



How principal leadership and person-job fit are associated with teacher mobility and attrition



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Leadership fit is associated with 35 percent lower odds of leaving the profession.
- Person-job fit is associated with 65 percent lower odds of leaving teaching.
- No observable characteristics moderate principal leadership and mobility.

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ABSTRACT

While existing studies of teacher retention have attempted to isolate economic and organizational factors that predict teacher turnover, this paper extends the research base by incorporating measures of principal leadership and person-job (P-J) fit. Using data from roughly 3000 teachers from the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey, we explore how leadership and P-J fit are associated with teachers' mobility. The results confirm that leadership and P-J fit predict retention in one's school and retention in the teaching profession, respectively, and we find no evidence that these associations are moderated by school or teacher characteristics.

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The ability of a school to retain a sufficient number of high-performing teachers has a significant impact on its functioning over time (e.g., Ingersoll & May 2012; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Research on teacher retention has typically focused on how student demographics and teacher characteristics have affected teachers' decisions to remain in their schools, move to other schools, or leave teaching (e.g., Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Diaz, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; for reviews of this literature, see Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Several studies have also examined how principal leadership affects teacher retention (e.g., Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Boyd et al., 2011a; Ingersoll & May 2012; Ladd,

2011).

But perhaps surprisingly, there has been relatively little focus in research on K-12 education on the role of person-environment fit in explaining teacher turnover. Theories of fit emerged from a robust research base in industrial organizational (I-O) psychology that has explored how employees interact with their work environments in an attempt to understand factors that lead to retention and other desirable outcomes (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Meta-analytic reviews of I-O research have found moderate associations between employee retention and different types of person-environment fit (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), although this is one of the first studies to examine actual turnover rather than stated intent to leave.

While there are several ways to conceptualize fit with regard to work environments, this paper uses two nationally representative datasets from the U.S., the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey

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(SASS) and the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), to investigate how fit with the demands of the job (i.e., person-job fit) and principal leadership relate to teacher retention. In our analyses, we found that principal leadership strongly predicted retention in one's school while person-job (P-J) fit strongly predicted retention in the teaching profession and retention in one's school. These findings are important because they indicate that school districts should attend to leadership practices in schools and teaching applicants' match with the demands of the profession in order to increase the likelihood that teachers are retained over time.

In the first two sections of this paper, we review previous research on principal leadership, person-job fit, and teacher retention. In the third section, we present a series of hypotheses regarding leadership, P-J fit, and retention that we tested in our analyses. The fourth section describes our methods including our data and sample, measures, and model. In the fifth section, we present our main findings regarding the role of principal leadership and P-J fit in teacher retention. Finally, we discuss implications of our findings for efforts to retain teachers in their schools and in the profession.

1. Principal leadership and teacher retention

Prior research has examined how teacher retention is affected by student demographics, teacher characteristics, and teachers' working conditions. Studies have reported that teachers are more likely to leave schools that serve high percentages of low-income, non-White, and/or low-achieving students (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007). In addition, teachers' age, years of experience, and effectiveness have been found to predict turnover. For example, early career teachers and those close to retirement are more likely to leave their positions than mid-career teachers (Allensworth et al., 2009; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). At the same time, teachers who are more effective (as measured by students' performance on state tests) are more likely to stay in their positions than less effective teachers (Goldhaber, Gross, & Player, 2011; Boyd et al., 2011a).

Several studies have found that strong principal leadership can promote teacher retention even in contexts where student and teacher characteristics predict that turnover is likely. For example, Boyd et al. (2011a) examined the impact of six aspects of school context on the retention of all first-year K-12 teachers in New York City: school leadership, teachers' classroom autonomy and influence on school policies, teachers' relations with colleagues, student behavior, school safety, and school facilities. After controlling for other school and teacher characteristics, the authors found that school leadership was the only factor that significantly predicted teacher retention. Their measure of school leadership was based on several survey items including whether an effective school discipline policy was in place, whether the school administration was viewed as supportive, whether the school administration was perceived as evaluating teachers fairly, and whether the school administration consulted with faculty before making decisions. In another study, Allensworth et al. (2009) investigated the effect of principal leadership and other school organizational conditions on the retention of beginning K-12 teachers in Chicago. The study reported that retention was higher in schools where teachers viewed the principal as a strong instructional leader, schools where teachers expressed high levels of trust in their principal, and schools where teachers reported having notable influence over school decisions.

Ladd (2011) drew on a 2006 statewide survey administered to all K-12 teachers in North Carolina to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of working conditions and their planned and actual departure rates from their schools. These

working conditions included the quality of school leadership, expanded roles for teachers, PD for teachers, facilities and resources, and, at the elementary and middle school levels, time to meet with students and other teachers. Ladd's measure of the quality of school leadership was based on a range of survey items including whether the principal was viewed as supportive with regard to instruction and student discipline, whether the principal maintained high expectations for student learning and teachers' instruction, whether teachers trusted the principal, whether the principal involved teachers in decision making, and, at the elementary and middle school levels, whether teachers viewed the teacher evaluation process as legitimate and fair. Ladd (2011) reported that the quality of school leadership was a stronger predictor of teachers' planned and actual departures than any of the other working conditions variables. In addition, the quality of principal leadership had a stronger effect on teacher attrition than the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch or the percentage of racial/ethnic minority students.

Research from outside the U.S. also indicates that the nature and quality of school leadership are strongly associated with teachers' plans to remain at their schools. Hulpia, Devos, and Van Keer (2011) drew on data from more than 1500 secondary teachers in 46 schools in Belgium to consider factors that affect teachers' commitment to their schools; research indicates that commitment is highly correlated with teacher retention (Chan, Lau, Nie Lim, & Hogan, 2008; Ladd, 2011). The researchers found that teacher commitment was related to the quality of support provided by school leaders, the degree of cooperation among school leaders, and the extent to which teachers contribute to school decision making (Hulpia et al., 2011). In this study, the measure of supportive school leadership included items that measured school administrators' strength of vision, supportive behavior, provision of instructional support, and provision of intellectual stimulation.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) used data from over 2500 elementary and middle school teachers in Norway to examine how supervisory support and other aspects of the school context affected teacher satisfaction and commitment to the teaching profession. Supervisory support was assessed using a three-item scale that measured teachers' experiences receiving cognitive and emotional support from school leaders while job satisfaction was assessed using a four-item scale that measured teachers' general enjoyment of and affective response to their work. The study reported that supervisory support was directly related to teachers' feeling of belonging at their schools and indirectly related to teacher job satisfaction; the indirect relationship between supervisory support and satisfaction was mediated by teachers' sense of belonging (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

In sum, there is strong evidence across different national contexts that principal leadership is associated with teacher retention and related outcomes. As described below, in this study we operationalized effective principal leadership as communicating a vision for the school, providing support to teachers, recognizing strong teacher performance, and enforcing rules for student behavior.

2. Person-job fit and teacher retention

Theories of person-job fit have arisen from research in industrial-organizational psychology exploring how people interact with their environments (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person-environment research, which has also been influenced by scholarship on vocational choice and personality, eventually expanded to consider not just *interaction* between people and environments, but, explicitly, how well people *fit* or match with the supplies and demands of their environment

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