

Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Office of Program Evaluation
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**Qualitative Analysis of the Teacher Survey on Strategies to Retain
and Attract Teachers in Miami-Dade County Public Schools**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	<u>3</u>
External Factors	<u>4</u>
Employment Factors	<u>4</u>
Personal Factors	<u>9</u>
Conclusion	<u>10</u>
Appendix: Sample of Complete Teachers Responses.....	<u>11</u>
References	<u>14</u>

Introduction

The No-Child left behind Act of 2001 requires that every classroom be staffed with “a qualified teacher.” However, recent studies estimate that the percent of teachers who choose to leave the profession within the first three years to pursue other careers remains considerably high (over 33%) according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2005). This situation is serious especially in light of the fact that schools are in desperate need of a qualified and stable teaching workforce. Growing evidence suggests that in order to reduce teacher shortage, school districts should focus on finding ways to maintain the teachers they already have rather than encouraging alternative routes to certification (Cochran-Smith, 2006, Darling-Hammond, 2005). A growing number of studies are focusing on 1) what causes teachers to stay in the teaching profession; 2) what causes teachers to transfer between schools; and 3) what causes teachers to leave the teaching profession (Strunk & Robinson, Stanford University, 2006).

The leadership of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, aware of this issue and determined to be proactive, took several initiatives to not only maintain the teachers already in the system but also to attract new qualified and committed teachers. One of these initiatives is to look for teacher retention strategies from teachers themselves. It should be noted that several studies showed that the crux of the teacher shortage problem is the teacher retention. There is a growing number of teachers moving from one teaching job to another between schools, districts, or states. There is also an increased number of teachers leaving the teaching profession altogether especially in their first years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). Ingersoll (2004) points out that in any given year, about 14% of the teachers, nationwide, move into, out of, or between schools.

To that end, under the direction of the Chief of Staff, the Offices of Human resources and Program Evaluation gave the opportunity to ALL teachers in the District to participate in an online survey to voice their opinions and give their suggestions on how to attract and maintain teachers.

It should be noted that teachers did appreciate the opportunity to participate and share their opinions. One of the teachers who responded to the survey said “*I am so happy to finally share my opinion.*”

Method

The survey contained close-ended as well as **optional** open-ended questions. Almost 5,000 teachers responded to the survey, and almost 1,000 of them responded to the open-ended questions. Previous information was provided on the responses to the close-ended questions.

Two surveys were actually administered; one focusing on randomly selected teachers from a small number of schools and one survey to all teachers in all schools regarding retention. Since there were a much smaller number of transferred teachers compared to the number of teachers responding to the retention survey the open-ended responses to both surveys were combined in this report.

This report is a qualitative synthesis of the open-ended responses of almost 1,000 teachers. It important to point out that there is an indication that teachers who responded took the survey seriously and provided rich data. Specifically, the teachers who answered both the quantitative and the *optional* qualitative portions of the survey constitute about 20% which is high. In general, respondents do not answer the open-ended questions because it is time consuming and requires extra efforts. However, in this study, some Miami-Dade teachers provided a long and extensive response of more than two pages (See Sample

3). It is important to point out these facts as it re-enforces the richness and maybe the validity of the data provided by the responding teachers.

Following Billingsley, B. S. (1993) the responses were conceptualized within three categories of reasons to maintain, attract, and deter teachers from leaving:

- External factors
- Employment factors
- Personal factors

Using these factors as a guide, each question was examined and further categorized into meaningful themes. These themes provide an overview of the concerns and issues of those teachers who responded to the open-ended questions. The following discussion describes those themes within the overall factors.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

External factors include variables that are external to the teacher, school, and school district. For example, economic trends, employment opportunities outside the classroom, federal and/or state regulations. These factors, although generally not looked at, affect tremendously the teacher workforce (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1993).

The Miami-Dade teachers, who responded to the open-ended questions of the survey, did mention some of these external factors:

One teacher wrote: "... Our retirement is awful and we have to work 30 years. Police officers and firemen make more than us and we are higher degreed. Is it because it is a female dominated profession? Change the retirement system. We can't live on what we retire on."

