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Committee on Education

Senator James E. "Jim" King, Jr., President

FIRST YEAR TEACHER RETENTION

SUMMARY

An important element in Florida's continuing effort to attract and maintain an effective teaching force in its public schools has been the retention of beginning teachers. This interim report focuses on retention strategies currently employed in Florida and identifying those strategies in other states that Florida may want to consider.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, nationally more than 30 percent of new teachers leave the classroom by the end of their fifth year. The attrition rate for first year teachers ranges between 12 and 20 percent. In Florida, 11 percent of new teacher education graduates who began teaching in fiscal year 1995 had left teaching by fiscal year 2001. Only three percent of teachers with ten or more years of experience who began teaching in Florida in fiscal year 1995 left the profession over the same time period. While Florida's teacher retention figures are encouraging when compared to the national data, continuing population growth and the recent constitutional amendment to reduce class sizes make it imperative that school districts increase efforts to retain instructional personnel.

The teacher retention issue will continue to be studied during the 2003 Legislative Session and the subsequent interim period. Findings from the interim study do not support recommendations to develop and create new programs. Effective teacher retention strategies exist and are being used in many of the state's school districts. The challenge will be to improve and refine programs already in place and initiate efforts to implement successful retention practices in all districts.

BACKGROUND

Florida faces a major dilemma in trying to attract the number of teachers necessary to meet its classroom needs over the next several years. The dilemma can

best be described as a classic supply versus demand scenario.

On the supply side, the number of teachers produced by state teacher training institutions each year is insufficient to fill the vacancies that either currently exist or are projected to develop over the next several years. Current estimates indicate that less than half of the teachers required to fill the vacancies occurring each year are produced in-state. Among the ways the state can address the supply issues are to produce more teachers, hire teachers from out-of-state, and to retain teachers who might otherwise leave the profession. By increasing the retention rate of teachers already practicing in Florida, the State is able to reduce the number of teachers who must be recruited each year. It is also more efficient to retain current quality employees rather than have to recruit new employees.

Three major factors combine to create the demand side of the dilemma:

1. Florida continues to be a high growth state with the current estimated increase in full-time equivalent students for 2002-03 at more than 53,000.
2. Teachers leaving the profession. Of those teachers employed in Florida during the 2001-2002 school year, 15,000 were expected to terminate employment before the start of the 2002-2003 school year.
3. The passage in November 2002 of two constitutional amendments that will require the school districts to employ additional teachers. The class size amendment requires the Legislature to provide funding for sufficient classrooms so that there are a maximum number of students in public school classrooms for various grade levels. Beginning with the 2005 school year, the state is required to implement a voluntary, universal, free pre-kindergarten program for 4-year olds. Depending on the extent to which school districts deliver pre-kindergarten services additional teachers may be required.

Florida's total teacher workforce for the 2001-02 school year was approximately 136,900 teachers. Of this number, almost 14,400 were new to teaching in Florida. Current estimates for the 2003-04 school year call for approximately 17,000 additional teachers to be hired. This estimate does not include the impact of the new constitutional amendments. The data cited reflects that Florida currently must hire more than 10 percent of its teacher workforce each year as replacements and to meet the needs of growth. One way to reduce the shortage is to improve the retention of teachers currently employed in the state.

Over the last several years the Legislature has taken steps to address the retention of well-qualified teachers. The actions have included both targeted appropriations and the initiation of statutory programs to assist school districts in retaining teachers. For example, the Legislature (s. 1012.05, F.S.) requires the Department of Education to identify the best practices that retain teachers. The law (s. 1009.60, F.S.) requires the Florida Fund for Minority Teachers to implement a training program designed to retain minority teachers. For Fiscal Year 2002-2003, the Legislature (s. 1001.62, F.S.) allows school districts to amend their operating budgets in order to free up more funds for teacher recruitment and retention. Finally, the Florida Mentor Teacher School Pilot Program was established to attract and retain high-quality teachers through mentoring.

METHODOLOGY

Committee staff reviewed existing retention tools in Florida and other states and also contacted school districts regarding local initiatives to retain beginning teachers. Staff also reviewed information from the Southern Regional Education Board to identify retention programs which have been or are currently being implemented by other states in the south. Finally, staff conducted a search of the national literature to identify retention programs and activities undertaken elsewhere.

FINDINGS

The staff findings are divided into three areas. The first is the experience Florida and other states are having with teacher turnover. The second identifies reasons cited for the turnover. The third area describes initiatives that have been or might be undertaken to reduce teacher turnover.

Teacher Turnover:

In Florida, eleven percent of new teacher education graduates who began teaching in Fiscal Year 1995 had left the state's public school classrooms by fiscal year 2001. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the range for other southern states cited is that from 12 to 19 percent of teachers in their first year of teaching leave the classroom:¹ Other national studies report as high as 30 percent of beginning teachers leaving the field within five years of starting their careers.

- Among teachers in Tennessee with no previous experience, 36 percent leave within the first four years and 42 percent leave within 5 years.
- In Oklahoma, 13 percent of first-year teachers left in 2000.

