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TEACHER RETENTION POLICY COHERENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES ACROSS FEDERAL, STATE, AND DIVISION LEVELS

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A report by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC)

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is part of the MERC Teacher Retention study, a research-practice partnership initiative designed to identify patterns of teacher retention in the MERC region and to determine the school and system-level factors driving them. The study examines policies and programs relevant to teacher retention, and includes evaluation of existing policies and initiatives to determine efficacy and cost benefit.

As part of this larger study, this report provides an overview of federal, state, and regional policies and practices relevant to teacher retention. Using key informant interviews and document analysis, the report addresses the following research questions: *What teacher retention policies exist at the federal, state, and local levels? How are these policies structured at the state level and local levels? How do teacher retention policies vary across MERC divisions?* Following the findings, the report presents recommendations for policy and practice.

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A report by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium

Established in 1991 as a partnership between Richmond-area school divisions and Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education, the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium leads research that addresses enduring and emerging issues in PK12 education with the goal of informing policy, building the professional knowledge and skills of key stakeholders, contributing to the body of scholarly knowledge, and ultimately impacting outcomes relevant to students, schools, and communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Background on This Report

In the spring of 2018, the Policy and Planning Council of the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC) commissioned a study on teacher retention. The research team sought to provide insights into the phenomenon of teacher retention and practical recommendations for policy and practice. The study was designed with two primary components. The first component identified patterns of teacher retention in the MERC region and the school and system-level factors driving them. This mixed-methods component included reviews of the literature, survey research methods, and secondary data analysis. The second component was a teacher retention policy analysis and evaluation.

This report addresses component two by providing an overview of federal, state and regional policies and programs relevant to teacher retention. This work was guided by the following research questions:

1. What teacher retention policies exist at the federal, state, and local levels?
2. How are these policies structured at the state level and local levels?
3. How do teacher retention policies vary across MERC divisions?

Using a naturalistic design, the research team collected data from document analysis as well as structured interviews with key stakeholders to identify teacher retention policies at multiple levels of the educational policy ecosystem. The particular focus on policies in the MERC school divisions allowed for in-depth findings across six geographically diverse school divisions. Findings are transferable to multiple contexts as MERC divisions represent urban, suburban, and rural geographies as well as divisions of varying size (e.g., large, medium, small).

The report is organized in four parts. First, in this introductory section, we provide a brief review of the literature on teacher retention and specifically, why teacher retention is an important policy issue. The second part of the report describes our research methods, followed by a presentation of our findings with respect to the MERC school divisions. In this part, there are aggregate and division-level summaries of the policies and initiatives aimed at teacher retention. The final section of this report offers conclusions and recommendations for teacher retention policy moving forward.

WHY TEACHER RETENTION MATTERS FROM A POLICY PERSPECTIVE

In 2017, then Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe appointed a committee to examine Virginia's teacher shortages. In their report, the committee wrote the following:

Reversing the trend in teacher shortages is essential for the Commonwealth's future economic growth and prosperity. The education and training of a state's workforce is the top factor that companies consider when choosing where to locate or expand. Without quality teachers in every classroom, an increasing number of Virginians will be unprepared to succeed in the workforce or to pursue the postsecondary educational opportunities that are required to fill most jobs of tomorrow. Without a work-ready labor pool, the Commonwealth's ability to retain and attract businesses will be severely compromised.¹

The teacher shortage problem is not just a Virginia problem,² nor is it a new problem.³ Over the last few years, there have been increases in subject area teaching vacancies across the U.S. as well as declining enrollments in teacher preparation programs. In March of 2019, the [Economic Policy Institute \(EPI\)](#)⁴ issued the first report in a series examining the magnitude of the teacher shortage. Based on their analysis of existing data and information, they concluded that the teacher shortage problem “is even more acute than currently estimated, with high-poverty schools suffering the most from the shortage of credentialed teachers.”

There are a number of reasons for this shortage, ranging from meager salaries to difficult working conditions. **And, the teacher shortage problem is not just the result of not replacing retired teachers or low enrollments in teacher preparation programs; it is also the result of teachers leaving the profession, particularly at early stages of their careers.** Therefore, in addition to trying to increase the supply of new teachers, there has been increased attention to efforts to retain existing teachers.

Consideration of teacher retention requires attention to both teacher attrition and teacher migration. Ingersoll suggests that “attrition” refers to leaving the profession completely, while “migration” is about teachers moving to a different school. Teachers often leave or

¹ Advisory Committee on Teacher Shortages (2017) p.2

² Dee & Goldhaber (2017)

³ Ingersoll (2001)

⁴ García, E. & Weiss, E. (2019)

migrate voluntarily, but not always. Recognizing that some turnover in organizations is necessary, some school leaders may pursue strategies “to encourage turnover among low performers, either through administrative means, such as contract nonrenewal, or through less formal means, such as “counseling out” or finding ways to make the job less palatable.”⁵ Whether attrition and migration is voluntary or involuntary, research indicates these processes are harmful to schools. High attrition rates correlate negatively with student achievement,⁶ and attrition and migration can lower teachers’ sense of satisfaction and commitment.⁷ Therefore, teacher retention policy matters.

Teacher Retention in Virginia

Teacher retention is an intractable problem in many Virginia school divisions including across the MERC region. Table 1 shares the percent of teachers staying in their schools across all schools in Virginia and across the region over eleven years (2008- 2018).

Table 1. Percent of teachers staying in their school across Virginia and in the MERC Region (2008- 2018)

Year (fall)	% Teacher Staying Virginia	% Teachers Staying MERC Region
2008	81.00%	77.40%
2009	85.73%	87.25%
2010	82.59%	83.68%
2011	74.94%	79.81%
2012	82.59%	86.30%
2013	82.33%	82.77%
2014	81.19%	79.75%
2015	80.99%	81.61%
2016	80.46%	80.22%
2017	80.43%	79.68%
2018	79.58%	78.98%

Source: Virginia Department of Education Workforce Data

⁵ Grissom & Bartanen (2019) p. 515

⁶ Ingersoll (2012)

⁷ Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff (2013)

Across all MERC divisions, 9.42% of teachers left their division in any given year between 2008-2018. However, teacher retention is especially challenging among beginning teachers. Approximately 50% of Virginia's new teachers leave their schools (attrition or migration) within four years.⁸ Workforce data also show that 80% of teachers who leave the profession (attrition) do not return within five years. Attrition rates for new teachers of color are also cause for concern. By the third year of teaching, Virginia's Black (22%) and Latinx teachers (18%) show higher rates of attrition than white teachers (13%). Similar exit patterns also occur in the fifth year of teaching across all racial/ethnic groups.

Increased Student Outcomes

Teacher retention policy matters, first, because stability in the teacher workforce is associated with positive organizational climates that promote student success. For example, using administrative data from the New York City Department of Education and the New York State Education Department, teacher turnover was linked to lower student test scores of fourth- and fifth-grade students in math and English across all NYC elementary schools over eight academic years (2001-2002 and 2005-2010).⁹ These negative effects of teacher turnover are particularly harmful to student outcomes in schools with large populations of low-performing students and Black students.

There are a number of possible explanations for this negative relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement. Using five years of teacher survey data from New York City Schools, Kraft and colleagues conclude that school climate matters. They note: "...when schools strengthen the organizational contexts in which teachers work, teachers are more likely to remain in these schools, and student achievement on standardized tests increase at a faster rate."¹⁰ In other words, the more supportive a school environment is, the more likely teachers will stay in that school and positively affect student learning outcomes.

