the conditions for new teacher success would be even higher and the likelihood of new teachers leaving would diminish.

**Personal and Family Needs**

As successful as teachers might be in those districts, however, they still might be likely to leave if their personal and family needs are not met. Teachers and administrators mentioned four different areas related to teachers' personal and family needs. Teachers
have needs for adequate salary, reasonable quality of life, professional treatment, and a collegial working environment. Most of these are within the districts' ability to affect. District school systems that pay a reasonable salary, hire locally raised teachers (with ties to the area), and treat their teachers with respect, consideration, and appreciation are more likely to retain those teachers. In addition, to help keep new teachers, districts should promote collegial school environments. Teachers said they wanted to feel that they are part of a "family" or part of a "team" in their schools. Based on teacher comments, treating teachers with respect and promoting collegial working relationships are especially needed in the high attrition districts.

Those districts that are safe, desirable places to live whose parents and community residents treat teachers well will likely have a lower rate of teachers leaving. School systems are unlikely to be able to do much about quality of life factors. They might, however, undertake steps to increase the likelihood that parents and others in the district appreciate teachers and treat them with respect and consideration.

Of course, districts in which teachers operate under conditions that promote success and have their personal and family needs met are likely to stay. Those districts that fall short on one or both of these first two categories, might still keep many of their new teachers, although under less than desirable circumstances, if those teachers do not have reasonable options to teaching.

**Reasonable Options**

The third question in the model, thus, relates to reasonable options. New teachers who want to leave teaching in the district need a way to do so. One option is not to work, if their families' financial situations allow. For instance, one discipline-frustrated teacher could quit when she got married. Other options for new teachers include teaching in another public or private school system, or beginning a different career.
Districts in which new teachers have fewer reasonable options should experience lower attrition. Districts, obviously have little control over alternative options. One effect they might have relates to raising salary. Those teachers earning low salaries may be more likely to feel that some jobs are reasonable options that they otherwise would not consider if they were making higher salaries. For example, one teacher in a focus group discussion from a lower paying district was considering working at a department store because of her financial needs.

**Application of the Model**

To display the potential utility of the model, this section contains the rating of the four selected districts on the three questions in the model. Table 6.1 provides the results of a "first cut" analysis based primarily on teacher and administrator comments and teacher ratings. It provides a subjective rating of the districts' standing with regard to the three questions (or categories) and then provides an assessment, based on the model, of what level of new teacher attrition should be expected based on the ratings.

**Table 6.1: Subjective Rating and Ranking of Elements in New Teacher Attrition Model for Four Selected Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of District</th>
<th>Conditions for Success</th>
<th>Personal and Family Needs Met</th>
<th>Reasonable Options Available</th>
<th>Likelihood of Attrition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District A</td>
<td>Very Low (4th)</td>
<td>Mod/Low (3rd)</td>
<td>Mod/Low (4th)</td>
<td>Very High (4th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Att</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District B</td>
<td>Low (3rd)</td>
<td>Low (4th)</td>
<td>Mod/High (2nd)</td>
<td>High (3rd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Att</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District C</td>
<td>Mod/Low (2nd)</td>
<td>High (2nd)</td>
<td>Mod/High (1st)</td>
<td>Low (2nd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Att</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District D</td>
<td>Moderate (1st)</td>
<td>High (1st)</td>
<td>Moderate (3rd)</td>
<td>Low (1st)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Att</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.1 also includes information on how each district is ranked on each of the three categories. To begin testing the model's utility, more objective analysis would be necessary based on more information and more well-defined methods for measuring each category.

As the Table shows, the model appears to have utility, if the highly subjective ratings are close to being accurate. In other words, the ratings for each of three categories seem to lead to a conclusion about attrition rates that fairly closely mirrors the actual attrition experience of the districts. In actual experience, District B has somewhat higher new teacher attrition than District A, unlike that predicted by the model.

**Implications of the Model**

This model has three major implications for school districts. Two implications are that they may need to work on 1) more than one facet of a category in the model, and 2) more than one category. For instance, a district that seeks to keep more new teachers may need to address other ways besides salary for teachers to meet their personal and family needs. Teachers indicated that they need respect and appreciation, and need to work in a professional, collegial environment. Districts might also step up efforts to recruit locally raised certified teachers, although they were attempting this already.