For first year teachers in other states, SREB reports that teachers leave at the following rates:

- Georgia: 15 percent.
- South Carolina: 12 percent.
- North Carolina: 13 percent.
- Texas: 19 percent.

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 20 percent of all new hires leave teaching within three years and 9 percent don't make it past their first year. A study by Darling-Hammond and Schan in 1996 found the situation to be even worse for urban districts. That study reported that close to 50 percent of new teachers in urban areas had left the profession by the end of their first five years.

The Missouri General Assembly directed the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to examine the retention and recruitment of teachers in the state's schools and report to the General Assembly annually on its findings.² Based on data from the 2001 report, Missouri is seeing a dramatic increase in the turnover rate of its teachers. Of the first-year teachers hired in 1991, 27.6 percent left within five years. This percentage was relatively constant for each five-year period for teachers hired through 1995. However, for those teachers hired in 1996, 33.8 percent were gone by 2001.

Contributing Factors:

According to the Southern Regional Education Board

¹ Southern Regional Education Board, *Quality Teachers: Can Incentive Policies Make a Difference?* April 2002.

² Missouri State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Missouri Public Schools*, December 2001.

and national and state research studies and reports, several key factors can influence a beginning teacher's decision to leave:³

- Inadequate preparation to teach, particularly as it relates to classroom management or student discipline.
- Conditions in the school and classroom, particularly the perception by beginning teachers of the lack of administrative support, lack of guidance from other teachers, and placement into difficult assignments (difficult students, subjects outside the beginning teacher's area of expertise, schools with a high percentage of minority students, and students living in poverty for which the teacher has had inadequate preparation to teach).
- Salaries and benefits.

A study conducted by the Chatham (N.C.) Education Foundation of the motivational influences on teachers supports the three major factors described in the other studies and adds a fourth: the need for more parental support of the teacher and school.⁴

The results of National University's Teacher Retention and Attrition Survey, a postsecondary institution in California, indicate that K-12 teachers in California are more dissatisfied with the level of stress in their jobs than they are with their salaries, and are almost as dissatisfied about the lack of praise and respect they receive.⁵ While respondents echoed familiar concerns about low pay in the teaching profession, survey results suggest that salary concerns are linked to other important issues, and that it will take more than pay raises to attract and retain the teachers California is going to need in the next decade.

For those respondents who had left the teaching profession, salary was a major factor but other issues were also high on the list of reasons for leaving the profession. Among these were a constantly

increasing workload that included non-teaching duties; the amount of take-home work (frequently linked to insufficient pay for overtime work); and unrealistic expectations for teachers to do everything. Another factor cited was a feeling of lack of support from administrators.

Two recent Florida studies detail reasons for teachers leaving the profession in this state. The Florida Legislature's 2000 study suggested that nearly 43 percent of the former teachers surveyed left their jobs due to factors related to the teaching profession rather than personal reasons.⁶ These factors included dissatisfaction with the teaching profession, a desire for better salary or benefits, or pursuit of another career. Respondents were also asked to indicate those factors that would encourage them to return to the profession. The most often selected items were: 1) increased pay (the salary increase most often marked was \$10,000 and the average amount was \$15,545); 2) smaller class size; 3) fewer disruptive students; 4) less paperwork; 5) more support from school administration; and 6) the ability to work part-time.

The Florida Department of Education reported that the top five reasons for classroom teachers voluntarily separating from service for July through June in 2001 and 2002 were: 1) family/personal reasons; 2) relocation; 3) retirement; 4) "other" (e.g., medical, career change, entrepreneurship; large class size); and 5) inadequate salary.⁷ This data is not specific to beginning teachers. The average length of service for the departing teachers was similar for both years (9.4 years in 2002 and 9.3 years in 2001).

Initiatives to Retain Teachers:

⁶ Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research, *Teacher Survey Results*, April 18, 2000. The study surveyed individuals holding current certifications in one of the following teacher shortage areas: math or computer science; science; exceptional student education; or foreign language.

⁷ Florida Department of Education, *Teacher Exit Interview Statewide Results Summary, July- June 2001 and 2002*. Classroom teachers, for purposes of the summary, are regular full-time instructional staff assigned to teach students in classroom situations, including basic instruction, exceptional student education, and vocational technical education. Other reports on teacher retention and the first years of teaching include the Florida Department of Education's preliminary study of leavers, stayers, and returnees. See *Teachers in Florida Public Schools 1992-93 to 1996-97*, January 1998.

³ SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD, *REDUCE YOUR LOSSES: HELP NEW TEACHERS BECOME VETERAN TEACHERS*, AUGUST 23, 2001.

⁴ The Chatham Education Foundation, *Teacher Retention Survey 2000*.

⁵ The National University, (LaJolla, California) *Teacher Retention and Attrition Survey*, 2001.

