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UTAH EDUCATION  
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# WHY DO TEACHERS CHOOSE TEACHING AND REMAIN TEACHING?

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*Initial Results from the Educator Career and Pathway  
Survey (ECAPS) for Teachers*

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*Bridging Research, Policy, and Practice*

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## Introduction

The Educator Career and Pathway Survey for Teachers was created by the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) in response to the continued concerns regarding teacher supply and demand. In partnership with the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), the UEPC has sought to understand the contributing factors to educator decision-making relative to their careers. Specifically, the ECAPS for Teachers explores teachers' decisions to become a teacher; the influence of various factors on their decision to remain in, move within, or leave education; satisfaction with working conditions; and career intentions.<sup>i</sup> The ECAPS for Teachers offers a unique perspective on these issues as it draws directly from the voices and experiences of Utah's teaching core. Findings from the survey can be used to inform strategies in recruiting, developing, and supporting teachers.

The ECAPS for Teachers survey was sent to the email addresses of all teachers in the USBE *Comprehensive Administration of Credentials for Teachers in Utah Schools (CACTUS)* database, which contains information of all Utah educators, and who are identified as:

- **Stayers** -- taught in a public school setting in 2016-17, and teach in the same school in 2017-18
- **Movers** -- taught in a public school setting in 2016-17, and teach in a different school in 2017-18.
- **Leavers**-- taught in a public school setting in 2016-17, and did not return in 2017-18 as a teacher.
- **New teachers** - teach in a public school setting in 2017-18 for the first time.
- **Returning teachers** - stopped out at some point in their careers but returned to teaching in 2017-18.

The survey was administered in an online survey platform. The link to the survey was distributed initially by the USBE to the approximately 29,000 teachers who have an active CACTUS account. The survey was launched in October 2017 and remained open for 5 weeks through November 2017. Multiple email reminders were distributed to school principals, district superintendents, and the Utah Education Association (UEA) in order to improve the response rate. This initial report provides descriptive information regarding teachers' responses to different survey questions, including stayers, movers, leavers, new, and returning teachers. Future analyses will provide information disaggregated by teacher and school characteristics, and study responses of open-ended questions in the survey.

## Survey Response Rates

In total, 2,025 teachers responded and completed the entire survey. Another 1,356 teachers started responding but stopped at the question that requested the respondent last name and CACTUS ID. Last name and CACTUS ID were requested to a) minimize the length of the survey and b) complete data analyses. No individual or identifiable data are reported here. In this brief, sample size refers to the number of teachers who responded to a specific question. Each of the 41 school districts and the majority of charter schools had teachers respond to the survey.

As **Table 1** shows, 2,025 teachers responded to the question about their teaching status in 2017-18. Of that respondent group:

- 6% were first year **new teachers** (n=116), and
- 3% were teachers who stopped out at some point in their careers but **returned to** teaching in 2017-18 (n=53).

Both new teachers and returning teachers did not teach in Utah public schools in 2016-17, and were not included in the 2016-17 CACTUS data.

Among all the teachers who taught in 2016-17 (n=1,852):

- 1,628 (88%) remained teaching in the same school they taught the year before (**stayers**);
- 158 (9%) taught in a Utah public school classroom in 2017-18, but in a different school (**movers**); and
- 66 (4%) were no longer teaching in Utah public school classrooms in 2017-18 (**leavers**).

*Table 1. Response Rates by Category*

<b>Teachers who taught in 2016-17</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Stayers	1628	88
Movers	158	9
Leavers	66	4
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1852</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>New or Returning Teachers in 2017-18</b>		
Returning	53	
New	116	
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>169</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2025</b>	

## Reasons to Become A Teacher

Teachers were asked what factors influenced their decision to become a teacher. Eighteen factors and an “other” option were listed for teachers to rate from 1- not at all influential to 5-extremely influential. An “other” option was included so that they could provide a written response. In total, 1,976 teachers responded to the questions.