It Pays to Stay

Teacher turnover is also financially costly to school systems.¹¹ In one analysis, each teacher a school does not retain is estimated to cost the school system \$15,000 to \$20,000, depending on size and geographical location.¹² A pattern of continual teacher turnover exacts financial and organizational costs, with teacher attrition costing school districts

⁸ Miller (2018)

⁹ Ronfeldt et al. (2013) p. 18

¹⁰ Kraft et al. (2016) p. 4

¹¹ Cooper & Alvarado (2006)

¹² Darling-Hammond (2010)

across the United States as much as \$2.2 billion a year.¹³ Associated costs of teacher turnover include new teacher hiring, training and professional development.¹⁴

From a policy perspective, teacher retention is a multi-pronged, multi-level issue, requiring both “[c]omprehensive investments in the preparation, induction, and professional learning of teachers and principals as well as in the conditions necessary to support high-quality teaching and learning.”¹⁵ Additional mechanisms that include financial rewards, effective human resource practices, administrative support, and opportunities for professional development are collective strategies for improving retention.¹⁶ Thus, improving teacher retention can, at least, improve schools as organizations, increase student achievement, and save school and division financial resources.

¹³ Alliance for Excellent Education (2014); Guin (2004); Ingersoll (2001); Ronfeldt et al. (2013); Simon & Johnson (2015)

¹⁴ Barnes et al. (2007); Darling-Hammond & Sykes (2003); Kraft et al. (2016); Ronfeldt et al. (2013)

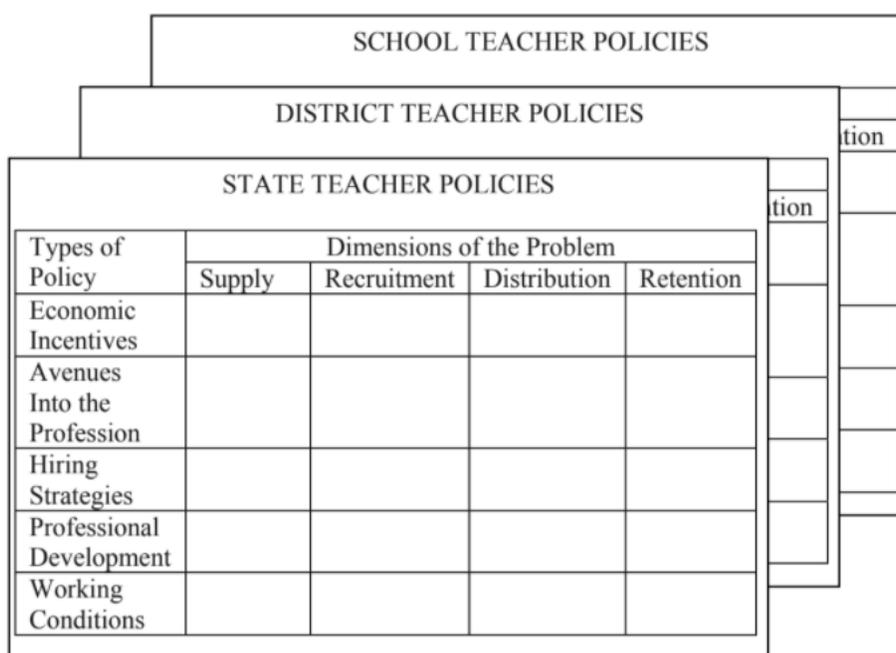
¹⁵ Podolsky et al. (2019) p. 57

¹⁶ Nguyen et al. (2019)

MULTI-LEVEL TEACHER POLICY FRAMEWORK

Policies are generally understood as rules for structuring everyday practices. In this way, policies serve to “mandate or prohibit behavior; reward, sanction, legitimize and provide inducements for particular behaviors; transfer resources to enable particular types of activities; and define or transfer authority.”¹⁷ Teacher policies that guide organizational practices and behaviors are multi-faceted and multi-leveled; therefore, we draw on a three-dimensional framework for understanding teacher staffing to account for policies across various levels.¹⁸ Based on a national scan of retention based policies, Rice et al. developed a typology that addressed multiple dimensions of the teacher staffing problem. Figure 1 below captures these dimensions of the teacher staffing policy framework.

Figure 1. Three-dimensional teacher policy typology framework



Source: Rice et al., (2009) p. 517

The typology consists of five policy strategies: economic incentives, avenues into the profession, teacher hiring process, teacher professional development, and working conditions.

¹⁷ Osher & Quinn (2003) p. 52

¹⁸ Rice et al. (2009)

- **Economic incentives** are monetary rewards and can take many forms, including salary schedule modifications or enhancements to increase teachers' overall salary; incentive payments, stipends, or cash bonuses; tuition grants and remission for teacher training and professional development; as well as in-kind and direct benefits, or retirement benefit waivers.
- **Avenues into the profession** consist of recruitment strategies to improve teacher supply. A major focus of increasing pathways into the profession includes alternate routes to teacher certification that may take the form of post-baccalaureate programs for mid-career entrants (i.e., career switcher programs), residency programs (i.e., Richmond Teacher Residency), grow-your-own pathways, and other experiential programs that provide a minimum level of training, while teachers learn on-the-job skills in classrooms.
- **Teacher Hiring Process** focuses on hiring strategies that divisions and schools use to improve identifying, selecting, and hiring well-qualified teachers to serve in specific school contexts. Hiring policies may include agreements for license and tenure reciprocity, streamlined hiring processes, partnerships with teacher preparation programs, and use of hiring software to increase visibility or manage data processing.
- **Professional Development Opportunities** include resources provided by states, divisions, and schools to improve personal and professional growth within the workplace. Common professional development policies may include opportunities for continuing education; teacher mentoring; targeted assistance for teachers pursuing continuing education and professional development; and rewards and incentives for continuing education and professional development.
- **Working conditions** are policies and practices that seek to improve the organizational environment within schools to, ultimately, positively affect retention. Although working conditions is a broad term that encompasses various elements of teachers' working environment, common strategies include: the amount of planning time teachers receive, workload manageability, class size, student behavior and discipline, teachers' level of autonomy to influence school policy and participation in decision making, as well as the availability of resources and necessary materials, and collegial opportunities within a school.

Figure 1 depicts these policy types with the columns representing four dimensions of the staffing problem: ensuring an adequate supply of qualified teachers, recruiting teachers to divisions and schools where they are needed most, distributing teachers in efficient and

equitable ways, and retaining teachers in schools. The figure also illustrates that teacher policies traverse multiple levels of the educational system. States and local divisions typically play an active role legislating and implementing policies that support teacher recruitment and retention. The federal government, on the other hand, assumes an indirect role by offering federal grants to states and districts (i.e., *Race to the Top*) or by emphasizing national accountability policy (i.e., *No Child Left Behind* or *Every Student Succeeds Act*), which has some implications for teacher quality and teacher recruitment and retention. Therefore, the third dimension of the framework represents the levels of the education system (state, division, and school) used in Rice et al.'s teacher staffing policy framework. For this study, we modified the framework to focus primarily on *retention* and *division-level* policies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Questions

1. What teacher retention policies exist at the federal, state, and local levels?
2. How are these policies structured at the state level and local levels?
3. How do teacher retention policies vary across divisions?

Collecting and Preparing Data for Analysis

The first stage of data collection involved identifying federal and state-level policies corresponding to Rice et al.'s analytic framework. As previously mentioned, the framework includes five different policy approaches to teacher staffing: (1) economic incentives, (2) avenues into the profession, (3) hiring strategies, (4) professional development, and (5) working conditions. We conducted an initial review of teacher recruitment and retention policies at the federal and state levels by identifying relevant policies through online document analysis.¹⁹ Document analysis is a form of qualitative research that enabled us to organize teacher policies according to the five approaches of teacher staffing, which later guided comparative analysis at the division-level.

Based on this initial review, the research team then solicited written input from school division leaders via a short survey to gather consensus on which components of state and regional teacher retention policies and programs would guide the second phase of the study. The survey was sent to leaders from all MERC divisions serving on the Policy and Planning Council.