However, to do a good job of helping teachers meet their personal and family needs may not be enough. The district might also need to work to improve its rating on the first category of the model. That is, they may need to improve conditions that allow new teacher success. Districts need to identify their specific needs. However, based on teacher responses in the four districts, strongly and consistently supporting new teachers in student discipline problems is one step they should take. More leadership support in other matters, more effective orientation and training, and more equitable student assignments would be others they should consider.
A third model implication is that having a higher new teacher attrition rate does not necessarily mean that a district is doing a worse job than another district. Differences in new teacher attrition rates among districts may be partially explained by factors 1) over which school districts have little control or 2) about which they must take special efforts to overcome.

For instance, districts have little control over whether suitable career or other options are available to teachers. Some areas have more job opportunities. Other more economically blessed areas may have a higher percent of teachers with families that do not depend on those teachers' salaries. Having to hire "outsiders" because of shortages of locally raised certified teachers is another example. Moreover, other quality of life issues relating to recreation and entertainment, community services, and community safety issues are matters essentially beyond the influence of the school district. One reason the two low attrition districts have success in keeping teachers relates to their high rating on the quality of life factor.

Low parental support, poor discipline in the home, and inadequate community support for schools are examples of difficult problems that require special efforts by school district and school leaders to overcome. Providing more effective academic and community approaches to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students might be another example.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

The study uncovered some important patterns in new teacher attrition that have implications for research on new teacher attrition. These concern the development of the model, the effects of discipline, the high new teacher leaving rate in rural districts, the unexpectedly high leaving rate of male teachers, the effects of salary, and variations in school level teacher attrition experience. In addition, further research is needed that
utilizes data not available to this study, to understand more precisely the nature of new teacher attrition.

**Development of the Model**

As indicated earlier, to be useful for predicting district new teacher attrition, further development of the model is needed. Each of the categories or questions would have to be more fully developed, particularly the one concerning conditions for success in teaching. Moreover, based on this study's findings, the category ratings may need to be adjusted to apply differently for rural, suburban and urban districts. Student-related factors may need to be weighed more heavily for urban districts, for instance.

In addition an algorithm needs to be developed for converting ratings on the three categories of factors influencing new teacher attrition to the predicted teacher attrition rate. Various groups of teachers would likely be affected differently by factors in the three categories. Thus, differentiating the effects of these factors for various types of teachers is a logical step. Other studies, for instance, have shown that different subject matter specialty teachers have different attrition rates. (Mumane, 1987, Mumane, Singer, and Willett, 1989).

**Effects of Discipline**

Student discipline has a surprising amount of influence in new teacher attrition in Louisiana, based on teacher comments and questionnaire ratings. These results indicate the value of much more research in this area. How extensively do student discipline problems affect new teacher attrition in other districts besides the four selected? Are there teacher training programs that focus on handling student discipline problems in difficult areas? If so, are teachers trained in those programs less likely to leave teaching than teachers trained in other programs? To what extent do alternative placement programs for disruptive students reduce student discipline problems and decrease new teacher attrition? To what extent do different approaches and levels of support by school principals toward
student discipline affect new teacher leaving? To what extent can a district or school reduce discipline problems and thus, new teacher leaving by promoting programs which are more well suited to the students' needs? This is the "other side of the coin" mentioned above. These are just a few of the discipline-related questions arising from the study.

The sense one receives from the study is that student discipline is particularly a problem when the teachers are of a different race and/or socio-economic background than the students. The problem of "outsiders" coming in to teach may be that they are not familiar with the culture. An outsider might even be one from another part of the district, using this type of analysis. Some teachers in the study had a problem with their veteran colleagues "yelling" at the children, for instance. It may be that this approach is the one to which the children respond because of their home environment.

The discipline problem for teachers becomes much more significant given the "uncoupled" nature of teaching. Unlike other professional organizations, where the rookie is likely to have considerable support during the first year or so, the norms of teaching are such that each teacher is expected to operate somewhat independently. This study identified teachers' feelings that they did not want to look incompetent in front of their principals or even colleagues, by asking for help.

Thus, it may be that districts and schools need to do more to establish regular expectations and mechanisms whereby new teachers receive help without a stigma being attached to it. Either opportunities could be provided for teachers to ask for help or district or school might routinely provide the help unless it is not specifically needed. Those districts that do so may be found to be among the ones with the lower new teacher attrition.