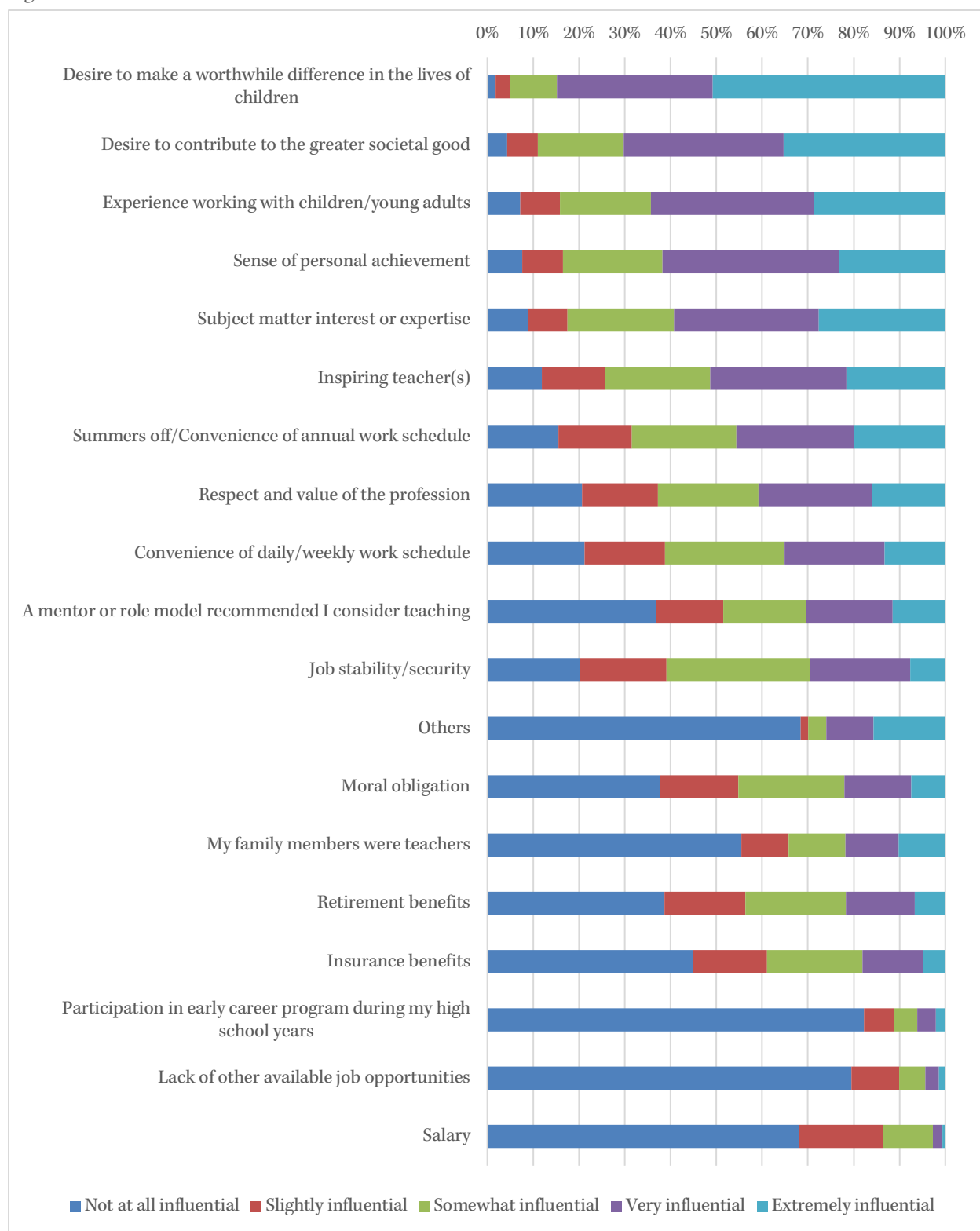
**Figure 1** shows all the factors in the order of the combined percentages of responses of “very influential” or “extremely influential.” The top five factors that were very influential or extremely influential in their decision to become a teacher were:

- Desire to make a worthwhile difference in the lives of children (85%)
- Desire to contribute to the greater societal good (70%)
- Experience working with children/young adults (64%)
- Sense of personal achievement (62%), and
- Subject matter interest or expertise (59%).

The five factors with the lowest combined percentages of “very influential” or “extremely influential” in their decision to become a teacher were:

