



TEACHER RETENTION IN UTAH: EXPLORING 2011-12 SASS AND 2012-13 TFS SURVEY DATA

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Introduction

In collaboration with the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) is exploring issues related to Utah’s educator workforce through multiple projects and research briefs. The first brief in this series, [At First Glance: Teachers in Utah](#), explored available data related to educator supply, demand, and shortage. At First Glance also identified teacher retention as an important factor affecting teacher supply and demand, but recognized the lack of data explaining why teachers leave. Another brief, [Utah Educators](#), reviews the importance of highly-qualified educators, the supports they need, and potential policy options to strengthen the educator workforce in Utah. To fill the gap in knowledge about why teachers leave, this brief explores Utah data from a national survey administered to teachers.

Teacher retention is a primary topic of interest, as the demand for teachers is ever-increasing with Utah’s robust K-12 student enrollment. According to national data, one of the largest sources for teacher shortages is teacher turnover, especially for beginning teachers.¹ Research also indicates that of all factors in a school, teachers have the greatest impact on student learning outcomes and achievement.² This creates a keen interest in keeping highly-qualified and effective teachers in the classroom. Teacher turnover can disrupt the functioning and organizational structure of a school,³ and can interrupt planning and implementation of a coherent, comprehensive, and unified curriculum.⁴ This not only impacts the school structure, but also student achievement as high teacher turnover is associated with lower scores in mathematics and language arts.⁵ Additionally, teacher turnover is expensive. Researchers estimated that teacher turnover may cost school districts roughly \$2.2 billion every year.⁶

Although Utah does not produce specific data on the reasons why teachers may leave the classroom, national surveys that contain data from Utah survey respondents exist. Using the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), this brief presents descriptive statistics organized into three parts:

1. Background of data sources on teacher retention and turnover
2. Descriptive statistics of teacher leavers and movers from the TFS
3. Reasons for teachers transferring and leaving the profession, as reported from the TFS

¹ Ingersoll, R. (2012) Beginning Teacher Induction: What the Data Tell Us. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93(8), 47-51.
<http://www.kappanmagazine.org/content/93/8/47>

² Kyriakides, L., Christoforou, C., & Charalambous, C. Y. (2013). What matters for student learning outcomes: A meta-analysis of studies exploring factors of effective teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 36, 143-152.

Muijs, D., & Reynolds, D. (2011). *Effective teaching: Evidence and practice*. London: Sage.

³ Guin, K. (2004). Chronic teacher turnover in urban elementary schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(42), 1–20.
 Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/197>

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(1), 4-36.

⁶ Haynes, M. (2014). *On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers*. Alliance for Excellent Education.

Teacher Retention and Turnover Data Sources

State Data. The USBE maintains a database of educator information called the Comprehensive Administration of Credentials for Teachers in Utah Schools (CACTUS) database. This database contains Utah educator demographic, credential, and assignment data, which is used to provide aggregate statistics on Utah teachers. While the data are available in Utah to calculate teacher retention rates, we do not have state-level data that tell us the reasons why teachers leave the classroom.

LEA Data. A Local Education Agency (LEA) is a school district or a charter school. In Utah, LEAs employ teachers, negotiate their pay, and maintain teacher vacancy and hiring data. The data collection and reporting regarding teachers varies by LEA. Utah schools are not required to conduct exit interviews or survey teachers who leave the school, which limits understanding of researchers and policy makers on complex issues related to teacher retention, satisfaction, and attrition.

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). SASS is a survey conducted every four years by the U.S. Department of Education. It has been administered seven times between the 1987-88 and 2011-12 school years. SASS has four components for both public and private schools: School Questionnaire, Teacher Questionnaire, Principal Questionnaire, and School District Questionnaire. The surveys include topics such as teacher characteristics, school conditions, perceptions of school climate, teacher demand issues, teacher compensation, district hiring practices, and student demographics. Survey administrators use a stratified sampling design, which provides representative data at the state and the national level for all public school teachers. Thus, while the surveys do not reach every teacher in each state, the data have been weighted to reflect the overall teacher population.

Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). The TFS is administered to a subset of the teachers who participated in the SASS Teacher Survey the year before. The intent of the TFS is to record the number of teachers who leave the teaching profession, move to a different school, or stay in the same school, and better understand the reasons for these changes. Topics included in the TFS include: teaching status and assignments, ratings of aspects of teaching, reasons for changing schools, and ratings of strategies for retaining teachers.