Preliminary survey data informed development of the interview protocol for semi-structured interviews with 10 school division leaders familiar with teacher retention policies (See Appendix B). Interview participants were recruited from within the MERC divisions and held a variety of positions (e.g., superintendent, HR personnel, or professional learning directors/coordinators) (see Table 2). We also partnered with the MERC Teacher Retention study team for this project to solicit recommendations (see page 2). The interview enabled researchers to get an accurate sense of teacher retention policies and practices in each division. Participants were asked to describe, for example, the division's current approach to addressing teacher retention, barriers or constraints to school-level leaders' experience regarding teacher retention, or the process for tracking teacher retention at the school-level or division level. In line with the framework, each participant was asked to describe their division's approach to each teacher policy approach.

¹⁹ Bowen (2009)

Table 2. Participant information

Division	Geographical Classification*	Total Students (2020-2021)**	Total Teachers	Participant Role / Job Family
Chesterfield	Suburban, Large	60,904	4,500	Professional Learning and Human Resources
Goochland	Rural, Distant	2,582	290	Superintendent's Team
Hanover	Suburban, Large	16,519	2,509	Professional Learning
Henrico	Suburban, Large	50,191	4,082	Human Resources
Powhatan	Rural, Distant	4,212	318	Human Resources
Petersburg	City, Small	4,045	323	Superintendent's Team
Richmond	City, Midsize	28,2260	2,100	Superintendent's Team

*Geographical classifications are based on [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#) definitions of locale.

** Division enrollment may vary based on full-time and part-time counts. Data retrieved from Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), [Fall Membership Report](#)

Data Analysis

After each interview, the research team conducted member checks by following up with participants to validate responses and, if necessary, add additional responses or suggest other individuals to be interviewed. Concurrently, other researchers within the team conducted a content analysis of each division's website, strategic documents, and other division-based information related to teacher recruitment and retention. Data gathered from the content analysis, along with the interviews, were organized in a data analytic matrix reflecting divisions' approaches to teacher recruitment and retention. The research team then analyzed the data in the matrix to identify salient themes across each division, noting similarities and differences in the types of policies offered. The final analysis included a comparison of policy approaches to MERC-level teacher retention outcomes.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two sections. In the first section, we offer a brief overview of federal and state policies that structure local teacher retention efforts. This information was obtained through a systematic procedure for identifying and analyzing electronic, web-based policy documents related to federal, state, and division level policies on teacher retention. This form of document analysis helped to corroborate interview and survey data collected in the study. Findings from this section are summarized in Appendix A. Section two of the findings presents detailed reporting on division-level policies and insights gathered from informational interviews with key division leaders and administrators.

Federal and State Policy

Federal-level policies

Although state governments traditionally hold more authority and oversight on teacher policies, efforts to improve teacher quality are evident across two federal policies that help guide schools and divisions with teacher retention: 1) the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2002 and 2) the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Under NCLB, the federal government provided definitions and requirements for a “highly qualified” teacher. This included a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree, certification in the state where they would teach, and proof of competency in the subject area(s) taught. The mandate for highly qualified teachers sought to address the maldistribution of teachers in schools serving low-performing students, students of color, and/or low-income students. The policy also required states to report on the degree to which students had access to highly qualified teachers, including public reports for how they planned to recruit and retain them. However, the emphasis on “highly qualified teachers” did little to systematically change the distribution, turnover, or quality of teachers in under-resourced schools.²⁰ There were also requirements for teachers to demonstrate their competency through (among other criteria) postsecondary education and passage of a state standardized test in the subject area(s) taught.

Another hallmark of NCLB was high-stakes accountability reform to measure improvements in school and student outcomes through Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Studies have shown that when schools face more accountability pressures related to

²⁰ Eckert (2013)

student test performance, teachers are more likely to report concern over their job security.²¹ However, evidence indicates that NCLB school accountability did not change the average national rate of teachers either voluntarily transferring between schools or voluntarily leaving the teaching profession in 2004–2005, although these effects were uneven for teachers in non-tested subject areas and teachers in under-resourced, higher need schools.²² Findings also suggest that federal policy pressure from NCLB may encourage school administrators to change their hiring and firing behaviors at the local-level to hire a higher percentage of more experienced, effective teachers. Ultimately, federal policy mandates have direct implications for local-level hiring and staffing practices that affect teacher retention.

Updates to NCLB in 2005 granted more flexibility in how and when teachers needed to demonstrate their competency; however, NCLB was later supplanted by ESSA.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Under ESSA, states are granted greater flexibility and control to determine policies on evaluation and performance, thus limiting federal oversight on teacher policies. For example, states may include various measures for student growth as long as the adopted standards are “challenging” and are aligned with accountability goals. By abandoning stipulations for “highly qualified” teacher requirements as well as specific educator evaluations, ESSA allows states to include multiple measures for educator performance. The policy also encourages states to “provide support for career opportunities and advancement initiatives that promote professional growth and emphasize multiple career paths”²³--a key policy strategy for teacher retention.

Prior to ESSA, the Obama administration also heavily invested in economic recovery efforts following the economic recession by issuing competitive grants for school reform initiatives like *Race to the Top*, the Teacher Incentive Fund, and School Improvement Grants. Many of these federal programs sought to strengthen the teacher workforce through recruitment and retention incentive programs.²⁴ The federally-supported [National Center on Performance Incentives](#) (NCPI), for example, was established to examine how the use of alternative teacher compensation plans (i.e., performance incentives, merit and bonus pay, or career ladder programs) could improve the quality of teaching and learning. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) enacted the *Equitable Access to Excellent Educators* (EAEE) to mitigate disparities in teacher quality and to ensure that all

²¹ Marsh et al. (2011); Reback et al. (2014)

²² Sun & Ye (2017)

²³ U.S. Department of Education (2016)

²⁴ Steinberg & Donaldson (2016)

children have equitable access to high quality, excellent teaching. Collectively, these policies and federal-level initiatives illustrate the role of federal-level support in expanding efforts targeted at teacher retention.

State-level policies

The Virginia Department of Education [outlines the steps required for teacher licensure in the Commonwealth](#). Considering the Rice et al. framework,²⁵ licensure policy encompasses both *Avenues Into the Profession* and *Professional Development* as licensure renewal in Virginia requires varied professional development activities to meet a set number of hours. Recent licensure policy changes created a new avenue into the profession. In 2017, [Executive Directive 14](#) provided Virginia colleges and universities with the option to offer an undergraduate major in teaching with the intention of removing barriers into the profession. Prior to 2017, the majority of new teachers earning licensure through a teacher preparation program needed to complete a fifth year of study to earn a masters of teaching or complete an additional minor in education. According to the directive, “this burdens future teachers with additional debt and delays their entry into the workforce.” Changing this requirement was intended to “encourage more Virginians to pursue careers in education and...help supply more future teachers to meet the growing needs of (the) public school system.” Overall, there are [37 colleges or universities](#) in Virginia that have state approved teacher preparation programs. Table 3 depicts the number of institutions currently offering undergraduate majors in education [according to the VDOE](#):

Table 3. Number of Virginia institutions of higher education offering undergraduate education majors

Program	Number of Institutions
Early/Primary Education PreK-3	6
Elementary Education PreK-6	28
Middle Education 6-8	7
(Special Education) Early Childhood	3
(Special Education) Adapted Curriculum K-12	1
(Special Education) General Curriculum K-12	16

Budget actions for the 2018-2020 biennium budget in Virginia also allocated funding towards retention of teachers, including tuition assistance for education majors in private

²⁵ Rice, et al. (2009)

colleges in the Commonwealth. These actions also included funding to address particular areas of need, including resources committed towards testing and test preparation for provisionally licensed teachers from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds and incentive scholarship programs for students planning to teach in shortage areas identified by the state or in school divisions with more than 50% of their students receiving free or reduced lunch. This recent change in the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program allows for greater flexibility as teacher candidates pursue employment in schools facing staffing challenges; previous language restricted candidates to accepting employment only in the very small number of school divisions that met these criteria division-wide.