**High New Teacher Attrition in Rural Districts**

It is also worth exploring further why the more rural of Louisiana's school districts have the higher new teacher attrition. This is different from the pattern found in
other parts of the nation (Haberman, 1987; Berry, 1985). It is only in the non rural
districts where the pattern in Louisiana is as previous research might predict. Moreover,
why do the more rural of the "rural" districts have higher new teacher attrition?

Louisiana's very high district new teacher attrition rates are made worse by its rural districts' difficulties in keeping new teachers. Instead of rural districts lowering the average new teacher attrition rate as they do in other parts of the country, they cause it to go higher. Put another way, if the state's rural districts could reduce their new teacher attrition to what other rural areas' experience, the state district average attrition rate would go down substantially.

More in-depth study is needed to discover the reasons for and solutions to such high attrition in many rural Louisiana districts. Are there reasons the less populated rural districts have higher attrition? The study noted two factors affecting new teacher attrition in the rural, as well as the non rural, set of districts in the study. These are the attractiveness of living in the district and insufficient numbers of available, locally-raised certified teachers. It would be interesting to know how prevalent these factors are in other rural high versus low attrition districts?

An administrator commented that a shortage of funds prevented the high attrition rural district from giving teachers a supply budget. Moreover, the study found that the more rural of the rural districts paid lower teacher salaries. This raises the question of how financially capable are rural districts to 1) provide conditions for success for new teachers and to 2) help teachers meet their personal and families' needs. For instance, rural districts with a high level of discipline problems might not be able to fund the creation of the alternative placement opportunities for unruly children.

Another interesting research question might be to find out if there is something about rural Louisiana that is different from other parts of rural America that might explain their differences in attrition. Possibly cultural, socio-economic or racial
factors are at play that are different from those affecting other rural areas. Lomotey and Swanson (1989), for instance, point out that the vast majority of non-metropolitan African-American and Hispanic residents live in the South and Southwest. Moreover, they note that the "functional illiteracy rate for non-metropolitan African-Americans is nearly three times that of metropolitan African-Americans." (p. 440) Research might also show that other deep South rural areas share the same levels of new teacher attrition and the same reasons for such attrition.

Higher Male New Teacher Attrition Rates

Previous research has documented that female teachers tend to leave the teaching profession at a higher rate than do male teachers (Rickman and Parker, 1990; Heyns, 1988; Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1988, Theobald, 1990, Murnane, 1987).

Surprisingly, this study finds that new male teachers in Louisiana leave at a higher rate than new female teachers. Moreover, young, new male teachers leave at a faster rate than young, new female teachers. Further study would be helpful to help explain why Louisiana is different in this regard.

District administrators offered one possible explanation. They observed that alternative, higher-paying jobs were more available to male than female teachers. It is possible that the difference in job availability between male and female teachers is more pronounced in this state than in other states. It also may be possible that since Louisiana is such a poor state, that female teachers are more dependent on their paychecks to provide adequate family resources. They, thus, may be less likely than teachers in more prosperous states to leave teaching to raise families.

Effects of Salary on New Teacher Attrition

Prior studies (e.g., Murnane, Singer, and Willett, 1989) have shown that salary levels make a difference in leaving decisions of new teachers. Yet this study found almost no relationship in Louisiana between new teacher attrition and district beginning
salary. This is despite the high rating that teachers in the four districts gave inadequate salary as a reason for leaving. Further research and analysis would be useful to learn the reason for these inconsistent results.

Based on the experience of the four districts in the study, it may be that other factors mask the effects of beginning salary. Specifically, it may be that other factors, like discipline problems, override salary effects. Student discipline problems certainly appears to be one of those factors. For instance, one of the two high attrition districts in the study is also the one with the highest salary and the most severe discipline problems. It could also be that how the salary level of teachers compares to other salaries in the district may be more important than just the teachers' salary level. It may be also, as one administrator seems to believe, that relative differences in salary among districts affect new teachers' initial decisions about where they start to teach more than they affect decisions to move to another district.

School Level Analysis

Another area where additional research would be useful relates to understanding better the variation in school level teacher attrition. It is entirely reasonable to assume that a closer relationship would be found with many of the same variables at the school building level. For instance, teachers logically would be more affected by such factors as student discipline and performance at the school in which they taught than they would for such factors district-wide. In addition, school level data would be useful since the size of school was found to make a difference in teacher attrition.