Figure 1. Definition of Terms Used in the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS)

Stayers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals who are teaching in the same school as when they were surveyed the previous year.
Movers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals who are teaching in a different school than they were in the previous year (could be a different public school in the same or different district, a charter, or a private school).
Leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals who are no longer teaching, but could be working inside or outside of education.

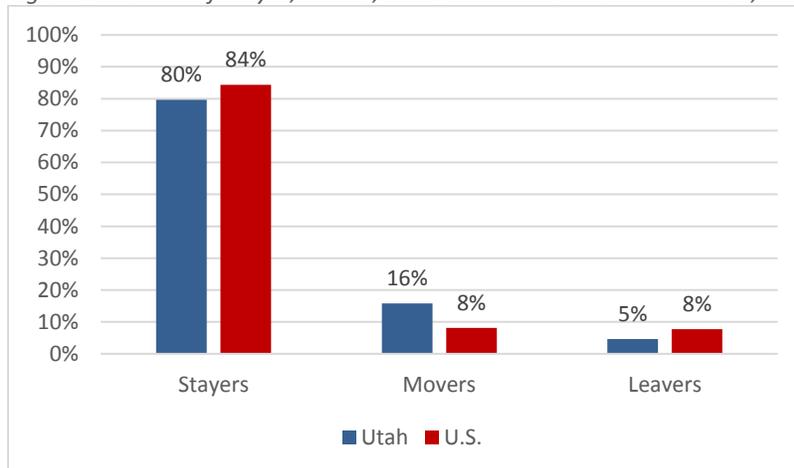
Utah Results from the TFS Survey

Methodology. This brief mainly utilizes Utah specific teacher data extracted from the 2012-13 TFS Survey, supplemented by base year information on teachers and schools from the 2011-12 SASS Public School Teacher Survey and School Survey. In the 2011-12 SASS Teacher Survey, 798 Utah public school teachers participated, which after weighting, represents 28,097 teachers statewide. In the 2012-13 TFS Survey, 68 out of the 798 teachers who responded to the SASS Teacher Survey in the previous year were surveyed again. This subset of teachers includes those who left teaching and a subsample of those who continued teaching, including those who remained in the same school, and those who changed schools. Based on the weighting of the sample, these 68 teachers represent 24,527 teachers. That said, although the sample of teachers in the 2011-12 SASS survey represents all Utah public school teachers, the results from the TFS do not necessarily represent the entire Utah teaching force. In addition, because of the small sample sizes, the readers need to be cautious in interpreting some of the results presented in this brief.

Teacher Turnover Rates

Results from the analysis of the TFS reveal that 80% of all Utah teachers who were teaching during the 2011–12 school year remained at the same school the next year, while 84% teacher nationwide stayed at the same school. Among those who did not stay, 5% of Utah teachers left the teaching profession compared to 8% nationwide. Additionally, 16% of Utah teachers moved to a different school, which is twice the national average.

Figure 2. Percent of Stayer, Mover, and Leaver Public School Teachers, Utah and U.S. Average