Another teacher suggested: "Increased salary, inexpensive health insurance, a realistic retirement multiplier (3%), and annual cost of living increase are foremost in the minds of teachers that I have spoken with. Many teachers I know have moved out of state. Support Change in Retirement Laws (Higher Multiplier)"

A third teacher stated the need for "Competitive salaries with industry/professionals and retirement like police/fire personnel. Raise salaries to be competitive with metro Atlanta and North Carolina. Our salaries are too LOW."

EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Employment factors have both direct and indirect effects on teachers' careers. Work related variables, such as work conditions and work rewards have shown to be predictors of job satisfaction and commitment, which in turn are associated with retention of teachers (Cooley & Yovanoff, 2004).

The Miami-Dade teachers, who responded to the open-ended questions of the survey, did mention some of these employment factors:

• Principal Leadership

The role of the principal in retaining teachers in schools is well documented. Several research studies (Stephens 2001, Carver 2003, Charlotte Advocates for Education 2004, Darling-Hammond 2003.) have shown a strong correlation between a teacher's decision to stay at a school and the type of leadership that his or her principal has. Several Miami-Dade teachers cited "The principal Leadership at the school" as a major factor in staying at that school, asking for transfer, or completely leave the teaching profession.

For example, one teacher wrote: *"A principal who puts down teachers or disrespects them in front of students should expect to see a high turnover every year. Teachers need to be treated as professionals and adults."*

Another teacher wrote: *"I feel that our principal only sees this as a stepping stone and has only her interest in mind when making decisions. I don't see support as much as I see intimidation. I am more likely to stay in a school and get more done when people are supportive rather than using the scare tactic. Also, as much as I love teaching and am a dedicated teacher, I tried to buy a house and couldn't afford it on my salary. How is that an incentive to stay?"*

A third teacher wrote: *"I transferred from a school where I had been for 19 years. The last 5 years, we had 5 principals. This in NO WAY creates a stable environment for teachers, staff or students. The co-principal model, in my opinion, was a total disaster and is the reason I left in the middle of the year!"*

Another teacher stated: *"Our current principal, who has been hired by a consulting firm, has no empathy, sympathy or consideration for the dignity of this staff. She has publicly stated that she doesn't care what personal, family or professional problems teachers have. She states that she's getting paid a lot of money to change this school and since she's retired she has nothing to lose. Change is wonderful; however, if it comes at the cost of losing dedicated, effective teachers, who cannot be easily replaced, then it comes with a cost to our students, our community, as well as our teachers."*

It should be noted that there were a relatively small number of respondents who expressed their happiness with their principals.

For example one respondent wrote: *"I am very fortunate to have a strong supportive administration and faculty."*

Another teacher wrote: *"I am very happy at the school I work. My principal and assistant principal are excellent."*

- **Stability of Principal**

Respondents expressed their concerns about the short term assignment of principals to schools.

For example, one respondent wrote: *“If they keep changing principals this school is never going to change (Remember, Rome was not built in a day)”*

Another teacher wrote: *“We have too many principals and change of administrations in this school. It's like getting a new boyfriend every year.”*

A third respondent said: *“A school should not change principal every year because it is unhealthy for stakeholders.”*

- **Need for Administrative support and Respect**

Several teachers were concerned about the way they are treated by their principals and by the lack of consideration to their input.

One teacher wrote: *“I do not want "financial support" to pay my mortgage; I want to be paid what I'm worth, and be treated with respect.”*

Another teacher stated: *“Teachers in Miami-Dade County are belittled and taken advantage of constantly. We are not treated with respect by those in power. Dr. Crew is doing a great job, but he can't do it all. I feel over-worked and underappreciated. Trying to prepare students to "pass a test" is becoming harder and more unrealistic because the requirements change yearly. As a teacher here (Florida), I feel pressured to teach -to-the test when as a teacher, there is so much more to educating students! Many of Florida's practices, as it relates to testing, seem unethical.”*

- **Need to Consider Teacher Input**

Teacher input is very important and was listed as one of the top five issues important to teachers in FDOE survey of nearly 13,000 teachers in the state of Florida (Flesvig, FDOE, 2007). This issue was also found to be important to Miami-Dade teachers.