Although these federal and state policies help guide decision-making around teacher retention, the majority of relevant policies and practices are created and implemented at the division level, as detailed later in this report. This intersection across federal, state, and division levels is also an underlying point emphasized in Rice et al.'s multi-level teacher policy, particularly as it relates to sustaining overall teacher supply. They state:

These policy differences flag an important distinction between two closely related terms: qualified teachers and quality teachers. Our case studies suggest that districts and schools with a shortage of highly qualified teachers, as externally defined by federal and state criteria, are focused on policies to attract and retain teachers with those qualifications. In contrast, districts and schools that enjoy a surplus of teachers who meet the externally imposed requirements are free to draw on a different set of policies that emphasize teacher quality, as defined by their effectiveness (or potential effectiveness in the case of recruitment) in the particular context.²⁶

Division-Level Policy

In this section of the report, we present findings from our division-level analysis of teacher retention policies across the MERC school divisions. We primarily rely on data collected from structured interviews with key stakeholders across divisions. Data gathered from document analysis of division websites and teacher retention reports or division strategic plans also supplement our findings. This section is organized as follows. We begin by differentiating between teacher *retention policy* and *retention practice*. Our findings indicate a focus on teacher retention practice, particularly at the school-level, with limited attention to division-level retention policy. This is critically important because we found schools were adopting certain practices that could be scaled at the division-level to guide more effective retention policy.

This overarching finding guides the development of subsequent sections. For example, we discuss the role of economic incentives and working conditions as well as findings related

²⁶ Rice et al. (2009) p. 537

to how divisions designed strategic retention policies, paying close attention to teacher hiring, professional learning opportunities, and retention of new teachers and teachers of color.

Retention practice vs. retention policies

As previously mentioned, policies structure everyday practice by mandating, rewarding, or prohibiting certain behaviors or activities within an organization.²⁷ As such, effective division-level retention policies drive teaching and learning and promote consistency across schools by ensuring clarity of internal processes. These policies set direction and provide school leaders with day-to-day guidance on school-level processes, actions, and strategies. Put simply, practice has a profound influence on policy and vice versa.

However, we identified very few division-level policies outlining general guidelines for addressing and solving teacher retention across divisions. Instead, findings indicate various building-level initiatives or division-level practices that directly and indirectly focus on retention. For example, division leaders mentioned the use of building-level practices like teacher appreciation and recognition events to improve teacher morale. They also acknowledged that principals actively sought to improve school culture and climate by strengthening organizational practices and accessing division-level support. Efforts to reduce class size and manage workload were noted as other school-level practices intended to improve retention. In theory, these practices should influence retention, but no division reported systematic data collection or analysis of these practices to inform policy. Without this ongoing feedback, school leaders may risk enacting retention practices that have little effect on teacher retention.

To further illustrate this differentiation between policy and practice, we highlight division-level responses for economic incentives and working conditions to highlight the need for policies designed to solve retention problems through resource allocation and systematic regulation.

How might economic incentive policies drive retention?

Studies consistently show that compensation influences teachers' employment decisions to remain in or exit the profession.²⁸ Salary can also incentivize teachers to move within or across divisions. Various economic incentive policies at the federal level such as service scholarship and loan forgiveness programs encourage teachers to teach in schools with staffing and retention challenges, which typically serve more low-income students and

²⁷ Osher & Quinn (2003)

²⁸ Farinde-Wu & Fitchett (2018); Goldhaber et al. (2011); Imazeki (2005); Johnson & Papay (2009)

students of color.²⁹ Virginia has also adopted scholarship loan programs to address uneven staffing and retention across the state.

When asked about economic incentive policies within their division, most division administrators noted the absence of division-level policies, but highlighted state-level economic incentive schemes used for recruitment and retention (See Appendix A). One division administrator commented, “Loan forgiveness is a big one, especially for those hard-to-staff schools. I think that it's five years that you put in there, you're eligible for loan forgiveness. ... It's a state thing, not a division thing. So I know that's one thing that does help with recruiting for their schools.” Similarly, another division leader stated:

But speaking in general terms, being able to go ahead and offer special stipends to Hard-to-Staff Schools, difficult areas to fill, is very difficult because it becomes for us, a matter of equity, making sure that we're doing right by everybody. But what we do rely on a lot is, for example, when we end up with the stipends that the state offers. The state, for example, offers a stipend for STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] teachers.

Research shows these federal and state-level policies are particularly influential for candidates with financial challenges or those concerned about the cost of teacher education and preparation—especially because teaching offers comparatively less in earnings than other professions with similar educational qualifications.³⁰ Ultimately, service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs result in higher entry rates to high-need fields and locations, and stronger retention.³¹

Economic incentives such as increasing the state minimum salary and providing tuition assistance represent additional policies adopted at the state-level to increase recruitment into the teaching profession, especially for teachers in harder to staff fields like STEM, special education, or language courses. Division leaders can leverage external grants from federal, state, or private foundations to apply for competitive grants to help offset the cost of these economic incentives. For example, one division leader noted that grant funds enabled the division to offer \$1500 for effective teachers who were hired in shortage areas.

Divisions responded with similar targeted financial incentives to address retention by offering “creative compensation,” which provides stipends and additional salary enhancements to improve teachers’ overall base salary. Although most divisions relied on

²⁹ Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2019)

³⁰ Santos et al. (2021)

³¹ Podolsky & Kini (2016)

state-based compensation schemes to improve retention, some also had, as one division administrator described, “hidden perks,” which were economic incentives already embedded within hiring policies. These incentives included removing a cap on sick leave as well as the number of sick days a teacher new to the division could transfer from another division, providing five days of bereavement (exclusive of sick time), expanding bonuses, and offering child-care subsidies for teachers with school-aged children. However, these policies were uneven across divisions and it was also unclear from our website analysis whether all teachers had access to this information, some of which were recently adopted policies.

In general, compensation, promotion strategies, and pay raises are powerful policy levers used to influence teacher retention. However, research indicates compensation alone is not sufficient for strong retention.³² An additional area of investment relates to the school-level practices shaping working conditions and the environments in which teachers work. Together, research suggests attractive compensation policies and supportive working conditions are strong drivers of retention.

Working conditions

School context plays a significant role in teacher retention³³ and is heavily shaped by school-level teacher policies. Working conditions, or the school organizational and environmental factors that influence teachers’ employment behaviors and decisions, make up various factors that impact, or have the potential to impact, retention practices. Similarly, Rice et al. refer to these working conditions as “contextual factors that affect school-level efforts to attract and retain teachers.”³⁴ Teacher working conditions are understood as the nonpecuniary (i.e., compensation-related) elements of the workplace that affect teaching or are related to a teacher’s ability to do their job.³⁵ This may include, but is not limited to, new teacher induction, collegiality, workload, school culture and climate, resources, facilities, teacher autonomy and teacher influence, professional learning opportunities, as well as leadership and administrative processes and practices.

Recognizing that poor working conditions play a major role in teachers’ decisions to change schools or leave the profession, division leaders emphasized class size, teacher morale and appreciation, and principal leadership as key factors enabling or constraining the environments in which teachers work. Some divisions have small classes and deeper

³² Farinde-Wu & Fitchett (2018); Goldhaber, DeArmond, & DeBurgomaster (2011); Johnson & Papay (2009)

³³ Bettini et al. (2018); Pogodzinski et al. (2012)

³⁴ Rice et al. (2009) p. 537

³⁵ Merrill (2021) p. 172

connections between central leadership and classroom educators. Similarly, some divisions promote a sense of belonging among teachers. Others have funding and structural support for teachers to earn teacher-leadership credentials, such as National Board Certification. Therefore, the factors influencing teachers' choices to accept employment and remain in MERC divisions vary widely.