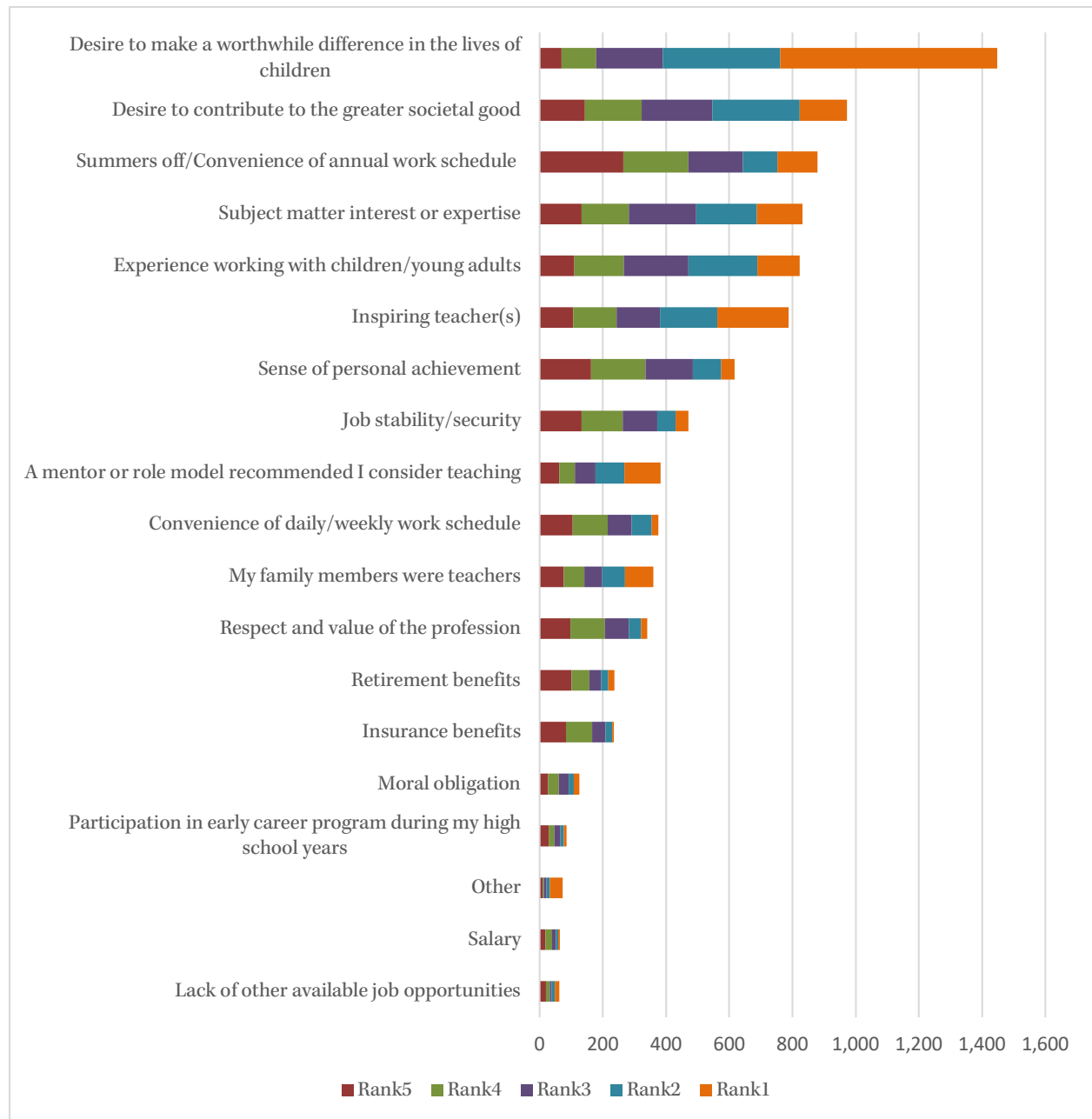
- Retirement benefits (22%).
- Insurance benefits (18%)
- Participation in early career program during my high school years (6%)
- Lack of other available job opportunities (4%), and
- Salary (3%)

Figure 1. The Influence of Various Factors on a Teacher's Decision to Become A Teacher



The survey then asked teachers to select 5 reasons among those 19 factors and rank them as (1) most important reason to (5) fifth most important reason. We counted the frequency of individual factors each time they were cited as one of the five top reasons and then ordered them from the most frequently cited to the least frequently cited (see **Figure 2**). The most cited factors that are ranked as top five reasons are also the most influential factors as indicated in **Figure 1**, except that the orders are slightly different for several factors. For example, although summers off is the 7<sup>th</sup> among the very or extremely influential factors that influence a teacher’s decision to become a teacher (as shown in **Figure 1**), it was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> among the all the factors for rank order (as shown in **Figure 2**).

Figure 2. The Top 5 Factors that Influence a Teacher’s Decision to Become A Teacher





## Reasons to Remain A Teacher

All the teachers who remained as teachers in both years, including stayers and movers, were asked the influence of 30 factors in their decisions to remain a teacher. These 30 factors include most of the 19 factors from the previous question “*What factors influenced your decision to become a teacher,*” plus items that pertain to their working environment, including both school and teaching professional factors. Again, an “other” option was provided. The teachers were asked to rate these 30 factors from 1-not at all influential to 5-extremely influential. In total, 1,729 teachers responded to the question.

As **Figure 3** shows, the five factors that are very or extremely influential in teachers’ decision to remain teaching include three of the top factors for becoming a teacher (desire to make a worthwhile difference in the lives of children (84%); experience working with children/young adults (69%); and desire to contribute to the greater societal good (67%)) and two new items (i.e., sense of purpose (70%) and commitment to children/young adults (69%)).

When asked to rank these 30 factors as (1) the most important reason to (5) the fifth most important reason, similar patterns were found (see **Figure 4**). The most cited factors that are ranked as top five reasons to remain a teacher are also the most influential factors to remaining a teacher, except that the orders are slightly different between for several factors. For example, summers off ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> among the top five most cited reasons to remain a teacher (see **Figure 4**), while it is the 10<sup>th</sup> very or extremely influential factor to remain a teacher (see **Figure 3**). Relationship with peers and colleagues ranks 5<sup>th</sup> among those factors that influences teachers’ decision to remain a teacher, while it is the 9<sup>th</sup> very or extremely influential factor to remaining a teacher, as indicated in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3. The Influence of Various Factors Have on Teachers' Decisions to Remain A Teacher

