

What factors are associated with teacher mobility within New Orleans?

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This Research Snapshot was requested by NOLA Public Schools.

Overview

This project examines teacher and school characteristics associated with teacher mobility within New Orleans publicly funded schools from 2016 to 2019. Results can be used to target interventions designed to improve teacher retention within schools.

One teacher characteristic predicted teacher mobility, and several school characteristics did:

- Newer teachers are more likely to switch schools than more experienced teachers.
- Teachers are more likely to switch schools if their principal is also leaving.
- Teachers at schools with lower School Performance Scores (SPS) are more likely to switch schools than those at higher SPS schools.
- Teachers at schools located in lower income neighborhoods are more likely to switch schools than those at schools in higher income neighborhoods.
- Teachers do not appear to switch schools due to low salaries or low per pupil spending.

This study's findings generally align with existing research in other districts, with one exception. The racial makeup of a school's student body does not appear to affect teachers' likelihood of moving schools in New Orleans, while studies in other locations have found that teachers in schools with a higher proportion of students of color are more likely to switch schools.

While it can be useful for individual teachers to move and find school environments that fit their skills and needs, high rates of teacher mobility can have negative effects on teacher collaboration, school culture, and student outcomes.

Background

New Orleans is the only city in the country with a majority-charter school district. Charter schools have autonomy over hiring and firing decisions, and in Louisiana, they are rarely subject to tenure policies or union contracts. Teachers can apply to a diverse set of schools with different teaching contexts and salary and benefits schedules. These factors could lead to more mobility in New Orleans, and this issue is important because existing research finds that increased teacher mobility creates instability in schools and can harm student learning.

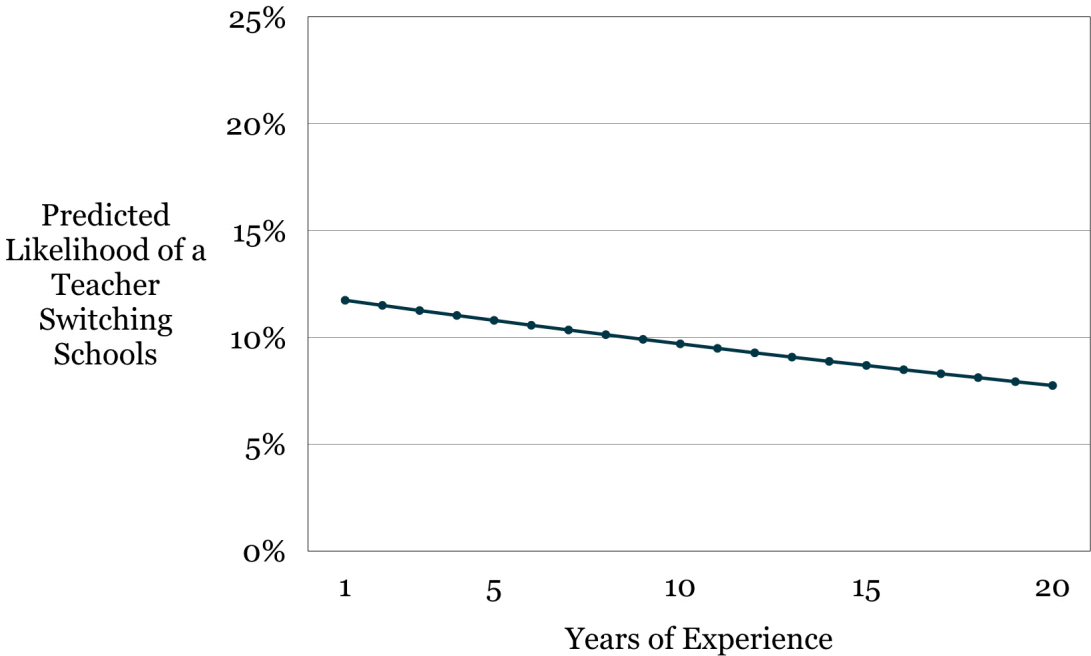
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While the definition of teacher mobility can include teachers exiting the profession, this analysis focuses exclusively on teachers moving between New Orleans schools; from 2016 to 2019, 10% of teachers switched schools within Orleans Parish. I exclude from this study the 19% of teachers who stopped teaching in Orleans Parish or stopped teaching altogether, as well as teachers who worked in schools that were closing, merging with another school, or eliminating a grade. The remaining 71% of teachers who did not switch schools are used as a comparison group for those who did switch.