Workplace conditions positively associated with teacher retention include school culture, collegial relationships, providing teachers with greater autonomy or decision-making power, consistent instructional leadership, professional development opportunities, time for collaboration and planning, and strong administrative support. In fact, a recent analysis of a 2019 Virginia Department of Education working conditions survey looked at the relationship between various sets of working conditions and their relationship to teacher retention.³⁶ School leadership and teacher autonomy emerged as the most significant predictors of a teacher's likelihood of staying in their current school in the following academic year. Using unstandardized coefficients from an ordinary least squares regression analysis, the analysis showed that, on average, increasing teachers' mean score by one point on response items related to leadership, could improve teachers' intent to stay in their current school by 7%. On average, survey data indicate teachers associate principals' practices and leadership support with their attitudes about retention, teacher self-efficacy, and their perception of administrators' ability to communicate a clear vision and encourage staff.

Designing strategic retention policies

Strategic retention aims to retain effective teachers using differential strategies. This differs from Grissom and Bartanen's notion of strategic retention that seeks to "counsel out" or encourage turnover among low performers.³⁷ Interview participants, especially those whose roles encompassed or intersected with human resources in divisions' central offices, were more likely to frame strategic retention from an asset-based lens that focused on providing teachers with necessary support to encourage retention.

In doing so, school leaders sought to reduce the overall teacher turnover rate by encouraging retention of effective teachers, while providing necessary improvement opportunities for low performing or less effective teachers. Collectively, these improvement strategies included mentoring, coaching, or other forms of innovative professional learning opportunities like workshops, presentations, research conferences, or webinars. This approach to strategic retention also necessitates a system for organizing the types of policies and the dimension of the problem (i.e., teacher supply, recruitment,

³⁶ Becker et al. (2021)

³⁷ Grissom & Bartanen (2019)

distribution, or retention) they address at each level of the system (state, division, school level).

Teacher Hiring

Rice et al. recommend streamlining the teacher hiring process as an important aspect of the teacher policy typology. The hiring process entails a set of activities aimed at securing well-matched candidates for each school. Recruitment involves finding suitable applicants, while selection and hiring includes screening, interviewing, and selecting applicants for hire. Strategic hiring practices should be aligned with the division's education plan. Engel and Curran's study of principals' hiring practices in Chicago Public Schools outline ten strategic hiring practices:³⁸

1. Always working on teacher hiring
2. Begin hiring for school year by March or earlier
3. Require prospective teachers to teach a sample lesson
4. Include a content-area specialist or grade-level representative on the hiring team
5. Ensure candidate is knowledgeable in content-area
6. Looks for teaching skills
7. Asks for referrals from current faculty
8. Networks with other principals or administrators
9. Networks outside of their division
10. Contacts candidates' references

These ten strategic hiring practices overlap with five types of hiring strategies that Rice et al. suggest can improve the likelihood of recruiting qualified teachers to address retention: license and tenure reciprocity, streamlined hiring processes, partnerships with teacher preparation programs, features that improve job offer attractiveness, and increased visibility and outreach.

Our study findings show that school division leaders in the MERC region used early contracts and targeted recruiting efforts for all teaching positions. As one administrator commented, "early and aggressive hiring practices are key." Leaders also partnered with universities, organizations, and companies to support the recruitment of staff that assist in diversifying schools and created a rigorous interview process, only hiring candidates who aligned to the division's core values. However, ensuring strategic or intentional hiring across all ten behaviors may be difficult.

³⁸ Engel & Curran (2016)

When principals are unable to engage in strategic or intentional hiring, research suggests they may instead adopt creative or transactional hiring practices.³⁹ Creative hiring refers to adaptations to strategic hiring efforts that involve novel and informal actions used to hire the best possible applicant. These behaviors may include informal recruitment activities or hiring a candidate based on limited information. Transactional hiring includes unsystematic selection practices driven by desperation and urgency to fill a vacancy. Transactional hiring is most likely to occur when principals need to fill multiple vacancies and believe there are few “hirable” teachers remaining in the labor pool.

Streamlining recruitment and hiring processes and building capacity within local divisions’ Human Resources office can limit school leaders’ use of these strategies. To address this, [Henrico County Public Schools’ \(HCPS\) Strategic Plan](#) recognizes strategic staffing as a critical component of the division’s goal to: “recruit, retain and reward educators who nurture the whole child.” The plan includes the following statement about recruitment and retention as a key implementation driver:

*Develop a comprehensive approach to staff retention that includes personalized/differentiated pathways for professional learning and microcredentialing, as well as supporting development and career goals through the teacher professional growth plan.*⁴⁰

Schools’ hiring patterns can help explain the rate of teacher turnover and retention. Schools with greater percentages of new hires or those constantly hiring new teachers may also face additional challenges of retention given chronic staff instability. Teachers are a school’s most important resource, therefore, enabling strategic hiring practices to attract and retain teachers can help to minimize staffing challenges and teacher distribution inequities.

Workforce Entry and Recruitment Pathways

Increasing workforce entry options can help address persistent turnover or shortages in specific schools or in subject area fields (e.g., math, science, and special education). Entry decisions, or why teachers choose to pursue teaching, and the factors that motivate or attract teachers to the profession, is a critical component of understanding teacher shortage trends. Teachers are highly motivated by a range of intrinsic factors like the ability to serve others, work with youth, and advance social justice in schools as well as extrinsic factors, like salary and wages.⁴¹ Adopting policies to modify teacher salary schedules might seem an obvious solution to increasing teacher supply and entry, but findings on salary

³⁹ Castro (2020)

⁴⁰ Henrico County Public Schools (no date)

⁴¹ Achinstein et al. (2011); Firestone & Pennell (1993)

modifications have been inconsistent with regards to recruitment and retention—regardless of the incentive’s size or duration.⁴² Therefore, exploring a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards based on teachers’ preferences and career stage might provide greater clarity about factors that attract teachers to the profession.

Division Highlights

Goochland: Central leadership identifies strong candidates with the skills and knowledge in general education open to teaching special education, then provides funding for coursework and professional learning to move them to a professional licensure with a special education endorsement.

Powhatan: Community-based funding organizations provide all teachers and school counselors with \$1,000 toward classroom supplies. The teachers and counselors have the autonomy to decide how to spend the funds.

Chesterfield, Henrico, Petersburg, and Richmond: These divisions have partnered with the VCU RTR residency program, which places teacher candidates in schools with greater staffing needs. This effort seeks to attract and retain local teachers since they already know the community and have built relationships within schools. Many move into leadership positions as well, creating a career pipeline with the potential to mitigate attrition.

Chesterfield: Partnerships with local universities provide graduating high school seniors with opportunities to complete teacher preparation programs and return to CCPS as professionally licensed teachers.

Henrico: Graduating high school seniors who identify teaching as their career goal earn scholarships to offset the cost of teacher preparation programs with a guarantee of employment in Henrico when they complete their programs.

Goochland: A creative in-house professional studies learning program transitions skilled industry professionals to effective CTE teachers.

⁴² Clotfelter et al. (2008); Feng & Sass (2018)

Strategic retention for new teachers

New teacher retention is critically important to maintaining a strong supply of teachers. National data indicate that between 40% and 50% of all new teachers leave the profession within their first five years.⁴³ In Virginia, approximately 50% of all new teachers leave their schools (turnover or migration) within four years and about 80% of teachers who leave the profession (attrition) do not return within five years. Based on an analysis of administrative data, Table 4 shows retention rates of new, first-year teachers in the MERC divisions. The numbers in each column should be read as the percentage of teachers who started in the division the prior year and remained employed by the division in the year represented in the column (i.e., within-division retention). For example, 81.3% of teachers who started in Henrico County in 2015-16 remained employed by HCPS in 2016-17.