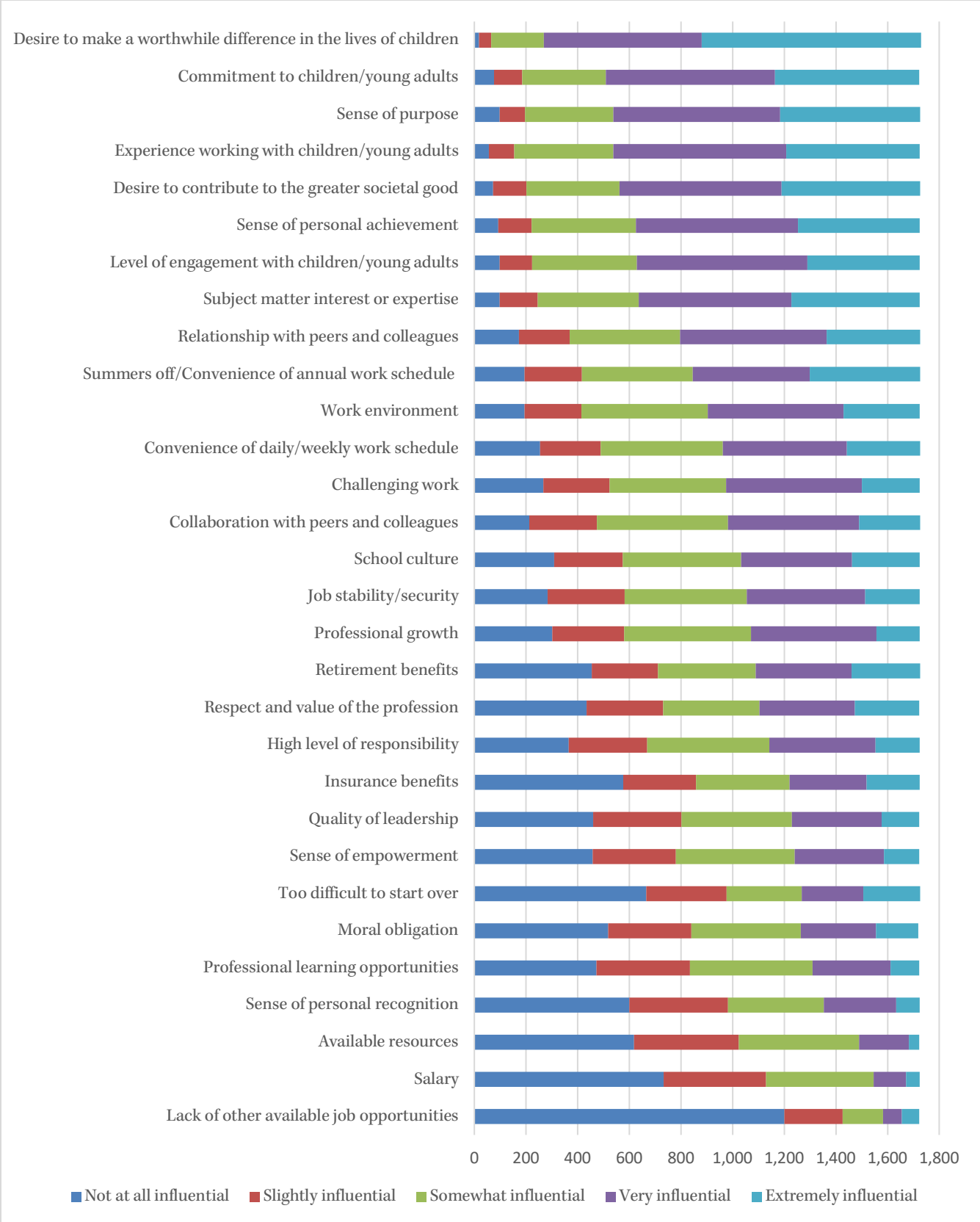
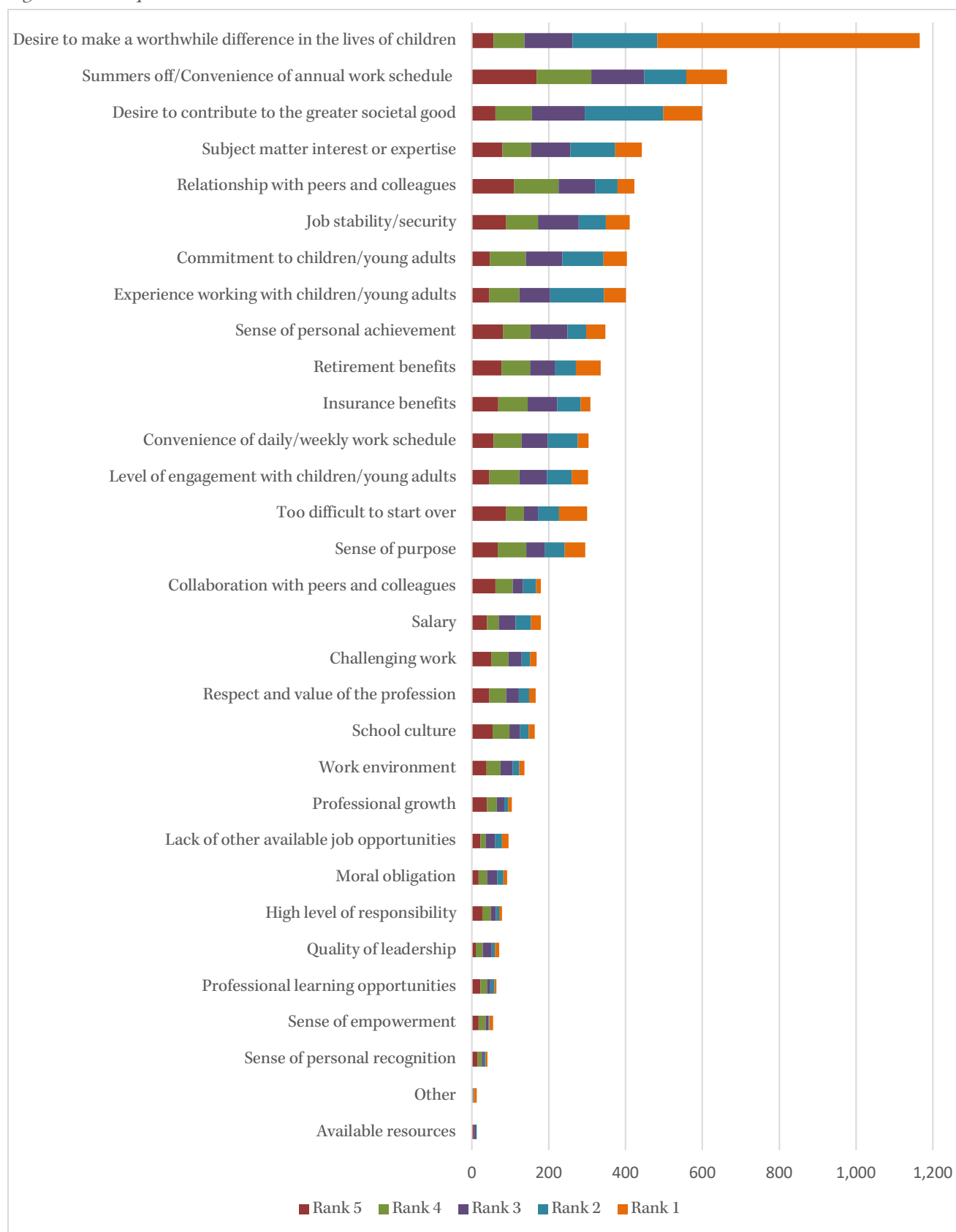