Various teachers commented that some schools were much different than the pattern for the district as a whole. Low attrition schools were identified in high attrition districts and high attrition schools were mentioned in low attrition districts. Two explanations were advanced by teachers. One is the quality and support of the principal. Teachers rated inadequate support by the principal as a major factor, particularly in a
district with high discipline problems. It may be that the principal is important primarily because of new teachers' needs for discipline and other survival support from the school in the first few years (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990).

The other explanation is related to the quality of parenting in the part of the district in which some schools were located. Teachers viewed unsupportive, and even highly critical parents as being a significant reason for new teachers in some schools to leave. That reason is in addition to teachers' concerns about lack of discipline in the home.

An interesting study would be why some schools in the most difficult areas of districts have lower new teacher attrition rates than do similar schools in those same areas. Is principal support as significant a factor as this study would seem to show? If it is, specifically what form does that support take? Are there factors other than principal support that make a difference? Do site based management schools experience lower attrition?

**Additional Analysis of Reasons for New Teacher Attrition**

It became apparent in preparing for the study that data beyond the scope of this study would likely be very useful for future quantitative analysis. The most important of this data was that related to grade level of students taught, subject matter taught, race of teachers, and type of certification held. It would seem logical that attrition would be related in some fashion to each of these variables. Research cited in the second chapter bears much of this out. Effects of salary on mathematics and science teachers, for instance, was found to be different than for teachers in other subject matter areas. Moreover, high school teachers are more likely to leave than are elementary school teachers.

The race of the teacher is also very important. While this study utilized district level teacher race data, because of the way that data is collected in Louisiana, it could not analyze such data at the individual teacher level. Nor could it determine at the district level
the race of the new teachers. As was cited in the previous chapter, differences in teacher attrition between the races could be expected. Moreover, race data of individual new teachers could be utilized in conjunction with race data for teachers and students in the schools in which they teach as another potential explanatory factor. Teachers were found less likely to leave if they taught in schools whose majority teacher and student population were of the same race.

Other types of information were not available for this study but would be useful for the future. Information about the teachers' family incomes, structures, and levels of academic performance would be useful to gain a more complete understanding of factors relating to why some teachers leave or move and others do not.

Finally, further analysis of any differential effects of various reasons for new teacher attrition and the likelihood of success of various solutions is needed for movers versus leavers. It is possible that those teachers who move to other districts are affected differently by the factors examined in this study than are teachers who leave teaching altogether.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

A few concluding observations about the surprisingly serious new teacher attrition problem in Louisiana seem appropriate. Little reason was uncovered to believe that the problem, left unchecked, will improve. All indications are that it will get worse. Societal problems are increasing and the public school systems are left to deal with increasingly difficult to teach children and more frequent and severe discipline problems.

To keep more new teachers, school district and school leaders need to protect and support them more effectively in their beginning years. From this standpoint, mitigating high new teacher attrition appears to be an entirely solvable problem for most districts who decide to make this a priority. This study has identified many steps that districts could adopt as part of their package that likely will reduce new teacher attrition. Based
on this study, it is unlikely that districts will have one easy solution— one “magic bullet.” Rather the solution is likely to involve a combination of steps the district should take. These are steps for districts and schools to prepare, assign, show respect, compensate, protect, and support new teachers more effectively.

As part of that process of examining potential solutions, district leaders should consider whose responsibility is it to take care of the problems under consideration. For instance, is handling disruptive and mainstreamed children primarily the responsibility of the teacher? If it is, how much responsibility does the principal and the central office have to provide greater support? Some states, districts and schools may unreasonably pass on to teachers the full brunt of various societal and governmental pressures without providing necessary resources for them to be successful.

Solutions to protect and support new teachers are not the keys to reducing new teacher attrition by themselves. They must be combined with other steps that more effectively attack the root of the problems and help students. “Control” may be necessary, but make possible, interest, excite, involve, and engross are ultimately the more important goals. These steps are the “other side of the coin” that need to be addressed, as one administrator noted.

Another observation is that better communication between district leaders and teachers may be needed. Leaders should not assume that they adequately understand the feelings and attitudes of their teachers, nor should they assume that teachers adequately understand theirs. In one district particularly, the comments made by the administrators and those made by teachers were remarkable in their differences. It was as if the teachers and administrators were from different districts.

Thus, to attack their new teacher attrition problem most successfully, district leaders may need to initiate steps to understand better the teachers’ perspectives on problems new teachers face. Moreover, teachers made many valuable comments in the
focus groups that they might not have been able to make to administrators directly. Administrators should adopt a way of considering problems and solutions that would allow such input.