Table 4. New teacher retention in MERC divisions (2016- 2019)

Division	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Henrico	% = 81.30 N = 213/262	% = 78.81 N = 212/269	% = 78.24 N = 205/262
Chesterfield	% = 80.95 N = 238/294	% = 82.70 N = 239/289	% = 85.11 N = 280/329
Powhatan	% = 71.43 N = 10/14	% = 87.50 N = 14/16	% = 90.00 N = 9/10
Richmond	% = 72.29 N = 167/231	% = 70.53 N = 146/207	% = 71.04 N = 184/259
Hanover	% = 79.73 N = 59/74	% = 77.89 N = 74/95	% = 82.89 N = 63/76
Petersburg	% = 60.34 N = 35/58	% = 45.45 N = 25/55	% = 60.24 N = 50/83
Goochland	% = 68.75 N = 11/16	% = 76.92 N = 10/13	% = 85.71 N = 18/21

Source: Virginia Department of Education Workforce Data

⁴³ Ingersoll et al. (2021)

Professional Learning Opportunities

There are few federal-level or state-level initiatives used to support professional development for strategic retention. However, at the local level, we found all divisions incorporated professional learning or development practices aimed at strategic retention of new and experienced teachers. For example, Powhatan County Public Schools (PCPS) pursues multiple professional learning opportunities, including a new teacher academy and teacher leadership program for National Board-Certified teachers. The division also provides “professional development leave” and cost reimbursement for out-of-division professional development programs. In Hanover County, each school created a plan to encourage and support professional development opportunities focused on innovative strategies to include, but not limited to self-directed learning models, hands-on learning, project-based learning, and skills-based instruction.

Additionally, in divisions like RPS and PCPS, teachers can receive intensive training on positive, asset-based classroom management techniques and efforts to create a meta-group for teacher leaders, which provides classroom technology for math and science classes. Several division leaders highlighted performance incentives based on teacher evaluation, but, while these incentives are designed to strategically retain high performing teachers, researchers have questioned the use and implementation of value-add performance incentives. In particular, studies highlight racially biased outcomes that screen out teachers of color from incentive opportunities.⁴⁴

Mentoring and Induction

Teacher induction programs are formal support programs for beginning teachers to develop necessary professional and socialization skills.⁴⁵ Induction supports may include new teacher orientations, PD workshops, classroom observation, mentor teacher assignment, instructional coaching, and/or formative evaluation. A comprehensive or extensive teacher induction program should include multiple types of support such as:

- Assigned, trained mentors
- Sequential professional learning curriculum
- Common planning time with peer teachers
- Supportive communication with administrators
- Reduced teaching schedule
- Opportunities to observe effective teachers and to be observed
- Receiving extra help (e.g., teacher’s aide)

⁴⁴ Drake et al. (2019); Petchauer et al. (2018)

⁴⁵ Feiman-Nemser (2001); Youngs et al. (2019)

Teachers who receive comprehensive induction support are 5% less likely to change schools or school divisions and 4.8% less likely to leave the profession.⁴⁶ Perhaps most compelling are research data regarding the longitudinal effects of comprehensive teacher induction supports:

[H]aving a mentor reduced the odds of leaving by 27% to 32%. Estimates ... suggest that each additional induction support is associated with an average decrease in the odds of leaving teaching over 5 years by between 15% and 18%.⁴⁷

Despite the fact that Virginia does not have a statewide model for mentor teacher training or competencies required for mentoring, some state level efforts exist. Virginia has previously supported mentoring and induction for new teachers and requires that school divisions assign a mentor to new teachers for their first year of employment. Although studies show teachers assigned mentors in their first year are more likely to return in their second year and persist as career teachers;⁴⁸ mentoring through the induction phase (years three to five) is also critically important to ensure retention.

Several divisions leveraged the use of mentorship programs that strategically matched or paired new teachers with experienced teachers who could offer formal or informal training. These efforts also helped teachers navigate the daily challenges of the profession. The VDOE licensure renewal requirements do not incentivize job-embedded or competency-based professional learning. This often results in new and experienced teachers completing licensure renewal requirements that are disconnected, leaving the promise of comprehensive induction support to school and division level leadership. Some school divisions created professional learning opportunities that build on one another, allowing teachers to develop and refine practice through their induction phase. These sequenced professional learning opportunities allow new teachers to connect their learning, mentoring, and practice.

All division leaders included mentoring and/or induction programs as a type of professional learning policy and practice. These programs support teacher retention by providing an effective transition to teaching, offer learning and guidance for new teachers by emphasizing the connections between effective planning, instruction, and student learning, and enable effective teaching of culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse students through continuous reflection for professional growth.

However, some division leaders did not include data on its effectiveness. In fact, one division leader confirmed that they have a partnership with a state-funded,

⁴⁶ Ronfeldt & McQueen (2017)

⁴⁷ Ronfeldt & McQueen (2017) p. 406

⁴⁸ Schmidt et al. (2017); Walker et al. (2019)

university-based coaching program for the last several years, “but we don’t have any data on its effectiveness at this point.” Although studies confirm a positive relationship between high-quality teacher induction programs and teacher retention,⁴⁹ there exists a lack of research on the cost-benefits of teacher induction programs to better guide what types of approaches are most cost-effective.

Division Highlights

Powhatan Middle School - The “Looking for Hope” professional learning community began as part of a dissertation research project that examined the induction experiences of early years teachers at Powhatan Middle School as they participated in a reflective community of practice. At the time of data collection, the group was in its second year and was meeting two to three times a quarter to share and problem solve around issues chosen by the participants. Participants focused on how to build and sustain student engagement in their virtual classrooms and are planning peer observations to both learn from and support each other. With participants from all grade levels, multiple content areas, and special education, the collaboration provided an opportunity to build relationships and hear perspectives outside of the usual professional groups. One outcome identified from teachers’ experiences was the development of a teacher support group, which was described as a safe space to be heard. Teachers also developed trusting relationships with their peers as they discussed problems of practice and their shared values as educators.

Hanover: In Hanover schools, there is a mentor coordinator in each building, who in previous years, served as an assistant principal or a senior teacher. Current mentor coordinators are teacher leaders who have a wealth of experience as well-qualified teachers. In their role as mentor coordinators, they still serve in the classroom for two blocks or class periods, but much of their time is dedicated to supporting new teachers. This enables each school to have a distributed model for leadership, teacher leadership, and mentorship.

Strategic retention for teachers of color

Diversifying the educator workforce is a critical policy concern in Virginia and in many school divisions where rapid demographic shifts have sharpened racial and ethnic mismatch between students and teachers. Beyond numerical parity, teachers of color add

⁴⁹ Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2017); Kang & Berliner (2012); Ronfeldt & McQueen (2017)

significant value to the workforce and contribute to schools in numerous ways. Increasing and retaining the number of teachers from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds have been shown to: (a) positively change student and school outcomes;⁵⁰ (b) increase attendance rates for students of color;⁵¹ (c) enable students of color to advance and enroll in more rigorous coursework;⁵² and (d) minimize the number of Black and Latinx students referred to special education.⁵³ The presence of male teachers of color in schools, for instance, disrupts zero-tolerance school discipline practices that facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline and racialized pathologies of students of color.⁵⁴ Administrators who understand and value these contributions will enact anti-racist and culturally responsive leadership practices to foster inclusive work environments, while prioritizing the recruitment and retention of diverse staff.⁵⁵

Teachers of Color within the MERC Region

Division level policies that broadly address teacher recruitment and retention using “a status quo approach” will not be sufficient to attract, retain, and support teachers of color. To strengthen retention for teachers of color, divisions should adopt targeted approaches to recruitment and retention.

Data indicate teachers of color disproportionately teach in high-minority, low-income schools, and leave these schools at higher rates than White teachers generally. Teachers of color are more likely to enter teaching through alternate preparation pathways,⁵⁶ although some programs may not include adequate and consistent clinical training or student teaching experiences.⁵⁷ Strategic retention approaches can help to illuminate particular obstacles and challenges teachers of color experience in schools such as racial isolation and persistent racial discrimination, lack of autonomy and influence, not feeling valued for their expertise, as well as lack of mentoring and support by same race educators, and receiving low evaluation rating from their principal than white educators.⁵⁸ Furthermore, increasing the racial/ethnic and cultural diversity of the teacher workforce requires division and statewide investment and commitment to collecting and analyzing educator workforce data to produce strategic efforts at recruiting, supporting, and retaining a diverse educator workforce.

