Teacher Quality and Teacher Mobility

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Abstract

This paper assesses the determinants of teacher job change and the impact of such mobility on the distribution of teacher quality. High and low-quality teachers are more likely to leave than those in the middle of the distribution. In contrast, the relationship between teacher productivity and inter-school mobility is relatively weak. Teachers who rank above their faculty colleagues are more likely to transfer to a new school within a district and exit teaching. As the share of peer teachers with more experience, advanced degrees or professional certification increase, the likelihood of moving within district decreases. There is also evidence of assortative matching among teachers. The most effective teachers who transfer tend to go to schools whose faculties are in the top quartile of teacher quality. Teacher mobility exacerbates differences in teacher quality across schools.

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Introduction

Given the central role of teacher quality in determining student achievement, there is growing concern over the impact of teacher job change on both the overall level of teacher quality and the distribution of teacher quality across schools. In particular, do the best teachers leave teaching and does teacher mobility within the profession exacerbate differences in educational quality across schools? The answers to these questions have important implications for designing policies to promote student achievement and reduce achievement gaps across students from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds.

The effects of teacher labor market decisions on teacher quality and student achievement are ambiguous, a priori. If high quality teachers possess transferable skills which are valued in other occupations, attrition will tend to erode average teacher quality. However, attrition may have a positive effect on the average quality of teachers if relatively less-effective teachers receive little job satisfaction, voluntarily leave the profession and are replaced by more able teachers. Likewise, the effect of teacher movement between schools on the distribution of teacher quality across schools is not clear ex-ante. Inter-school mobility of teachers could exacerbate the divergence in education quality across schools if schools serving disadvantaged populations lose their best teachers to schools serving more advantaged students. However, it is also possible that switching of schools by teachers has no effect on the distribution of teacher quality across schools and simply enhances the utility of the teachers that move.

A number of previous studies have explored the relationship between various observable teacher qualifications, including college entrance exam scores, performance on teacher certification exams and possession of advanced degrees on teacher attrition (Boyd, et al. (2005), Feng (2009), Feng (2011), Imazeki (2005), Podgursky, et al. (2004)). However, studies of student achievement find little correlation between these credentials and the impact of teachers on student test scores, particularly in elementary and middle school (Betts, et al. (2003), Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2007), Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2010), Hanushek et al. (2005), Harris and Sass (forthcoming), Kane, et al. (2006)). Previous research has highlighted the disparity in qualifications of teachers in schools serving primarily disadvantaged and minority students versus teachers in schools with more advantaged student bodies (Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2005), Goldhaber, Choi and Cramer (2007), Lankford, et al. (2002)). There is also circumstantial evidence that within-profession teacher mobility is contributing to these differences in teacher credentials. Teachers in schools serving primarily disadvantaged students are more likely to transfer to a new school district (Hanushek, et al. (2004), Imazeki (2005), Ingersoll (2001)) and teachers in urban inner-city schools are more likely to migrate away from their schools than teachers in other areas (Ingersoll (2001), Lankford, et al. (2002)). Similarly, teachers, particularly white teachers, tend to move away from schools with high percentages of minority students ((Boyd et al. (2005), Feng (2009), Feng (2010), Feng (2011), Hanushek et al. (2004), Imazeki (2005), Scalfi,Sjoquist and Stinebrickner (2007)).

Given the generally weak relationship between observable teacher characteristics and student achievement, three recent studies have attempted to directly investigate the relationship between teacher job choice and a teacher’s contribution to student achievement or teacher “value-added.” Kreig (2006) analyzes the
relationship between teacher attrition and teacher value-added in Washington State while Boyd, et al. (2007) and Goldhaber, Gross and Player (2007) analyze both attrition and inter-school mobility in New York City and in North Carolina respectively. These papers generally conclude high quality teachers are less likely to transfer and leave. In this paper we consider the impact of teacher quality, measured by teacher value-added, on both teacher movement into other occupations and mobility across schools in Florida. We derive multiple value-added measures of teacher quality and investigate how each is related to individual teacher choices of exit from teaching and movement across schools. Building on recent work which highlights the importance of teacher peer effects (Jackson and Bruegmann (2009), Jackson (2010)), we also explore how the average quality of faculty colleagues and the productivity of a teacher relative to her peer teachers affect teacher job choice. Further, we consider the faculty and student characteristics of schools teachers move to and the implications for the distribution of teacher quality across schools.

*End of excerpt. The entire report is available in PDF format.*

**Other Publications by the Authors**

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