Using regression models, I estimate how teacher and school characteristics may separately affect the likelihood of a teacher switching schools. For example, when I say that teacher experience predicts teacher mobility, this means that I am comparing the mobility of teachers with different experience levels who are otherwise similar (e.g., they have the same race and salary).

Key Finding #1

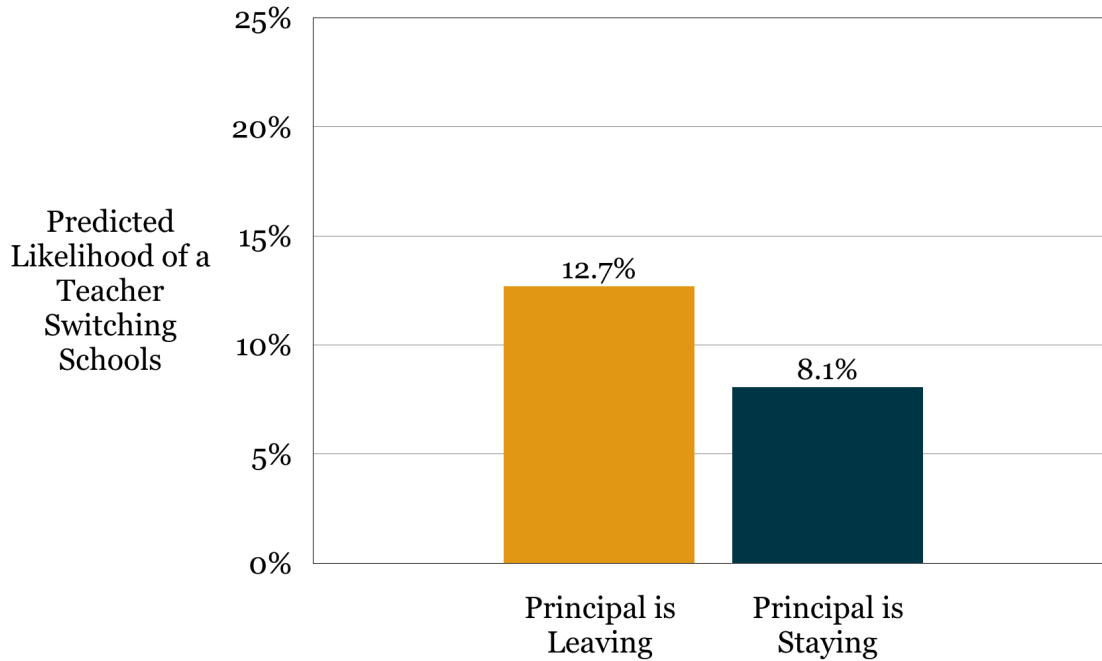
Newer teachers are more likely to switch schools than more experienced teachers.



Teachers who are newer to teaching are more likely to switch to a different school than teachers who are more experienced. First-year teachers are 4 percentage points more likely to switch schools than teachers with twenty years of experience, which translates to a 51% increase in the likelihood of switching.