On another point, while this study is directed to the district level, its results have ramifications for the state with regard to new teacher attrition. How the state can best further increased new teacher retention deserves further exploration. Questions regarding equitable funding, teacher training and certification, and “top down” requirements that may currently make matters worse should all be addressed. For instance, the state might explore whether poor school districts have the financial capacity to create any needed alternative placement opportunities for disruptive students.

Finally, district leaders need to keep the goal of reducing new teacher attrition in some kind of perspective. Policy makers frequently focus on one problem and, in the process, exacerbate others. A more central problem concerns how district leaders can best promote learning and education success in its students. The assumption is that high turnover among new teachers frustrates that goal. While that assumption seems reasonable, district leaders attempting to solve the serious new teacher attrition problem in many of their school systems should keep in mind the broader problem definition.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: CLASSIFICATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics for parishes and municipalities in Louisiana, school districts have been classified as "urban," "suburban," or "rural" as follows based on the methodology described in Chapter 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bossier</td>
<td>East Carroll</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caddo</td>
<td>Jefferson Davis</td>
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<td>Calcasieu</td>
<td>Lafourche</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Baton Rouge</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
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<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Madison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>Plaquemines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orleans</td>
<td>St. John the Baptist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ouchita</td>
<td>St. Tammany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapides</td>
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<td>St. Bernard</td>
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<td>St. Charles</td>
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<td>Terrebonne</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
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<td>Acadia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
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<td>Ascension</td>
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<td>Assumption</td>
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<td>Avoyelles</td>
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<td>Bienville</td>
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<td>East Feliciana</td>
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<td>Union</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
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<td>Webster</td>
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<td>West Baton Rouge</td>
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<td>West Carroll</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Feliciana</td>
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<td>Winn</td>
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To: Focus Group Participants

From: Carl Frantz

Re: New Teacher Attrition Study Questionnaire

Date:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that seeks information about how school districts can retain more of those relatively new teachers who would otherwise leave teaching or move to teaching positions in other districts. As you may know, you and the other participants from your district in the study were randomly selected from those who began public school teaching in your district in 1991.

We would appreciate your taking the few minutes necessary to respond to the items in the attached questionnaire. The responses from you and the other selected teachers in your district will be used to prepare for the focus group discussion with you and other teachers in your district, and as another source of information for arriving at study conclusions. All of your responses will be held strictly confidential and will not be used in any way that can identify you as the respondent.

Please mail your completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope as soon as possible.
New Teacher Attrition Study: Factors and Solutions
Teacher Questionnaire

Factors Relating to New Teacher Attrition

I. Please rank the five factors below that most influence relatively new teachers' decisions to leave teaching or move to a school outside of the district's public school system. Mark the most important factor as "1", the second most important as "2", etc.

- Another job was available to them which was more attractive.
- Supplies and/or equipment were inadequate to teach properly.
- They questioned their ability to be effective in teaching assigned students.
- Salary was too low.
- They became "disillusioned" with teaching.
- Home responsibilities prevented them from teaching.
- Maintaining discipline in the classroom or school was too much of a problem.
- They believed the leadership at the school did not support them adequately.
- They felt they did not have enough latitude in how they taught their classes.
- Their families decided to move to another location.
- They believed that teachers had inadequate respect and support from the community.
- They became "burned out" with teaching.
- They were concerned about their personal safety on campus.
- They were frustrated with paperwork and classroom interruptions.
- They felt parents are too critical or non-supportive.

II. Please list any other factors that feel are important in influencing teachers to leave teaching or to teach in a school outside of the district's public school system.

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________
Solutions to New Teacher Attrition

III. Please rank the five potential solutions below that are most likely to have a significant effect in persuading a greater number of new teachers to stay in the district's classrooms. Rank the most likely as “1,” the next most likely as “2,” etc.

_____ Reduce the interruptions to teaching.
_____ Increase salary.
_____ Give teachers more say-so in running the school.
_____ Establish or upgrade a teacher mentoring program for new teachers.
_____ Develop increased community support and respect for teachers.
_____ Establish measures to reduce student discipline problems.
_____ Provide lower pupil teacher ratios, especially for new teachers.
_____ Develop more effective relationships between the principal and teachers, especially new teachers.
_____ Place new teachers in the less difficult teaching assignments.
_____ Provide more effective university preservice training in teacher training programs.
_____ Improve working conditions generally.
_____ Make the job flexible enough to allow mothers with small children to teach while still meeting home responsibilities.
_____ Provide additional support for dealing with “mainstreamed” special education students.