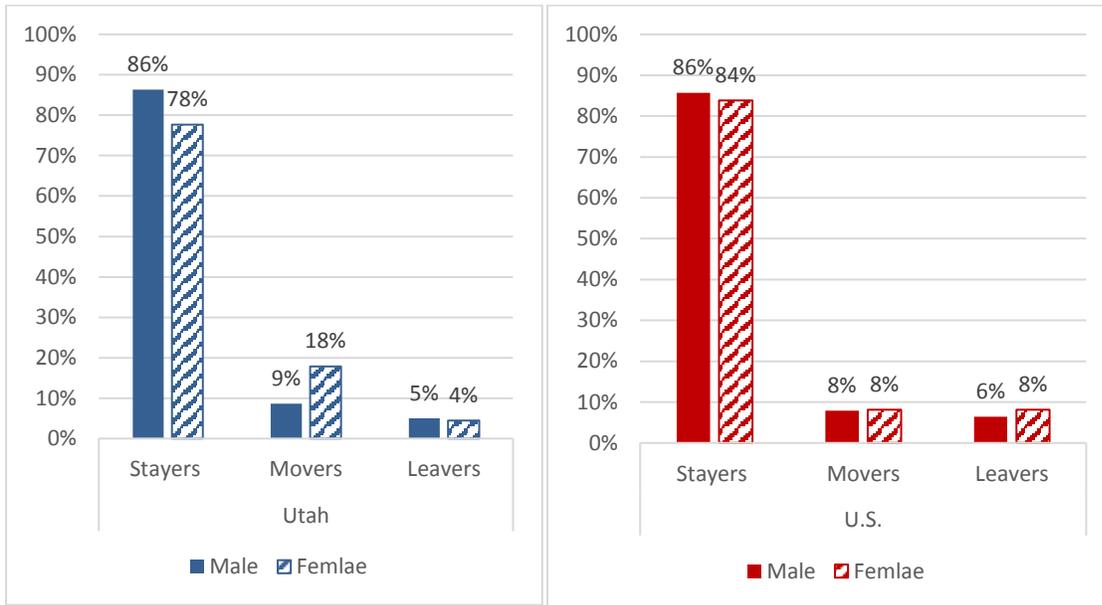


Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Teacher Turnover by Gender

As Figure 3 shows, female teachers in Utah moved at double the rate of male teachers (18% compared to 9%). This rate of female teachers moving was also much higher than national rates for both males and females (8%). In Utah, the percentage of female leavers and male leavers was similar (5% and 4%), while nationwide, a slightly larger percentage of females left the teaching profession than did males (8% compared to 6%).

Figure 3. Percent of Stayer, Mover, and Leaver Public School Teachers in Utah and U.S., by Gender

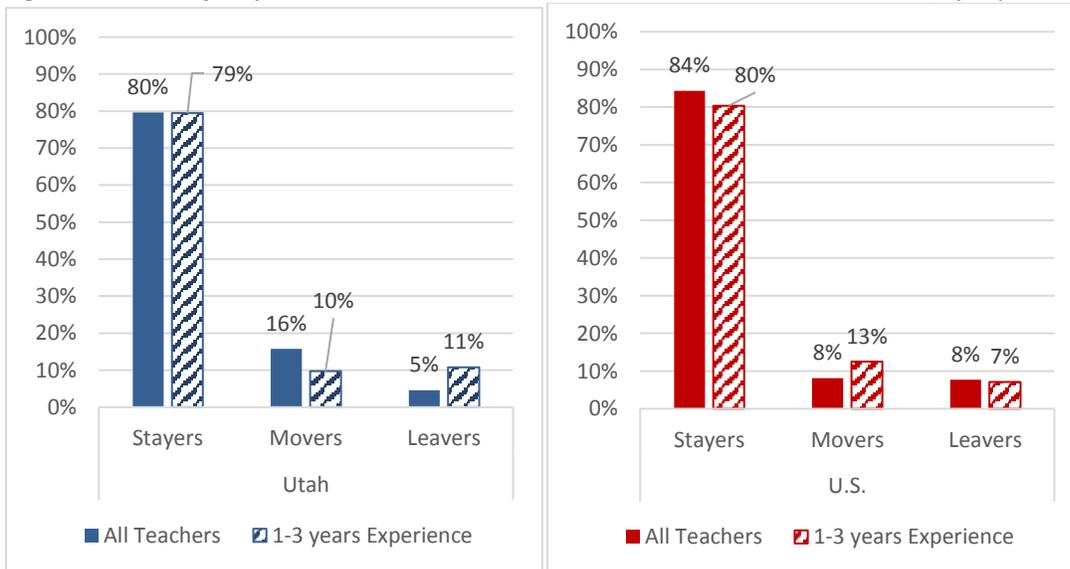


Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Teacher Turnover by Years of Experience

Figure 4 illustrates teacher turnover by years of teaching experience. On average, Utah teachers left teaching at lower rates than the U.S. average (5% compared to 8%). However, new teachers with 1-3 years of experience in Utah were much more likely to leave when compared to the rates for all teachers in Utah (11% compared to 5%). This differential was much more pronounced than the same comparison at the national level. Looking at U.S. averages, beginning teachers left in similar rates that all teachers left (7% compared to 8%). These findings may indicate that Utah should focus support and effort toward beginning teachers to combat relatively high turnover rates among new teachers.