Figure 4. The Top 5 Factors that Influence Teachers' Decisions to Remain A Teacher



## Satisfaction with School Factors

The stayers, movers, and leavers were all asked about their levels of satisfaction with 32 factors and conditions in their previous year's school (i.e., assignment and classroom factors, school factors, student performance factors, professional factors, and economic factors). In total, 1,901 teachers answered the questions, but not all of them rated all the factors. The percentages of respondents who rated each of the factors as "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied" were calculated and sorted from the largest to the smallest.

**Figure 5** shows the satisfaction that stayers have with school factors at their last year's school (N=1,686). For stayers, their last year's school is the same as their current year's school. In addition, **Table 2** shows the top 10 factors that stayers, movers, and leavers were very or extremely satisfied with in their previous year's schools. Similarly, **Table 3** shows the bottom 10 factors for stayers, movers, and leavers.

As **Table 2** indicates, overall, stayers were more satisfied with their schools the previous year than were movers and leavers. Interestingly, teachers across the three categories—stayers, movers, and leavers—cited very similar school factors that they are very or extremely satisfied with, including colleagues, working relationships, how ethically they were treated, and intellectual challenge. The factors that are common among all teacher categories are highlighted in light orange.

As **Table 3** shows, several factors related to student assessment and accountability pressures, and support provided to prepare assessments, are among the factors that stayers, movers, and leavers were least satisfied with. The factors that are common among all three teacher categories are highlighted in light orange. In addition, several factors are cited as least satisfied among movers and leavers, but not stayers, including time commitment, teachers' influence on school policies and practices, and feedback and/or coaching on instruction to improve teaching. The factors that are common among movers and leavers are highlighted in blue.