There appears to be a general consensus among researchers and teacher retention experts that focusing resources on beginning teachers can result in more teachers remaining in the field for a longer time or (conversely) fewer teachers having to be replaced. Among the specific activities identified as being effective in reducing turnover were:

- Quality mentoring programs. Numerous studies and reports support increased teacher retention as being a direct result of quality mentoring programs. Over thirty states mandate some form of mentoring for beginning teachers.
- Induction programs, including support teams that focus on the beginning teacher. Induction is the process of systematically training and supporting new teachers, beginning before the first day of school and continuing through the first two or three years of teaching.⁸ A number of Florida school districts have induction programs.
- Improving teacher skill, confidence, and efficiency through better opportunities for training and professional development.
- Increasing teacher salaries to prevent teachers from moving across the border to higher paying states, some state legislatures are increasing the state's own base salary.

The Chicago Public Schools have created a Teacher Retention Unit which focuses on retaining teachers currently working in the Chicago system. Activities undertaken by this unit include:

- Educating principals about strategies to retain teachers.
- Compiling data to clearly identify the causes of teacher turnover.
- Conducting exit interviews of teachers who leave the system.
- Performing "911" activities which include helping teachers find new positions in the system, helping teachers network for additional support, and directing teachers to resources which will make their jobs easier.⁹

⁸ Education Week, Wong, Harry K. *Mentoring Can't Do It All*, August 8, 2001.

⁹ Chicago Public Schools, Department of Human Resources, Teacher Retention Unit, *Description of Program*, www.cps-humanresources.org/Initiatives/TRU/Abouttru.html

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, eight of the region's states have either a planned or operational teacher induction or mentoring program that is mandated or supported by state funds. An example of such a program is the Alabama "GEMS" (Gaining Expertise through Mentoring and Support Program). The goals of the Alabama Program are identified as the following:¹⁰

- Build collegial relationships between mentor teachers and beginning teachers to promote instructional excellence.
- Develop self-efficacy for beginning teachers as well as their mentors, to improve teaching satisfaction and job retention among special education teachers and service personnel.
- Identify the needs of beginning teachers.
- Generate and implement strategies to support beginning teachers within the context and culture of special education.
- Examine the Alabama Standards for the Teaching Profession and utilize these to support beginning teacher growth, if needed.

State strategies to retain Florida teachers include:

- Allowing each district to adopt its own alternate certification pathway with approval by the Department of Education so that uncertified teachers can become certified and therefore be retained.
- Providing financial support for beginning teachers in the form of both scholarships to take classes for certification and to fund student loan forgiveness programs.
- Providing funding to train and retain current teachers in areas of critical teacher shortages.
- Providing targeted appropriations including funds for retention bonuses.
- Passing statutory programs like the mentoring initiative designed to assist school districts in retaining teachers.

Additional teacher retention studies are currently being conducted in Florida by the Department of Education, the Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement (CEPRI), and by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Governmental Accountability (OPPAGA). CEPRI's Committee on the Teaching Profession recently issued a draft report that includes recommendations for retaining teachers

¹⁰ Alabama State Department of Education, State Improvement Grant, Gaining Expertise Through Mentoring and Support, 2000.

and the Council continues to gather written information for its final report.¹¹

The Florida Board of Education's strategic imperatives include increasing the supply of highly qualified instructors by keeping good beginning and veteran teachers in the profession. The Department of Education is establishing a design team to research and provide further recommendations to the Florida Board of Education for teacher compensation.¹²

RECOMMENDATIONS

Florida appears reasonably successful in retaining teachers when matched against the efforts of other states in national comparisons. Several factors cited in this project, however, should be sufficient to temper the feeling of success. Continued population growth, constitutionally mandated class-size reduction, and the necessity to replace at least 10 percent of the public school teaching force annually are all very strong reasons why teacher retention efforts should be strengthened. There are numerous examples of successful programs that should be improved and expanded in school districts where they do exist, and implemented in school districts where they don't. These activities should be able to be accomplished, at least initially, by redirecting existing resources. The work of OPPAGA in identifying best district practices in teacher mentoring, teacher induction, and professional development provides a basis of tested programs that can be emulated and tailored to fit specific situations. The State Board of Education and the Department of Education are well positioned to provide the necessary leadership through Strategic Imperative #1.

Examples of successful teacher retention efforts that should be pursued, include:

- Teacher mentoring, with a strong training program for mentors.
- Teacher induction programs that provide follow-up services.

- Staff development that addresses specific concerns cited by teachers.
- Staff development for school administrators that helps them acquire the skills needed to manage successful retention efforts.
- Coordination between alternative certification programs and mentoring and induction services.
- Cooperative agreements between teacher training programs and school districts that include emphasis on teacher retention issues.

Teacher retention should continue to be a topic for interim review by legislative committees. The potential retention initiatives for improving the quality of the teaching force and the efficiency of the teacher recruiting process warrant the attention.

¹¹ Committee on the Teaching Profession, Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement, *Working Draft Report #1: Florida Teachers and the Teaching Profession*, December 2002.

¹² Florida Board of Education, *Florida's K-20 Education System Strategic Plan: Achieving the Future Together (Projects Recommended to Achieve the Management Objectives of the Florida Board of Education)*, Imperative #1, August 2002.