⁵⁰ Gershenson et al. (2018); Villegas & Irvine (2010)

⁵¹ Achinstein et al. (2010)

⁵² Eddy & Easton-Brooks (2011)

⁵³ Bettini et al., 2018; Grissom & Redding (2016)

⁵⁴ Martino & Rezai-Rashti (2010)

⁵⁵ Khalifa et al. (2016)

⁵⁶ Gist et al. (2018)

⁵⁷ Castro & Edwards (2021); Redding & Smith (2016)

⁵⁸ Campbell (2020); Drake et al. (2019)

Division Highlights

Hanover: Hanover continues a partnership with Longwood University's *Call Me MISTER* program. The mission of the Call Me MISTER (Men Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) National Initiative is to increase the pool of available teachers from a broader, more diverse background. Dr. Quentin Ballard, Principal at Bell Creek Middle School continues to serve as a spokesperson and resource for the program. The program supports ongoing internal recruiting and retention planning with minority leaders as well as structured meeting groups to address needs.

Richmond: Much of the recruitment and engagement for teachers of color is college-based, for example, targeting jobs fairs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) like Alabama A&M. Additionally, the division has sought stronger engagement with social media, for example using LinkedIn as a recruitment tool, particularly at the national level.

Conclusion

As suggested in the findings section, divisions struggle with varying levels of teacher shortage and/or turnover challenges, therefore, teacher retention initiatives will be unique to each organization. Schools with chronic teacher instability, often those serving students of color and low-income students, are more likely to experience adverse effects of low teacher retention. Despite the many reasons that teachers opt to leave their schools or the profession, teacher mobility and attrition threatens educational equity and student achievement as well as disrupts organizational stability and trust.⁵⁹ Therefore, well-coordinated retention efforts can yield high levels of success. These sustained and strategic approaches to teacher retention can address the differentiated needs of teachers, strengthen academic outcomes, and promote better organizational climates.

⁵⁹ Bryk & Schneider (2003); Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2019); Ronfeldt et al. (2013); Sutchter et al. (2016)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis, in this section we present policy recommendations in three core areas: (1) teacher preparation and support, (2) rethinking the approach to teacher retention, and (3) creative compensation.

Teacher Preparation and Support

Residency and grow-your-own programs. Fund and support residency and grow-your-own preparation pathways. Given the financial costs of national and international recruiting, as well as the resources required to acclimate new teachers to a school division, we recommend reallocating funds toward funding residency and grow-your-own/teacher assistant-to-teacher models that have the potential to reduce chronic workforce instability, while concurrently bridging traditional university and school silos. This long-term approach to stabilizing the workforce can strengthen overall teacher supply.

Comprehensive induction. Fund comprehensive induction to support site-based retention. As short-term staffing challenges persist, differentiating early career supports by teachers' pathway into the profession (e.g., traditional, alternative, provisional, etc) and by previous experience (e.g., new teacher, career-switcher, etc) may reduce resource needs and duplication of effort, while providing individualized, teacher-based support.⁶⁰ We recommend a greater focus on mentoring and coaching rather than additional seminars or workshops that may not align with teachers' professional needs. Supports may also include reducing a new teacher's workload, providing a trusted and experienced mentor or coach for weekly feedback and/or dialogue, as well as offering new teachers the necessary tools and instructional support to be productive and engaging teachers.

Rethinking the Approach to Teacher Retention

Systems-based approach. Incorporate a system-based lens to retention. Given the varying conditions or contexts within schools, access to resources, and capacity, a traditional approach to retention that designs retention initiatives in a piecemeal fashion minimizes the potential of a division-wide strategic plan. Retention is enhanced when divisions embrace a comprehensive set of strategies with teacher retention at the center. Retention focused efforts may include building a cadre of excellent principals, developing division and school-wide cultures of trust and increased teacher satisfaction, increasing teacher and parent/family engagement, fostering partnerships with universities for professional

⁶⁰ Tran & Smith, 2020

learning opportunities, and assessing systems and structures to better understand teachers' experience, especially for teachers of color.

Equity-focus. Adopt an equity-focused approach to human resources. A holistic perspective that views all teachers through the same lens may overlook teachers' multiple needs and experiences. We recommend a modern approach to human resource management to address teacher retention issues by developing individualized solutions that accounts for these differences across the employee experience. Such an approach can better address the nuances associated with why teachers choose to leave their schools or the profession as well as why some teachers may choose to return to teaching after leaving the workforce. Ultimately, this approach entails “an organizational shift from a process focus to an experience focus”⁶¹ that needs to be highly individualized.

Empower principals. Ensure principals have the capacity, willingness, and resources to improve school climate and teacher retention. School building leadership plays an important role in teacher retention, in that, principals influence school climate which then influences teacher satisfaction and, therefore, retention. Divisions will need to commit resources and ensure the willingness of principals—as key building level leaders—to change the lens through which they can support and promote impactful retention. Developing a “place conscious principal” can provide contextualized administrative support and leadership strategies to reduce teacher turnover and improve student achievement. Therefore, school divisions should give building leaders the resources to make sure they attend to the climate of the school such that teachers will want to stay.

Scale-up what works. Scale-up and contextualize what works. Our findings suggest incoherence between retention policy and practice. These miscues can lead to effective retention efforts in some schools and yield poor outcomes in others. Additionally, these scaled and contextualized interventions should also include an adaptable, long-term strategy. Recent events like the COVID-19 global pandemic and the rapid shift to online learning have influenced labor supply and illustrate the need to create flexible, adaptable retention strategies aimed at sustaining a flow of candidates into the profession, while supporting existing teachers.

Rigorous Data Systems. An important component of policy scale and adaptation to varying contexts is access to adequate data. Utilizing data structures like annual feedback, exit surveys, automated and randomized touch-points throughout the academic year can help pinpoint underlying motivators of teacher exit. Teachers experience aspects of job dissatisfaction, demoralization, and job stress long before they exit, therefore, developing

⁶¹ Tran & Smith (2020) p. 101

rigorous systems to capture ongoing data and employees' experiences can better inform school and division leaders' policy and practice responses.

Creative Compensation

Differentiated pay or incentive strategies. A redesigned approach to teacher retention should also consider the causes of different types of mobility. Most division leaders mentioned the particular challenges with recruiting and retaining teachers in STEM, special education, and English Learner fields. These specific shortages have important implications for students' academic and social outcomes, therefore, focusing recruitment and retention efforts with differentiated pay or additional incentive strategies can help attract teachers willing to fill these high-need positions. Indeed, providing competitive compensation packages (i.e., salary, service scholarship and loan forgiveness programs, bonuses, in-kind incentives, retirement incentives, etc.) for all teachers can curb overall workforce attrition. These incentives can also be tailored to teachers' career stage, enabling divisions to better target teachers across the career spectrum.

Conclusion

By outlining federal, state, and division level policies we contend that no single policy can solve teacher retention challenges. Rather, a comprehensive set of strategies at the federal, state, and local levels is needed to collectively improve retention and minimize inequities in teacher retention across schools and divisions. Since division-level leaders were the primary units of analysis for this study, our findings suggest a number of opportunities for division and school-level leaders to address teacher retention.

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APPENDIX A: National and State Policy Matrices

National Policy		
Name of Policy	Major Components	Reference
NCLB - No Child Left Behind		
“Highly Qualified”	<p>GENERAL DEFINITIONS:</p> <p>Highly Qualified Teachers: To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a bachelor's degree 2. full state certification or licensure 3. prove that they know each subject they teach. <p>State Requirements: NCLB requires states to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. measure the extent to which all students have highly qualified teachers, particularly minority and disadvantaged students 2. adopt goals and plans to ensure all teachers are highly qualified 3. publicly report plans and progress in meeting teacher quality goals. <p>Demonstration of Competency: Teachers (in middle and high school) must prove that they know the subject they teach with</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a major in the subject they teach 2. credits equivalent to a major in the subject 3. passage of a state-developed test 4. HOUSSE (for current teachers only, see below) 5. an advanced certification from the state 6. a graduate degree <p>High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE): NCLB allows states to develop an additional way for current teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency and meet highly qualified teacher requirements. Proof</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Education (2004, March). <i>New No Child Left Behind Flexibility: Highly Qualified Teachers</i>. Retrieved February 26, 2019, from https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/methods/teachers/hqtflexibility.html</p> <p>U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). <i>The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001)</i>. Retrieved February 26, 2019, from https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html</p>

may consist of a combination of teaching experience, professional development, and knowledge in the subject garnered over time in the profession.