Figure 5. Satisfaction of Stayers with Various School Factors

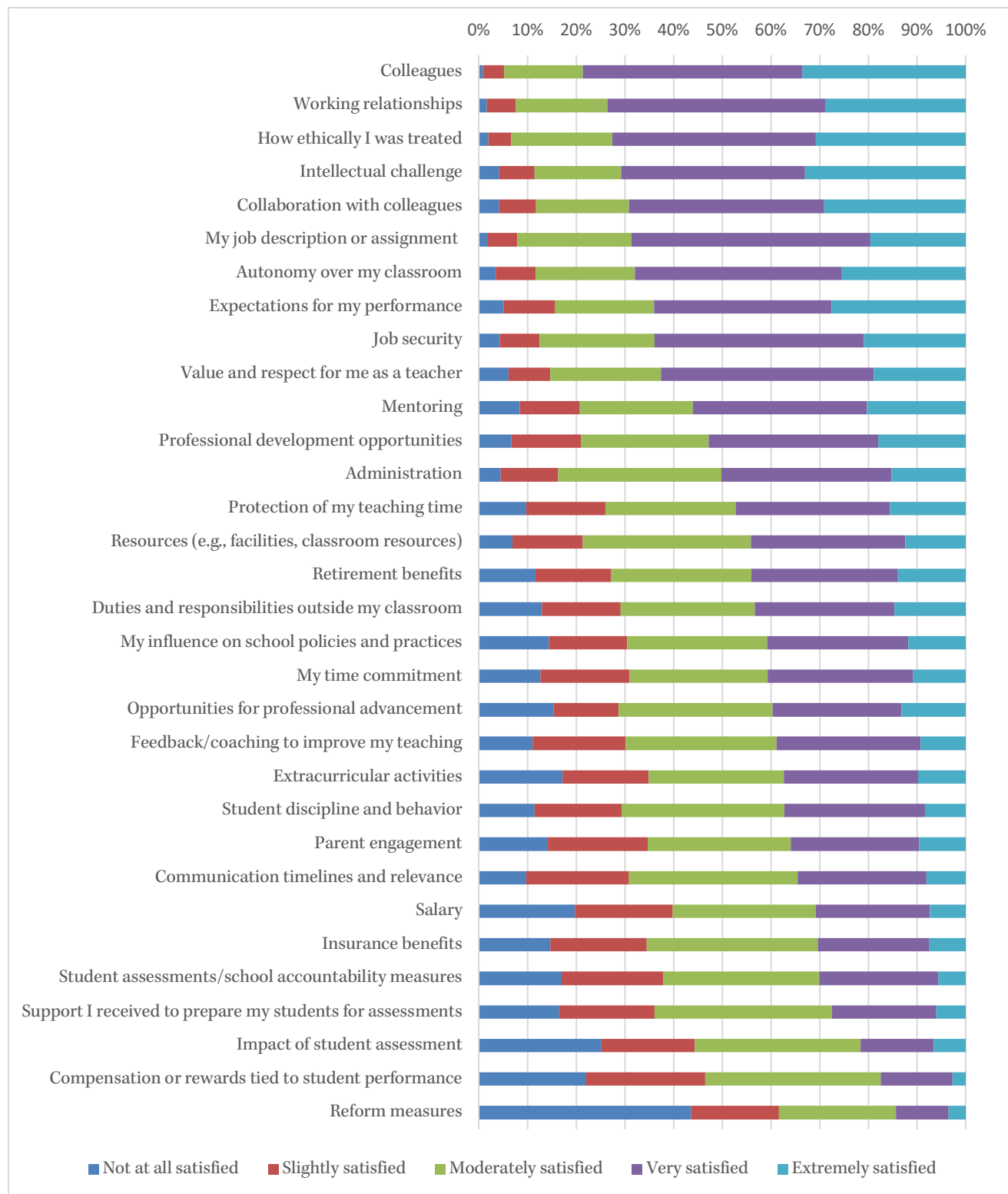


Table 2. Top 10 School Factors that Stayers, Movers, and Leavers identified as Very or Extremely Satisfied

Rank	Stayers (n=1686)	%	Movers (n=151)	%	Leavers (n=64)	%
1	Colleagues	79	Colleagues	64	Intellectual challenge	72
2	Working relationships	74	Working relationships	57	Colleagues	71
3	How ethically I was treated	73	Autonomy over my classroom	54	Job security	70
4	Intellectual challenge	71	Intellectual challenge	51	Working relationships	69
5	Collaboration with colleagues	69	My job description or assignment	50	Collaboration with colleagues	62
6	My job description or assignment	69	Collaboration with colleagues	50	My job description or assignment	58
7	Autonomy over my classroom	68	Job security	49	Autonomy over my classroom	58
8	Expectations for my performance	64	Resources	49	How ethically I was treated	57
9	Job security	64	How ethically I was treated	42	Resources	54
10	Value and respect for me as a teacher	63	Protection of my teaching time	41	Expectations for my performance	51

Note: % means percentages of teachers who were very satisfied or extremely satisfied with a specific factor.

Table 3. Bottom 10 School Factors that Stayers, Movers, and Leavers identified as Very or Extremely Satisfied

Rank	Stayers (n=1686)	%	Movers (n=151)	%	Leavers (n=64)	%
1	Reform measures	14	My compensation, benefits, or rewards tied to the performance of my students	9	Reform measures	8
2	My compensation, benefits, or rewards tied to the performance of my students	17	Salary	14	My compensation, benefits, or rewards tied to the performance of my students	14
3	Impact of assessment/ accountability on my teaching curriculum	22	Reform measures	19	Support I received to prepare my students for assessments	16
4	Support I received to prepare my students for assessments	27	Support I received to prepare my students for assessments	22	Salary	19
5	Student assessments/school accountability measures	30	Student assessments/school accountability measures	25	My time commitment	21
6	Insurance benefits	30	Impact of assessment/ accountability on my teaching curriculum	27	Student assessments/school accountability measures	24
7	Salary	31	My time commitment	28	Impact of assessment/school on my teaching curriculum	25
8	Communication timelines and relevance	35	My influence on school policies	28	Insurance benefits	26
9	Parent engagement	36	Student discipline and behavior	29	Feedback and/or coaching on instruction to improve my teaching	29
10	Student discipline and behavior	37	Feedback and/or coaching on instruction to improve my teaching	32	My influence on school policies	29