Figure 4. Percent of Stayer, Mover, and Leaver Public School Teachers in Utah and U.S., by Experience

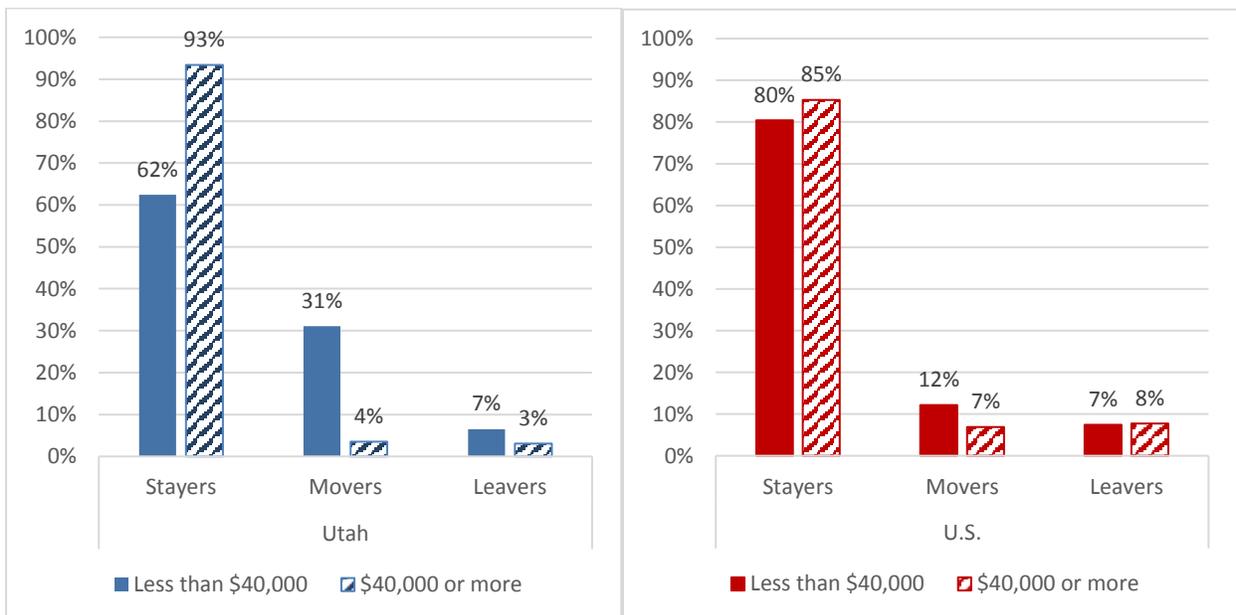


Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Teacher Turnover by Base Salary

Salary seems to be a significant factor influencing teacher turnover, as shown in Figure 5. Teachers were more likely to stay in the classroom if they were making a higher salary, but this was truer in Utah than for the national average (93% compared to 85%). Teachers were also more likely to move to a different school if they were earning less, but again, this movement was much more pronounced in Utah than the U.S. as a whole (31% compared to 12%). The difference of the moving rates between Utah teachers who earned less than \$40,000 and who earned \$40,000 or more was striking (31% and 4%, respectively). Among all teachers who earned less than \$40,000, the percentage of Utah teachers who left the classroom was similar to the percentage of teachers nationally (3% compared to 8%). However, Utah teachers who earned more than \$40,000 were less likely to leave than those teachers nationally (3% compared to 8%). This may indicate that salary is a much more potent factor in influencing teacher retention in Utah than nationwide.

Figure 5. Percent of Stayer, Mover, and Leaver of Public School Teachers in Utah and U.S., by Salary



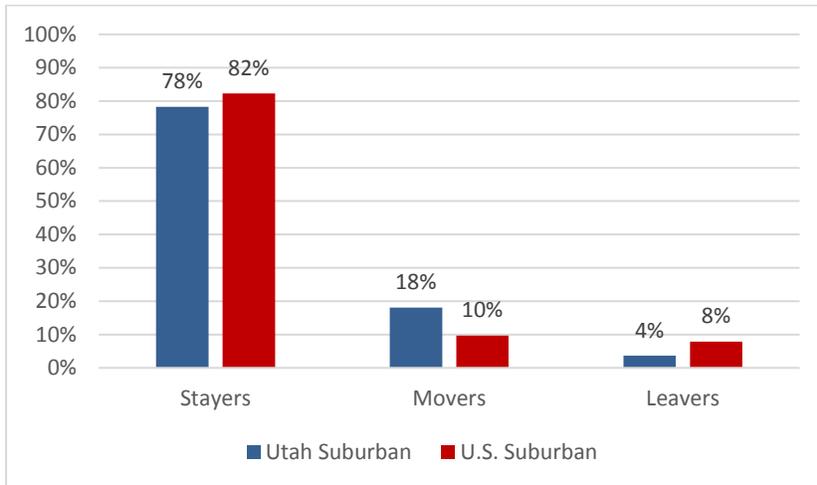
Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Teacher Turnover by Community Type