IV. List other solutions that you feel might be effective in influencing teachers to stay in teaching in the district.

1. _________________________________________________________________
2. _________________________________________________________________
3. _________________________________________________________________

V. Based on what you know now, what would you say is your likelihood of leaving K-12 teaching altogether within the next three years? Please check the response which most closely reflects your answer.

_____ 90%   _____ 75%    _____ 50%    _____ 25%    _____ 10%
VI. Based on what you know now, what would you say is your likelihood of aggressively seeking a K-12 position in another district or state or in a private school within the next three years? Please check the response which most closely reflects your answer.

_____ 90%  _____ 75%  _____ 50%  _____ 25%  _____ 10%

VII. What could your district or your school do, if anything, which would substantially increase the likelihood that you would stay? If the likelihood of your staying is already high, what could the district do which would substantially increase the likelihood that others would stay whom you know who might otherwise leave or move to another district?

1.__________________________________________________________________________

2.__________________________________________________________________________

VIII. What policy steps has your school district or school taken, if any, which have substantially increased or decreased your likelihood of staying?

1.__________________________________________________________________________

2.__________________________________________________________________________

3.__________________________________________________________________________

IX. If there are any other comments that you would like to add about reasons for, or solutions to, new teacher attrition in your district or the state, please do so here.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Background

X. For each category please circle response:

Sex:  M  F

Ethnicity: Black, White, Hispanic, Other (specify) ____________

Age: 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-50, over 50

Teach. Level: Elementary, Middle/Junior High, High (circle only one)

XI. Have you taught in a full time K-12 position prior to 1991-92? Yes No

XII. If the answer to the previous question is "Yes", please identify the type of school, state(s), and years of your full-time teaching experience prior to 1991-92.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Yrs Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private</td>
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(Please use back of page if more space is needed.)
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Welcome and thank you all for coming this afternoon and for completing your questionnaires. As you know from previous correspondence, our purpose today is to discuss the factors which affect why new teachers leave, and more importantly what school districts and schools can do that would be most successful in keeping new teachers in the classroom. My name is Carl Frantz from LSU. Assisting me today is

This is one of four discussions with teachers in different districts all on the same topic. You have been randomly selected from those teachers hired in your district in 1991. We are particularly interested in talking with you because you are relatively new teachers yourselves and can offer an understanding that would be hard to find otherwise.

Before we start, let me emphasize a few points. First, there are no right or wrong answers here. We want to know what you think. Second, we will treat any records of this conversation as strictly confidential. Moreover, any reports we write will not reveal any teacher's identity. We are taping the session so we do not miss any of your comments, so please speak up. Also, we ask you to speak one at a time so the group can receive the benefit of your thoughts. Please feel free to make negative comments as well as positive ones. We will receive the full benefit of this session only if everyone is completely candid.

This session will last an hour and a half. We will not be taking a break but please feel free to leave the table quietly to grab a cup of coffee or a soft drink or use the restroom.

1 Please think back to those new teachers you know in your school district who left teaching in their first two or three years. Aside from pregnancy or a spouse taking another job out of the district, what do you feel are the major reasons new teachers leave the classroom in your district? What needs to happen to cause teachers whom you know to make the decision to leave teaching or move to another teaching position outside of the public schools in your district?

(Follow-up) How do you think those teachers who left generally felt about their teaching experience?

(Follow-up) If you know teachers who left for other teaching positions outside of the district, what reasons do you feel make the most difference for leaving teaching altogether than for moving to another teaching position? Are there differences?

2 To what extent do you feel that teachers who leave the classroom have other jobs lined up or other plans like staying home with the family when they decide to leave?

3 In this parish, what policies and administrative decisions have made it more likely that new teachers might leave?
4 In this parish, what policies and administrative decisions have made it less likely that new teachers might leave?

5 If you were advising the school board and the superintendent concerning the problem of new teacher attrition, what advice would you give them? What are the most important policies or administrative steps they could take to convince new teachers to stay who might otherwise leave?

(Follow-up) We noticed in your responses that ________________ was listed by many of you as very important in addressing the new teacher attrition problem. Why do you feel that this factor was rated as being so important?