One teacher wrote: *“Teachers should have more input or be consulted more in the daily operations of the school. Various policies for attendance, discipline, scheduling, etc. need the buy in from the whole staff to make it successful.”*

Another teacher stated: *“...There is a lack of inclusion of teacher input into decisions affecting my program.”*

- **Recognition (not necessarily financial) for Accomplishments**

One teacher stated: *“Recognition of work efforts particularly in efforts that involved mentoring/working with students that may not show immediately or due to student's disabilities or personal issues.”*

Another teacher passionately wrote: *“... in the life of the tired, overworked, stressed out, unappreciated teacher (by students and parents), PRAISE IS DEFINITELY NEEDED from the ADMINISTRATORS.”*

- **Higher Salary**

Many respondents expressed the need for higher salary. This finding is supported by other national research studies indicating a strong positive correlation between increased salary and increased teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2005).

For example, one teacher responded: *“I am leaving the district and moving upstate because I cannot afford to buy a home here on my current salary.”*

Another teacher wrote: *“Simply put, teachers are not paid enough and leave the profession because they can find jobs that will give them a higher salary. There is a huge discrepancy between teacher's salaries and the cost of living in Miami Dade Co. After paying bills and rent, there just isn't any money left until the next paycheck. Living check to check and just barely making ends meet is what is driving teachers out of the profession. Also, if we are professionals, we need to be treated as such. These days the teacher has very little authority: parents run the teachers, and the regions support the parents.”*

- **Higher pay for Higher Degrees**

One teacher stated: *“I think teacher's paycheck should include a cost of living increase that reflects the economical realities of the places that we live. Salaries are still too low. Some of us would like to continue going to school and obtain higher degrees. But should we do it? The difference in the paycheck is hardly worth the sacrifice to the family.”*

- **National Board Certification**

Some teachers think that it is better to pursue a National Board Certificate than go back to school, spend time and money and get little increase in return.

- **Working Conditions**

One teacher wrote: *“As a Nationally Certified Teacher, I am concerned about the working conditions that include moldy, vermin infested schools. Fortunately, I transferred to a beautiful school this year, but how do you think you will keep teachers at the salaries provided and some of the working conditions that teachers are forced to work in. How do*

you expect young people to commit to a team where they feel powerless, underpaid, and intimidated?"

Another teacher stated: *"Cleanliness is the only issue this school should work on."*

• **Student Discipline**

One teacher wrote: "One child with major problems can upset a class all year long with behavior issues. When these students spend the day in the office doing work, because of repeated bad behavior, they are exhibiting good behavior. Elementary schools deal with bad behavior and the teachers need more help with the repeated offenders. Teachers know that the administration does not want them to send these students into the office, so teachers and the other students suffer all year. DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS take away so much from so many."

Another teacher stated: "Discipline in this county has to be more than reducing suspensions. From the top down, we need ethical, moral leadership that will set the example and demand respectful behavior. No new teacher is willing to tolerate the widespread disrespect demonstrated by the students in our schools. Too many students are being deprived of an education because of bad behavior."

A third teacher said: "Giving bonuses for not issuing CSI and suspensions creates an attitude from the students that they can get away with almost anything without punishment."

Another teacher wrote: "Teachers' authority needs to be restored with the support from the administration, as well as the school system. Therefore, the system needs to stop putting pressure on the administration for fewer suspensions, and less scams. The bonus offered to AP's to reduce suspensions SEVERELY AFFECTED MY ABILITY TO MAINTAIN CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE THIS YEAR.

If the students do not have a sense of respect for the consequences of inappropriate behavior, they will continue to do it. Consequently, teachers will continue to get fed up with the system. I think this and the lack of competitive salaries has a lot to do with the teacher turnover rate."

• **Safety**

One teacher wrote: "Safety is lately a national concern. Older schools like xxxx (name was removed to ensure confidentiality) need to be locked. It is very open and easy to access. It needs to be remodeled with safety in mind. For example, our school needs doors with peepholes. What is the purpose of locking our doors? If someone knocks, we have to open the door. We don't know who exactly is behind the door. If doors had peepholes, then we would know. Also, our school is very open. We need our school perimeter enclosed with gates that open from the inside but not from the outside. Not chain link fence!"