When examining how the type of community where a school is located affected teacher turnover, we found that for both Utah and nationwide, urban and rural communities faced higher rates of teacher leavers, while suburban communities experienced the lowest percentage of teacher leavers. When comparing Utah and U.S. average, the teacher turnover patterns were similar in urban and rural areas but different in suburban areas.

As Figure 6 shows, Utah teachers in suburban communities left at a lower rate than the national average (4% compared to 8%). Although the Utah teacher leaver rate for suburban communities was lower than the national average, the mover rate in Utah suburban communities was almost twice as high as the national average (18% compared to 10%).

Figure 6. Percent of Stayer, Mover, and Leaver Public School Teachers in Suburban Schools, Utah and U.S.



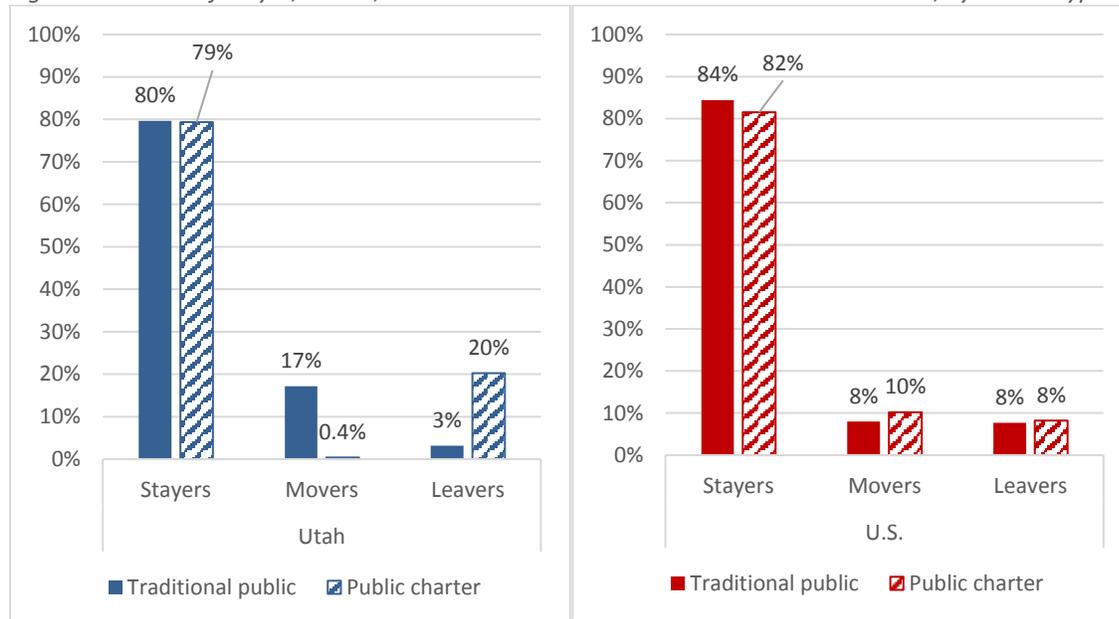
Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Teacher Turnover by School Type

Figure 7 compares teacher turnover in charter schools and traditional public schools (TPSs). Overall, teacher turnover rates were similar in TPSs and charter schools, both in Utah and nationally. The turnover patterns were also similar between the two types of schools nationwide, both in terms of movers (8% in TPSs vs 10% in charter schools) and leavers (8% in both TPSs and charters). In contrast, the turnover patterns were very different between the two types of schools in Utah. When teachers in Utah TPSs left a school, they tended to go to a different school (17%), only a very small portion of TPS teachers left teaching (3%). When Utah charter school teachers left a school, they also left teaching (20%) and almost never moved to a different school (0.4%). This finding of higher rates of leavers among Utah charter school teachers is similar to other research.⁷

⁷ Gulosino, C. & Ni, Y. (2014). *Who stays and who exits in charter schools and traditional public schools? The influence of teacher and school attributes*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Education Research Association, Philadelphia, PA.