## Career Intentions

The survey also asked teachers who are new, returning to teach, or staying as teachers, how long they plan to remain in a teaching position (see **Table 4**). There were 1,651 teachers who responded to this question. A majority (53.2%) stated that they will remain as long as possible or until they are eligible for retirement, and another 7% indicated that they would stay until a specific life event occurs. Another 19% of the teachers reported they were undecided at this time.

*Table 4. How Long Teachers Plan to Remain Teaching*

	%	Response (N)
As long as I am able	34.0	562
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job	19.2	317
Until a specific life event occurs	7.0	116
Undecided at this time	19.0	313
Until I get a promotion within education	5.9	97
Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits	4.0	66
Until I get a job within another field	2.7	44
Until my loans or debt are paid off	0.8	14
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job	0.2	4
Other	7.1	118
Total	100.0	1651

Further, when asked whether they have applied for another position, 60% of the teachers answered they did not apply for another job within education, and 69% answered that they did not apply for another job outside of education (see **Table 5**). Among those who applied for jobs within the past 12 months, 15% applied for a position within education and 8% applied for a position outside of education. An additional 25% of respondents indicated that they had applied for another position within education beyond the past year, while 24% indicated that they had applied for another position outside of education during this time period.

*Table 5. Job Seeking of Teachers*

	Applied for another position in education	Applied for another position outside of education
Yes, in the past 12 months	15%	8%
Yes, but not in the past 12 months	25%	24%
No	60%	69%
Total (N)	1650	1650

## Most Influential Personal Reasons for Moving or Leaving

Movers and leavers were asked what the most influential personal reasons were for them to leave their previous year's schools. In total, 131 movers and 56 leavers responded to the questions. As **Figure 6** and **Figure 7** show, emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout are the number one very or extremely influential reason for moving (51%) or leaving (62%). While 47% of movers cited location of the position as an influential personal reason to move, only 9% of the leavers indicated that location of the position was an influential personal reason to leave the teaching profession.

Figure 6. Influence of Personal Factors for Teachers to Move to A Different School

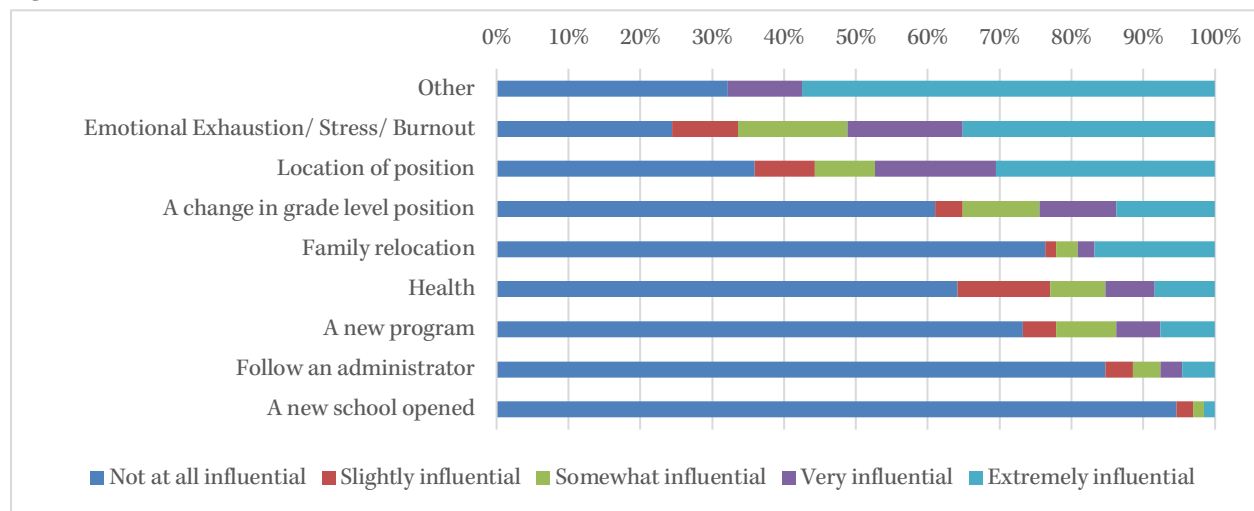
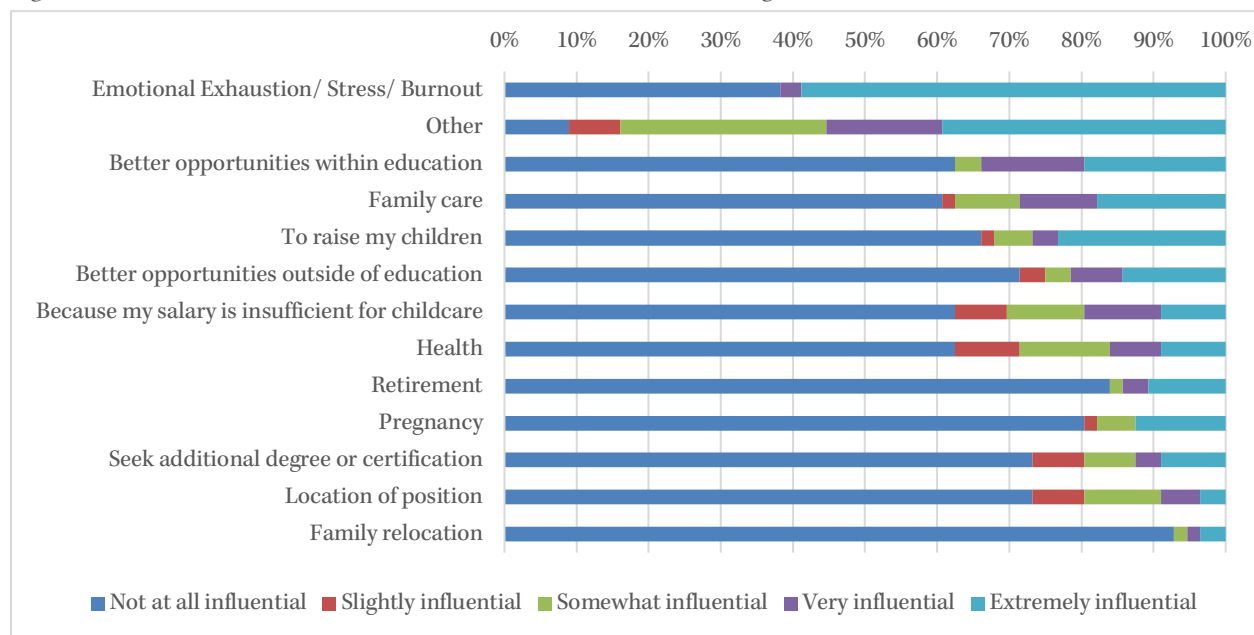