Another teacher stated: *“My school lacks discipline. Teachers have excellent management skills, but administration refuses to deal with discipline issues appropriately. There have been incidents in the school which merit a suspension or documentation and neither one has been done. The students, unfortunately, have caught on to this and insist on misbehaving. There is bullying going on that has not been dealt with appropriately. Furthermore, the school counselors don't participate much with the students. When a student misbehaves, he or she receives a little talk and is sent right back to class. The counselor has never been in my classroom to speak to my students about anything. She has never, not even once, stepped inside my room to see how my kids are doing or to talk to them about issues that they need to know about. I find myself wearing many hats- teacher, counselor, and mother. I do it because my kids are important to me. But I feel that administration wants to avoid being questioned about suspensions or referrals and choose to ignore the problems and this is only hurting our kids, not benefiting them. Kids need to know that there are consequences. But administration and the counseling department does not feel this way. I'm disappointed. There have been all sorts of harassment going on- from verbal to physical to sexual- and the students have not been punished appropriately. These students who do the bullying need help. But if the problem is ignored long enough.....just look at Columbine and Virginia Tech.*

Thank you for your time and I do hope there will be changes in the near future. You cannot ignore these issues. They are too dangerous for society. Also, our administration is scared of the parents. You cannot run a school if you are going to give in to the parents all the time.”

- **Parental Involvement**

The lack of parental involvement has been a major educational issue since the 1980s. It is an area of concern that is seen to affect the quality of education in the USA (National Association for Education, 2007). In Miami-Dade this concern has been echoed by many teachers who responded to the survey.

For example, one teacher wrote: *“IT IS A DIFFICULT POPULATION TO DEAL WITH...NO PARENT INVOLVEMENT...NO PTA”*

Another said: *“We need more parent involvement; however, during this 2007 year parental involvement has improved.”*

- **Reduced Class Sizes**

A veteran teacher stated: *“... I am in my last five years. There are two factors for a successful teaching experience, I feel. The first is solid pay, and the second is low class size with sufficient books and materials.”*

Another teacher wrote: *“I feel discontented with the large classroom size in the lower elementary grades - 29 in one second grade class and the level of achievement they have when they enter third grade.”*

One teacher stated that team teaching is not effective in reducing class size and wrote: *"We are discouraged with the new Team Teaching, which defeats the whole purpose of the "class size amendment", which is to provide students with a small and nurturing learning community."*

PERSONAL FACTORS

Personal factors include demographic, family, and cognitive/affective variables (Billingsley, 1993). Among the demographic variables such as age, gender, and race, research has shown that they have an impact on teacher retention (Singer, 1993). Family variables such as marriage, divorce, birth of children, planning to have "a family," relocation, commute are generally cited as reasons for continuation or interruption of a teacher's career (Billingsley, 1993). Finally, cognitive/affective variables include such things as interest, expectations, motivation, and personality (Brownell, Smith & Lenk, 1993).

The teachers, who responded to the open-ended questions of the survey, mentioned reasons such as:

- Proximity to their homes;
- Need to drive their children to and from school;
- Need to take care of family members; and relocation.

For example, one teacher said: *"Everything was fine where I was at for 20 years. Distance and taking my kids to school is the reason for the transfer."*

Another wrote: *"Today in this city {it} is very important to avoid traffic and save in gas. The school was also very far from my home - over an hour's drive in abysmal traffic."*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concerns, issues, and suggestions gathered from the responses of the nearly 5,000 Miami-Dade teachers who responded to the on-line survey are similar to that of other teachers nationwide and are supported by several research studies that were conducted by various groups.

Furthermore, the analysis of the qualitative portion of the survey supports and reinforces the findings and results of the quantitative component of the surveys which were presented in a separate report.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE OF COMPLETE TEACHERS RESPONSES

The following are samples of teachers' complete responses, with minor grammatical editing. The purpose of this sample is to give the reader a flavor of the type and range of responses to the open-ended questions in the survey.