Key Finding #2

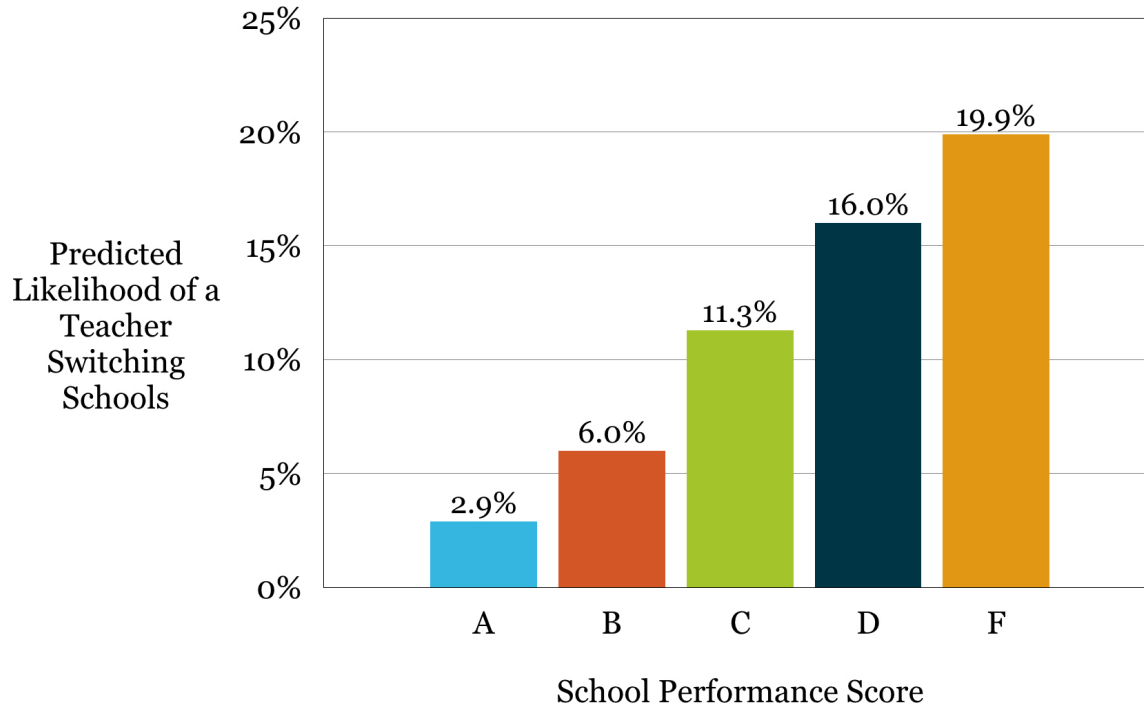
Teachers are more likely to switch schools if their principal is also leaving.



Teachers are 5 percentage points (a 57% increase) more likely to switch schools if their principal is leaving than if their principal is staying at the school. However, fewer than 1% of teachers who switch schools follow an administrator to a new school. Additional analyses I conducted further support the finding that administrative turnover may contribute to increased teacher mobility: the longer a principal has been at a school, the less likely a teacher is to switch to a new school.

Key Finding #3

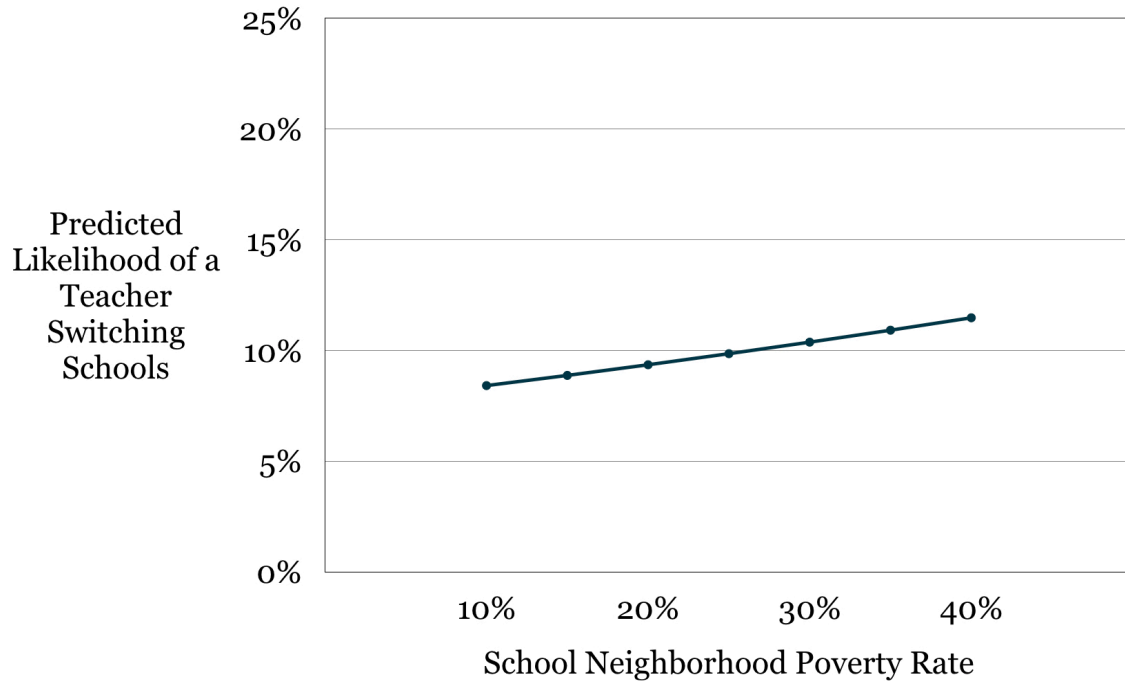
Teachers at schools with lower School Performance Scores (SPS) are more likely to switch schools than those at higher SPS schools.