NEW FLEXIBILITY [Last Updated 11/29/2005]

RURAL TEACHERS:

Under this new policy, teachers in eligible, rural divisions who are highly qualified in at least one subject will have three years to become highly qualified in the additional subjects they teach. They must also be provided professional development, intense supervision or structured mentoring to become highly qualified in those additional subjects.

SCIENCE TEACHERS:

Now, states may determine--based on their current certification requirements--to allow science teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified either in "broad field" science or individual fields of science (such as physics, biology or chemistry).

CURRENT MULTI-SUBJECT TEACHERS:

Under the new guidelines, states may streamline this evaluation process by developing a method for current, multi-subject teachers to demonstrate through one process that they are highly qualified in each of their subjects and maintain the same high standards in subject matter mastery.

EXISTING FLEXIBILITY [which is currently cited as underused]:

More details about HOUSSE for Current Teachers, Middle School Teacher Requirements, Testing Flexibility, Special Education Teachers:

<https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/methods/teachers/hqtflexibility.html>

ESSA - Every Student Succeeds Act

ESSA got rid of the requirement in the law it replaced, the *No Child Left Behind* Act, that teachers must be highly qualified, which typically meant they needed to have a bachelor's degree in the subject they are teaching and state certification. Instead, states must come up with their own definition of an "effective teacher." The feds are explicitly prohibited from telling states what that can be.

Under ESSA, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) was reauthorized and amended. IDEA is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. Most importantly, the reauthorization emphasized information regarding **Personnel Preparation** that has implications for teacher preparation and retention. The Personnel Preparation program helps meet state-identified needs for adequate numbers of fully certified personnel to serve children with disabilities by supporting competitive awards to:

- Provide research-based training and professional development to prepare special education, related services, early intervention, and regular education personnel to work with children with disabilities.
- Ensure that those personnel are fully qualified, and possess the skills and knowledge that are needed to serve children with disabilities.

Klein, A. (2018, July). Does ESSA Require Teachers to Be Highly Qualified? *Education Week, Politics K-12*. Retrieved February 26, 2019, from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/07/essa_highly_qualified_teacher_effective_evaluation.html

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Every Student Succeeds Act*. Retrieved February 26, 2019, from <https://www.ed.gov/essa>⁶²

⁶² *The U.S. Department of Education source is listed, but it does not include information about teacher recruitment or retention. This should highlight the specific lack of language around this topic.

State Policy

Name of Policy

Major Components

Executive Directive 14	Directs the Board of Education to issue emergency regulations to provide Virginia's colleges and universities the option to offer an undergraduate major in teaching.
Budget Actions for the 2018-2020 biennium budget	<p>1. An increase in the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program (\$225,000 in FY2020) to encourage students attending Virginia's private colleges and universities to enter into the teaching profession. Seniors pursuing degrees in education will receive an additional \$500 increase in their TAG award amount; and,</p> <p>2. New funding (\$100,000 over biennium) to help cover the cost of tests and test-preparation programs for provisionally licensed minority students who pass those exams at disproportionately lower rates than their peers. This is one of the contributing factors to Virginia's shortage of teachers of color, which has huge implications for the success of the Commonwealth's students.</p> <p>3. Revised budget language to improve the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program to better incentivize teachers to fill vacancies in the places where they are needed the most. Students will be eligible for up to \$20,000 if they teach for two years in a top five critical shortage area, in a division with 50% free and reduced lunch student population.</p>
2018 HB1125/SB3 49	<p>Changes to Licensure Process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extends the length of license from 5 years to 10 years 2. Eliminates technology requirement 3. Allows some requirements to be completed during the first year of provisional licensure 4. Provides full licensure reciprocity for out of state licenses 5. Provides extensions of provisional licenses 6. Extends one-year licensure waiver for CTE teachers 7. Eliminates the restriction on three-year career and technical teaching licenses that limit such licensees to teaching only half of the instructional day and eliminated the requirement of a mentor.

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

Participant: _____

Date: _____

Division: _____

Interviewees: _____

Before Interview

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us today. My name is _____ and I am a faculty member in the VCU School of Education and researcher for the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium. We are here today as a part of our study on teacher retention. A key component of the project is an analysis of policies related to teacher retention. Our policy team is organizing a matrix of teacher retention policies at the federal, state, and division levels and this interview will help us get an accurate sense of division-level policies and efforts focused on teacher retention in your division. We plan to take notes during our conversation and, with your permission, would like to audio record the conversation so we can get it transcribed. That way we can make sure we don't miss anything that you say. Although we will be publicly reporting our findings from this study, we will not share your name or any identifiable information in any of our reporting.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview:

1. Could you begin by telling us your name and role in the district.
 - a. How long have you been in this role?
 - b. Previous work experiences (*if applicable*)
 - c. Describe your school division's organizational structure with regard to teacher recruitment, onboarding/ induction, and retention. What offices, individuals, or units work on this?
 - d. How does your role relate to teacher retention?

2. Tell us what teacher attrition and mobility look like in your division over the last two years. (*Probe: leadership, salary/incentives, career growth and opportunities, mobility to other districts*)
 - a. What factors do you think contribute to teacher retention and attrition in your division?
 - b. Are there specific groups of teachers that are particularly more challenging to retain in the division (e.g. subject area, demographic groups, experience, etc.)? Explain.

3. What is the division's current approach to addressing teacher retention?
 - a. Tell us about specific strategies (*probe: when was the policy adopted; is it still an active policy*) and how the division analyzed the outcomes.
 - i. Economic Incentives (strategies that focus on increasing teachers' overall compensation, including salary schedule modifications, salary enhancements, incentive payments, stipends, and cash bonuses, tuition grants and remission for teacher training and professional development; in-kind and direct benefits, and retirement benefit waivers)
 - ii. Avenues into the Profession- (establishing alternative routes into the teaching profession especially in persistent shortage areas such as urban schools and in subject specialties (e.g., math, science, and special education))
 - iii. Hiring Strategies & Policies- (strategies for streamlining the hiring process to improve recruitment and retention: license and tenure reciprocity, streamlined hiring processes, partnerships with teacher preparation programs, features that improve job offer attractiveness, and increased visibility and outreach)
 - iv. Professional Development- (factors that allow for personal and professional growth within the workplace)
 - v. Working Conditions- (organizational environment factors that influence teachers' employment decisions, such as the amount of planning time, workload and class size, student behavior and discipline, influence over school policy and participation in decision making, availability of necessary materials, and collegial opportunities.)
 - vi. Other policies that do not align with any of the above categories?
 - b. Why do you think these efforts have worked/not worked?
 - c. Are these strategies tailored to specific groups of teachers?
 - d. What programs, if any, does the division offer to support schools with greater retention challenges?
4. What barriers or constraints do school-level leaders experience regarding teacher retention?
5. In schools with fewer retention challenges, what are some school-level practices that help keep teachers in the classroom? (*Ask to provide specific examples*)
 - a. What division-level supports help to scale up these practices across the division?

6. What is the process for tracking teacher retention at the school-level? And the division level?
 - a. Based on this data or what you know about why teachers move schools or exit the system altogether, what do you think are potential policies that could increase overall teacher retention?
 - b. Based on your experience and role, what is unique about [division name] that makes teachers want to stay?

7. Is there anything else about teacher retention and what the division is doing that you think is important that we should know?

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