Furthermore it should be noted that there is an indication that teachers who responded took the survey seriously and provided rich data. Specifically, almost 1,000 of the 5,000 teachers (or 20%) who participated in this study answered both the quantitative and the *optional* qualitative portions of the survey. In general, respondents do not answer the open-ended questions because it is time consuming and requires extra efforts. However, in this study, some Miami-Dade teachers provided a long and extensive response of more than two pages (See Sample 3). It is important to point out these facts as it re-enforces the richness and maybe the validity of the data provided by the responding teachers.

SAMPLE 1:

"I have been overwhelmingly impressed with Dr. Crew's initiatives and great progress since his arrival. I applaud the direction that he is leading our schools... This is the type of leadership that will put Miami-Dade on the top of the educational map where we belong. We need to focus on new testing tools that will replace this FCAT madness. It is overshadowing what should be a more balanced and global education! We need a better solution... I also don't agree with the recent implementation of financial rewards for teachers whose students score higher on the FCAT... I think this is a recipe for disaster and is unfair to both students and teachers."

SAMPLE 2:

"Teachers and staff have little or no input in the evaluation of the administration. We have lost excellent principals and APs who have established so many positive changes, without no warning to the staff or to them, that they were being moved. I feel as though the county is forever in the process of re-inventing the wheel. This frequent change of administration only impacts our school in a very negative way. If I were a younger teacher, I would definitely be looking for a teaching position in another county, or state as so many of our teachers are currently doing. Dade County treats its teachers and staff with very little professional consideration. Our current administration has been hired by a consulting firm to "get rid of bad apples". This, my friend, is as unprofessional as it gets. Teachers have been harassed, embarrassed, and humiliated in front of students and other staff. We have an extremely high percentage of teachers who have already left this year, who have asked for transfers or who have obtained employment out of county or state. Young teachers need nurturing and mentoring; experienced teachers sometimes also need this. We all need to feel that our voices are heard and considered. No one needs the punitive physical and psychological pressures and stress being placed upon us. Our current principal, who has been hired by a consulting firm, has no empathy, sympathy or consideration for the dignity of this staff. She has publicly stated that she doesn't care what personal, family or professional problems teachers have. She states that she's getting paid a lot of money to change this school and since she's retired she has nothing to lose. Change is wonderful; however, if it comes at the cost of losing dedicated, effective teachers, who cannot be easily replaced, then it comes with a cost to our students, and community, as well as our teachers."

SAMPLE 3:

"Job Retention - to retain high-performing, diverse, and motivate faculty and staff, you need to reward them for being high-performers. All people work hard for a reward of some sort. When you work with students who are low functioning and have bad behavior, you need support from somewhere. As teachers I do believe we try to support one another, but it is done in whispers. Administration is bogged down with an onslaught of duties and behaviors should not have to be coming to their doors everyday in Elementary school. Our AP is tired of seeing our students at her door and I believe she takes it PERSONALLY or as a personal attack, when in fact the teachers are trying to teach in their classes and the behaviors are not being dealt with at home and at school, there is no means to deal with them. Elementary Administrators need more than one Counselor to handle all the problems children have today.

PRAISE, PRAISE, WHAT IS THAT. Hardly ever do I get a pat on the back for staying till 6:00 and even 7:00 o'clock at night to try and meet all the demands of my job. Administrators do not praise me; they only tell me what they see that I am doing wrong. Everybody knows, that is wrong in any profession. But in the life of the tired, overworked, stressed out, unappreciated teacher (by students and parents), PRAISE IS DEFINITELY NEEDED from the ADMINISTRATORS.