Figure 7. Influence of Personal Factors for Teachers to Leave Teaching





## Observations and Future Plans for Analyses

There were consistent responses regarding the top influential factors that inspire individuals to both become teachers and also remain as teachers. Given this finding in the descriptive data, it is important to recognize that certain factors can potentially influence educators to become teachers and remain in the profession. These include opportunities for leaders to optimize the work environment to increase the ability for teachers to make a worthwhile difference in their students' lives, therefore contributing to the greater societal good. Additionally, it is important to provide support and professional development opportunities for teachers to grow in their subject matter.

As a group, stayers are more satisfied with their schools than movers and leavers. Improving teacher satisfaction with the school may increase teacher retention, including addressing areas that they feel are influential in their decisions to stay or go and addressing those areas that they are currently less satisfied with. For instance, teachers noted that several factors related to student assessment and accountability were among their least satisfied areas. Further information is necessary to understand what aspects of these factors they are problematic, and teachers could inform this further at their local schools, including whether or not further professional learning is appropriate or guidance on how to further align instruction with standards and assessments, or use assessment information to make decisions about how to improve instruction for students. Other factors that warrant further attention include time commitment, the influence teachers may or may not have on school policies, and the nature and frequency of feedback and/or coaching on instruction to improve teaching. These were also among the least satisfied areas of teachers who were movers or leavers.

Teachers were asked about their career intentions and potential longevity in the field. A majority of respondents indicate that they plan to remain a teacher as long as they can and are able. However, 19% of the teachers indicated that they were undecided in how long they plan to remain teaching. These initial findings suggest that opportunities are available to increase the prospects for these teachers to remain. It is encouraging that 6% of respondents indicated that they would remain a teacher until they received a promotion within education. As important as it is for us to retain teachers, it is also imperative that we have a strong and deep pool of leadership talent.

In order to improve teacher retention, we are further exploring which groups of teachers are staying, moving, and leaving and for what reasons. This analysis will provide information regarding conditions that may prompt teachers to remain in the profession and be highly satisfied. In our upcoming research, the UEPC will further analyze survey responses given teacher demographics and characteristics. Findings will be disaggregated by satisfaction of school factors, career intentions, and personal reasons for staying, moving, and leaving by teacher and school characteristics. In addition, we will analyze responses of open-ended questions in the survey to better understand the various situations that were not captured by current survey items. To maximize its utility, the ECAPS is designed, and available, to be used annually to provide feedback at the school, district and state-level. The UEPC will release a companion ECAPS for Leaders in Fall 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> We reviewed previous research on teacher retention and attrition, and existing surveys, policies, and reports from The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and other states to inform the development and design of the ECAPS.