Figure 7. Percent of Stayer, Mover, and Leaver Public School Teachers in Utah and U.S., by School Type



Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Reasons for Teacher Turnover

To better address teacher retention issues, the TFS first asked whether teachers move or leave schools and then asked a set of questions about the reasons behind the decision. In this sample, most Utah teachers moved or left voluntarily.⁸ The percentage of those moving involuntarily was much lower in Utah than the U.S. average (9% compared to 30%) The percentage of those leaving involuntarily was a little higher in Utah than the U.S. average (15% compared to 10%). We are unable to accurately report which reasons are the most common for Utah teachers leaving involuntarily, because of the small sample sizes.

Reasons for Moving

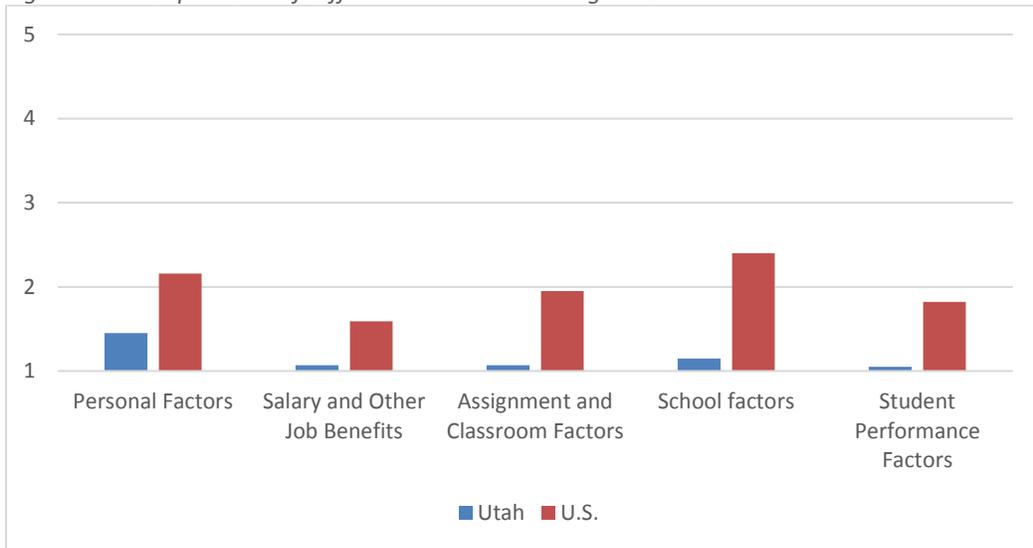
Among all the teachers who moved voluntarily, the TFS asked them to rate the importance of different factors in their decisions (1-not at all important to 5-extremely important). In total, it asked 20 questions related to 5 main factors, as shown in Figure 8.⁹ Interestingly, none of the factors played a major role in Utah teachers’ decision to change schools. By comparison, teachers nationwide rated these factors somewhat higher than Utah teachers. This difference may indicate that these items are not a good representation of all the reasons why Utah teachers move.

⁸ The reasons for teachers leaving involuntarily include budget cuts or budget shortfalls, reduced pupil enrollment, changed roles, school and/or district merger or school closed, transfer required by school or district, did not meet highly qualified teacher requirements, have not taken or could not pass the test(s) required by school or district, or others.