In a college class I took, they asked what runs the world. And of course it was MONEY. All everyone is seeking more money for their schools. That equates to scores. Sure, we want our students to excel on the tests, but if these are the end all, then why is there so little help in meeting that expectation. The classroom teacher (not special areas - which is a whole other subject in and of itself - they definitely need more WORK related to student success - PLEASE EVERYONE KNOWS THATS TRUE), the classroom teacher is expected to do a job from 8:00 - 3:30 or so. We know there are planning hours and some work should go home, but my planning hours are busied (as are most teachers in a class by themselves) with paperwork, such as grades, Xeroxing, assessment, documentation, anecdotal, notes to and from parents, agenda reporting, constant activities going on at school, gathering work for students who were absent, who are going to be absent, who were tardy, who left early, covering for absent special area teachers and on and on. My lunch time is spent with students with bad behavior because I KNOW THE ADMINISTRATION IS TIRED OF SEEING THESE STUDENTS AND YET THEY DO NOTHING ABOUT IT. To be honest, there are probably feelings like me. TOO MUCH TO DO, too little time. And all of these training classes going on during our planning time. We are constantly being told WHAT ELSE someone in some cubby somewhere, like the person who made up this silly inventory, had sat and made up. I think Dade County needs to get rid of some of the people, sitting around with nothing to do but think of WHAT ELSE the classroom teacher should be doing. Put them to work at something that needs to be done. SURE you can KEEP piling jobs on the classroom teacher, but it isn't going to get done. One person is one person, and there are only so many hours in a day. I don't even think we should have an AP. Many of their duties could be done by someone like a higher paid security guard, watching over the students with poor behavior and calling their parents to report their poor behavior. Get more INDIANS and fewer CHIEFS. MORE WORKERS. You ask me if I would rather get a raise next year, or have a more manageable classroom and less work because I have a para now and then to help me file or Xerox etc. I would take the part time para, given she or he is not removed CONSTANTLY to cover for another class, which is what has happened all year in my class. DON'T TELL me that I have been given help, when you call to remove that person every time they step through my door. It is only help on paper. MAKE THEM SIGN IN AND OUT OF MY ROOM and you will see there is hardly any time spent in my class helping me. I would not allow my children to become teachers. No worry, they wouldn't want to. They see me, working late at school and on the weekends. They see me sad and discouraged about how the administration treats me with little respect and little or no appreciation. WHO WANTS THAT? NOT ME. But teachers are stuck. This is our career. For me, it is too late to change.

For those TURNOVERS, they are the smart ones. They are getting out early enough to find a job they can love. IT'S hard to LOVE being a teacher in today's world. But it is even harder, when the demands are so strenuous, you can't stand under the pressure and the administration adds pressure, by not appreciating what you do. All they can see is what you haven't done, that they would like you to have, even though, in the far reaching places of their memories, most of them can vaguely remember TEACHING.

Our teacher of the year who was promoted for being "THE BEST TEACHER" and I agree, she was a great teacher, said, "I'll never have to do that again." She was talking about TEACHING. She got out of the classroom and now she goes to those meetings and comes back with things for the classroom teacher to do. PILE IT ON - GO AHEAD. HIRE A THOUSAND MORE PEOPLE AND GIVE THEM JOBS TRYING TO COME UP WITH MORE THINGS FOR TEACHERS TO DO. Our Principal just told us, the BUDGET is tight next year. But we are lucky; we get to keep our teachers. SO WHAT! IS THAT SUPPOSE TO MAKE US FEEL GOOD, IT DOES NOT.

INCLUSION teachers seem very happy, with 2 teachers and a full time paraprofessional. A look should be taken at their constant state of happiness. If you want to find answers go to the teachers who are in the class by themselves with no para. Teachers who have to prepare students to pass the FCAT Reading test or they fail and these students come to them with a 7% on their SAT and a pre primer reading level. (Third grade was just told, at one of those mini training sessions, how NEXT YEAR, we were going to have to focus more on writing. This year it was more on MATH. Wait and watch what happens to the reading then. Or go to the resource teachers who have to make six sets of lesson plans for 18 students with behavior and learning problems and have no para most of the time. Go to them, LISTEN. LISTEN. Listen, listen. And if you are not going to take any of this advice, stop asking us to give you advice."

SAMPLE 4:

"I love working at my school. I feel I am treated as a professional and that my opinions count. I have been given many opportunities to grow professionally. Teachers count here (in my school). But I am in my last five years. If I were starting again, I would have to move to a different school district, maybe out of state, so that I could earn more money. Perhaps I would even leave teaching. There are two factors for a successful teaching experience, I feel. The first is solid pay, and the second is low class size with sufficient books and materials."

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