Teachers are 17 percentage points (almost seven times) more likely to switch schools if their school has an F rating than if their school has an A rating as its School Performance Score (SPS). The SPS is an A to F letter grade that the state assigns to schools, primarily based on student test scores. I also find that teachers tend to switch from lower performing to higher performing schools, as measured by SPS. Forty-one percent of those who switch are moving to a school with a higher letter grade. Over half of teachers move to a school with the same SPS, and only a small fraction go to a school with a lower SPS.

Key Finding #4

Teachers at schools located in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates are more likely to switch schools than those at schools in lower poverty neighborhoods.



Teachers are 3 percentage points (36%) more likely to switch schools if their school is located in an area where at least 40% of residents live in poverty, versus one where no more than 10% of residents do. Most New Orleans neighborhoods have poverty rates between 10 and 40%, but roughly one fifth of neighborhoods are above that range, reaching levels considered to be “concentrated poverty.” Additional analyses I conducted show that teachers tend to move from schools in higher poverty areas to those in lower poverty areas.

Key Finding #5

Teachers do not appear to switch schools due to low salaries or low per pupil spending.

Counterintuitively, teachers are more likely to switch schools when they have a higher salary, relative to other teachers with similar characteristics, and on average, those who switch do not see a salary increase as a result of their move.

Likewise, teachers in schools with higher per-pupil expenditures are more likely to switch schools than those at schools with lower per-pupil spending. Schools may have higher per-pupil expenditures for a variety of reasons, including enrolling more students with certain designations (e.g., students with disabilities), having more revenue from outside sources (e.g., fundraising), or having low enrollment relative to staff, which often occurs in new schools with few grade levels. However, when teachers do move, they tend to move to schools with even higher per-pupil expenditures. This appears to be driven by two factors. First, we observe a small set of schools with high per-pupil expenditures that both lose and gain experienced New Orleans teachers at a high rate, creating a revolving door effect associated with high per-pupil spending. Second, there are a number of schools that are adding one or more grade levels that are both likely to recruit experienced teachers from other schools and have higher per-pupil spending, on average.

Additional Findings

I do not find evidence that a teacher's race affects their likelihood of switching schools, with the exception of Asian teachers, who are about half as likely to switch schools as teachers of other racial and ethnic groups. However, the sample size is small, with only 56 Asian teachers across all years of the analysis.

While this analysis excludes teachers who were forced to switch schools due to a school closure, school merger, or the elimination of a grade, it does include teachers whose school will close soon. I find that teachers are more likely to leave if their school is going to close one year later, even though these closures had not yet been announced at the time of the teacher's departure.

Methodological Notes

The data for this brief come from deidentified administrative records collected by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). This analysis explores teacher mobility within New Orleans Public Schools by examining the relationship between teacher and school factors and the likelihood that a teacher will move schools. Only full-time teachers who taught at one Orleans Parish school per year for at least two consecutive years from 2015-16 to 2018-19 are included. Full-time teachers were identified as those with salaries of at least \$30,000 per year, who started the school year in July/August, and ended the school year in May/June.

I estimated these associations using multilevel probit regression models that included teacher ethnicity, years of experience, years in their school, and salary; principal years in their school and whether the school is getting a new principal the next school year; and school SPS, percent of teachers who are Black, percent of students who are Black, percent of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, percent of students who have limited English proficiency, percent of students with disabilities, average out-of-school suspensions per student, total per pupil spending, neighborhood poverty rate, and whether the school would close within two years. The analysis also describes the changes in a teacher's school as a result of the move. For this, I used t-tests to estimate whether the change in each school characteristic for those who moved schools was statistically different from zero ($p < .05$) for teachers who moved. Lastly, I calculated the percent of movers who followed an administrator to a new school and the percent of movers who moved to a school with a different SPS level. One important limitation of this analysis is that there is no way to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary moves.

References

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About the Author

Olivia Carr is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow for Research-Practice Partnerships at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans.

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In this series of reports, we analyze data to inform New Orleans education policy and practice by answering questions asked by either our Advisory Board or NOLA Public Schools (NOLA-PS).

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