⁹ For a detailed description of the list of questions, please visit Questionnaire for Current Teachers 2012-13

<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/pdf/1213/tfs-3.pdf>

Figure 8. The Importance of Different Factors in Making the Decision to Move



Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

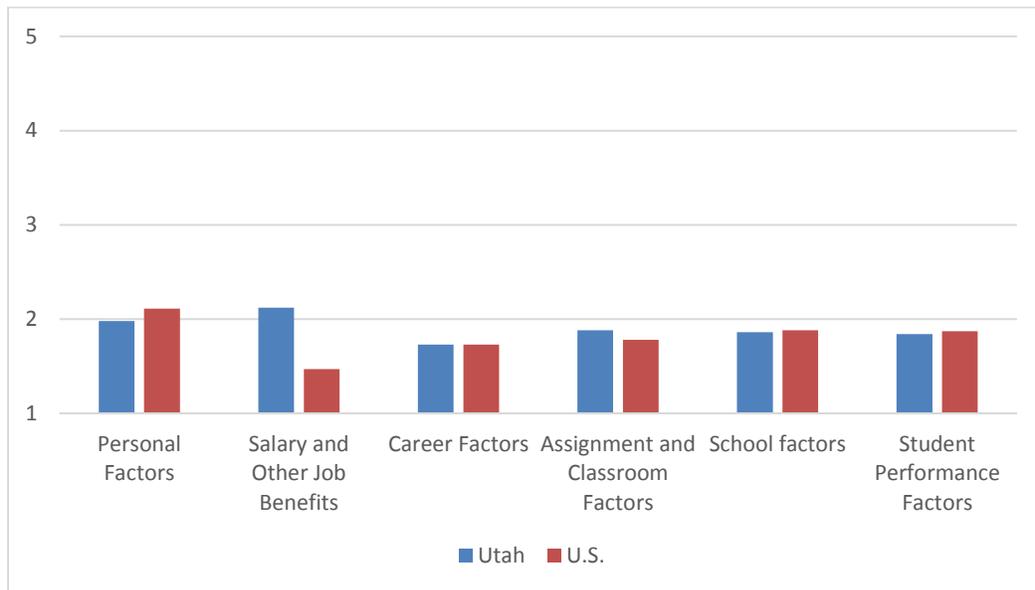
Scale: 1=Not at all important, 2=Slightly important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=Very important, 5=Extremely important)

Reasons for Leaving

Among all the teachers who left voluntarily, the TFS also asked them to rate the importance of different factors in their decision. In total, there were 23 questions related to 6 main factors.¹⁰ As Figure 9 shows, the importance of different factors in the decision to leave were similar for Utah teachers and teachers nationwide. It is difficult to say which factors are more important than others, although salary and other job benefits received the highest rating for Utah teachers, while personal factors were perceived by teachers nationwide to play a slightly more important role than all other factors.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of the list of questions, please visit Questionnaire for Former Teachers 2012-13 <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/pdf/1213/tfs-2.pdf>

Figure 9. The Importance of Different Factors in Making the Decision to Leave



Source: 2012-13 NCES Teacher Follow-up Survey

Scale: 1=Not at all important, 2=Slightly important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=Very important, 5=Extremely important)

Conclusions

The findings in this brief expand upon what we know about teacher retention from Utah data sources, and give readers a better understanding of how Utah compares to the nation. While caution must be used in interpreting some of the results due to small sample sizes, four key findings characterize teacher turnover in Utah based on the TFS survey:

- Teachers in Utah left the teaching profession at lower rates than the national average; however, teachers in Utah appear to have moved to other schools at rates higher than the national average.
- Beginning teachers in Utah (those with 1-3 years of teaching experience) left the teaching profession at higher rates than the national average.
- Teachers in Utah charter schools have much higher leaving rates than teachers in traditional public schools, while Utah teachers in traditional public schools were more likely to change schools than charter school teachers.
- Although TFS asked many questions regarding the importance of different factors in teachers' decisions to move or leave, there is no strong evidence to suggest which factors are the most influential for Utah teachers.

Considerations

Given the findings in this study and findings in other UEPC studies, early career support is a strategy that Utah can use to improve teacher retention. This brief provides some supplementary understanding of teacher turnover in Utah, but collecting additional locally-derived data will provide better information to address teacher retention, satisfaction, and possible shortages. As a whole, the data available at the national level fail to identify the underlying reasons for Utah teachers moving between schools and leaving the profession.

Some other states have invested in data collection regarding teacher retention and attrition. For example, the State Board of Education in North Carolina collects annual data and produces a report that includes turnover rates, detailed reasons for turnover, turnover by category of teachers, and the most difficult areas to fill. Without such data collection, the State of Utah will continue to rely on data that gives an incomplete picture on Utah educators and the teaching profession. Utah has an opportunity to collect additional data, which will likely lead to better and deeper understanding of teacher retention and attrition issues.