(Follow-up) Another important solution that many of you listed was ____________. Why is that? What can you tell us about why that solution was suggested and more specifically what you would recommend?

6 In our research, we have discovered that this parish is higher/lower than most of the rest of the parishes in new teacher attrition. Are there factors other than what we have talked about so far that might explain that difference?

7 If there are any other comments that you would like to add about new teacher attrition in your district or the state, please do so now.
APPENDIX D: QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

In this discussion, we are particularly interested in talking about new teachers--those with two or fewer years of experience when hired. Unless the context of the question would suggest otherwise, the questions refer specifically to these teachers' decisions to stay, move, or leave within two years after hiring.

1 Hiring Procedures and Criteria

1 [Personnel Director questions] Who decides which teachers to hire? What other individuals play a major role in the hiring process? What roles do they play?

2 [Personnel Director questions] When you are filling vacant classroom teaching positions, what criteria do you use in hiring? What type of teachers are you looking for? In other words describe the ideal teacher candidate? the ideal new teacher candidate?

1.2.1 How much weight in the hiring process is placed on the fact that a person is certified? Under what conditions would you hire a non-certified teacher over one who is certified?

1.2.2 What percent of teachers you hired are fully certified? What percent of newly hired teachers are certified for the subject matter they are teaching? This is just a ballpark estimate we are looking for here.

1.2.3 How important is previous experience? What percent of those you hire would you say are teachers who have taught previously?

1.2.4 When you hire, what are the "intangibles" that you look for in a new teacher--those qualities that are beyond formal qualifications?

3 [Personnel Director questions] When you do your hiring, how many qualified people do you have for the positions you are filling? Do you feel you have many qualified candidates and the job is deciding from among them?

4 [Personnel Director questions] How well do you compete with the surrounding districts for teachers to fill your vacancies? Do you believe that you have the pick of the crop or generally do you think you have the leftovers, or somewhere in between? Why do you think that it is that you are (more competitive, less competitive or about the same) as your surrounding districts?

2 Reasons Teacher Leave

1 Would you please look at this list of potential factors affecting why teachers leave? Do you consider these or any other factors the most important reasons why new teachers leave classroom teaching in your district for more than a year?
2.1.1 Do any conditions in the district make it harder or make it easier to keep new teachers?

2.1.2 Does your district have specific policies or administrative approaches that make it harder or which make it easier to keep new teachers?

2 (Follow Up) Your district has higher/lower than average new teacher attrition compared to other districts. Why do you think your new teacher attrition is worse/better than other districts?

3 Steps to Keep Teachers in the District

1 Would you please look at this list of potential solutions to new teacher attrition? Describe any of these steps or any other steps you have taken which likely improves your new teacher attrition rate? When you hire new teachers, does your district take specific steps to promote their success like special in-service training or special mentoring programs? If so, please describe these steps. In your judgement, how well do they work?

2 What other policies or administrative steps would you like your district to take which you feel will increase the likelihood that new teachers will stay?

3 Based on your experience, what advice would you give Superintendents/Board members in other school districts who are interested in reducing their new teacher attrition? What "package of steps" would you recommend?
APPENDIX E: COMPARISON OF COMMENTS AMONG DISTRICTS

The following notes concerning reasons for new teachers leaving and potentially effective solutions to the new teacher attrition problem were taken to compare the four districts in the study. They are based primarily on the comments of teachers in the focus group discussions for each of the districts.

### REASONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT A (High Attrition)</th>
<th>DISTRICT D (Low Attrition)</th>
<th>DISTRICT B (High Attrition)</th>
<th>DISTRICT C (Low Attrition)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discipline</td>
<td>1. Lack of control of students.</td>
<td>1. Discipline</td>
<td>1. Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. Lack of administrative support; inconsistency of discipline</td>
<td>1a. Classroom management is problem for new teachers--stressful. But district has taken ownership of problem for most part.</td>
<td>1a. Inconsistency of discipline</td>
<td>1a. University classes do not prepare you for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. School Board micro-management, principal selection and expectations, and pressure on principals</td>
<td>1b. New teachers given worst assignments.--especially first year.</td>
<td>1b. Principals worried about how suspensions look on paper.</td>
<td>1b. New teachers given worst assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c. [Teachers assigned ownership of problem]</td>
<td>[Supt took ownership of problem.]</td>
<td>1c. Teachers blamed for the discipline problem.</td>
<td>1c. Class sizes too great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d. Poor teacher training and preparation.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1d. Teachers are not prepared to control discipline.</td>
<td>1d. Need better support from principal and asst. principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher placement</td>
<td>2. Salary - particularly for men, maybe single parent.</td>
<td>2. Parents are critical, not supportive; low expectations; teachers have to do their job.</td>
<td>2. New teachers given worst assignments in schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Student assignment including mainstreaming.</td>
<td>3. Dissillusionment cannot make a difference with kids. Difficult to motivate kids</td>
<td>3. Disrespect by administrators for first year teachers.</td>
<td>3. Paperwork is a problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Friction with other teachers.</td>
<td>4. Little in-service training for new teachers.</td>
<td>4. Orientation, help for new teachers is inadequate.</td>
<td>4. School board involvement in school level decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. General Frustration and stress.</td>
<td>5. Stress from teacher evaluations done by district.</td>
<td>5. Salary not enough for aggravation of the job.</td>
<td>5. Parents control the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Little inservice training.</td>
<td>6. Teachers grew up in the area and are less likely to leave</td>
<td>6. Many teachers from out of the district. Area is not desirable for non-natives.</td>
<td>Teachers are from area. District is among highest paying in the area.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## SOLUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT A</th>
<th>DISTRICT D</th>
<th>DISTRICT B</th>
<th>DISTRICT C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(High Attrition)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Low Attrition)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(High Attrition)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Low Attrition)</strong></td>
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</table>

1. Principals support teachers in discipline
   1a. Develop solid parish wide policy on discipline and enforce it.
   1b. Don't look down on schools with high suspension rates.

2. Get rid of bad teachers, reward and praise good ones.
3. Reduce politics in bureaucracy, improve selection of principals, school board support administrators
4. Encourage mentoring.
5. Give teachers better assignments.

### DISTRICT D
1. 2nd choice: Provide more parental support esp on discipline.
   1a. Reduce procedures before disciplinary action taken
   1b. Be consistent in discipline

2. Increase salary.
   2. Provide more money

3. Less paperwork, fewer interruptions
4. School Board not side with parents; let teachers teach.
5. Provide help for teachers first day--school level responsibility.

### DISTRICT B
1. Stress discipline
   1a. Don't worry about how suspensions and expulsions look on paper.
   1b. Be consistent in discipline

2. Provide more money
3. Prepare teachers better for difficulties. (discipline)
4. Provide peer teachers, team teaching.
5. Provide orientation program for new teachers; midterm review and help.

### DISTRICT C
1. Consistency of discipline
   1a. Better discipline

2. Inservice training program
3. Lower pupil teacher ratio
4. Build confidence of new teacher. Principal take time to see how doing.
5. Provide materials and supplies.
6. Hire teachers better prepared to teach, and provide in-service training.

6. Make teacher evaluations more positive instead of negative.

6. Don't assign new teachers known discipline problems.

6. Increase salaries.

7. Be more proactive instead of reactive.

7. Make me feel like a valued professional.

7. More innovation, cooperative lesson plans.

8. Lower pupil teacher ratio.

9. Provide vocational school option.
VITA

Mr. Frantz is currently the Associate Director of the Louisiana Education Policy Research Center at Louisiana State University. His previous academic experience involved serving on the faculty of the Department of Public Administration at Southern University for two years.

Prior to working in academia, Mr. Frantz served for twenty years in policy research positions in three different legislatures. He was the chief policy assistant to the Ohio Speaker of the House before being hired to direct the policy research office for the Connecticut General Assembly. After eleven years in that position, he became Executive Director of the bill drafting and research office for the Louisiana House of Representatives.

Mr. Frantz has served on various national and state level committees. Two of the most notable were as co-chairman of a 110 member Education Task Force of the National Conference of State Legislatures and as a member of the Executive Committee of NCSL. In addition to these professional responsibilities, Mr. Frantz has been a speaker and a consultant for various groups in different states on numerous topics concerning legislative staffing, knowledge utilization, and dropout prevention.

He is receiving his Ph.D. in Education with a minor in Political Science from Louisiana State University. He previously had obtained a Masters Degree in Political Science from Ohio State University and a Bachelors Degree in Education from Emporia State University.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Carl D. Frantz

Major Field: Education

Title of Dissertation: New Teacher Attrition: The Case of Louisiana

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

March 23, 1994