The relationship between reasons for leaving teaching and intention to return

by

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Abstract

This study examined teacher intentions to return to teaching after leaving. Two overarching questions were posed: (1) Are there differences in the odds of return when examining ethnicity, age of the teacher, gender, and grade level? (2) Controlling for gender, ethnicity, and grade level, what are the odds of return for each category for leaving (1. Personal life factors; 2. Salary, other job benefits, and career factors; 3. Dissatisfaction with school factors; and 4. Accountability factors)? Which category has the highest return rate? Does age moderate the average return rate? The 2012-2013 School and Staffing Survey’s Teacher Follow-Up Survey (SASS TFS) was used to examine new public school teachers (those who taught for less than five years). The total sample size for this study was 366 (N=366). For the first question, Hispanic teachers were more likely to indicate intention return, while there was no difference in return rates between Caucasian and African American peers. Male teachers were less likely to plan to return to teaching than female teachers. As age increased, the likelihood of a teacher returning also increased. Secondary level teachers were more likely to indicate their intention return to teaching than elementary level teachers. The two groups most likely to indicate an intention to return to teaching were those that left for personal life reasons and those who left because of salary, benefits, or career reason. Both teachers that left because of dissatisfaction and teachers who left due to accountability measures were less likely to intend to return. Salary, Benefits, and Career group had the highest return rate. Teachers who left for Accountability reasons had the lowest return rate. The interactions were all significant. As a teacher’s age increased, the likelihood of a teacher indicating their likelihood of returning increased for those who left because of salary, benefits and career and for those teachers who left because of dissatisfaction with school. As teachers’ age increased, the likelihood of a teacher indicating
their likelihood of returning decreased for those who left for personal life reasons or accountability reasons.
Introduction

Teacher attrition has long been a focus in educational research in the United States. Finding the reasons why a teacher leaves the profession are paramount to improving the chances of keeping a teacher in the field longer. There is an abundance of information available when searching for why a teacher leaves. However, information on the likelihood of a teacher returning is harder to find. The purpose of this study is to help fill in this gap in knowledge. By examining the relationship between why a teacher leaves and the likelihood of returning based on said reasons, measures can be taken to improve conditions to reduce the likelihood of a teacher leaving the profession.

The general consensus among researchers is that attrition is highest among teachers who are “new” to the field, that is, for teachers who have been teaching for 1 – 5 years. According to their study on teacher attrition, Ingersoll and Smith (2003), “The data suggest that after just five years, between 40 and 50 percent of all beginning teachers have left the profession” (p. 2). Some of the more common reasons for leaving are personal life factors (such as moving, pregnancy/childcare), salary and job benefits, career changes, and dissatisfaction within the school (i.e. dissatisfied with workplace conditions, dissatisfaction with administration, dissatisfaction with student behavior, and class size issues). In the advent of the high-stakes testing, the United States Department of Education has started to examine how student performance on high – stakes tests and its subsequent effect on teacher accountability has affected a teacher’s decision to leave. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics has included specific questions concerning accountability based on student performance in their School and Staffing Survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).
Numerous studies have been performed examining teacher attrition. However, there is limited research available on the likelihood of a teacher returning to the profession. This study examined teacher intentions to return to teaching after leaving. It used the 2012-2013 School and Staffing Survey’s Teacher Follow-Up Survey (SASS TFS). This study examined two questions: Are there differences in the odds of return when examining ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, Hispanic), age of the teacher, gender, and grade level (secondary teachers compared to elementary teachers)? And, controlling for gender, ethnicity, and grade level, what are the odds of return for each category for leaving (1. Personal life factors; 2. Salary, other job benefits, and career factors; 3. Dissatisfaction with school factors; and 4. Accountability factors) and which category has the highest return rate? Does age moderate the average return rate?

Age served as a moderator in this question due to the fact that previous research has shown that “younger” teachers (under 30 years of age) leave more frequently than “older” teachers. Younger teachers are also less likely to return to teaching than older teachers. Age could potentially change the relationship between reasons for leaving and the likelihood of return.

**Literature Review**

The literature review that follows is broken up into two sections. The first section examines research on reasons teachers leave. The second section examines current research on the likelihood of a teacher returning. The categories for leaving and the reasons for returning are ordered to parallel how the School and Staffing Survey Teacher Follow-Up Survey (SASS TFS) order the reasons for leaving in their survey: (1) Personal Life Factors; (2) Salary, Benefits, and Career Factors; (3) Dissatisfaction with School; and (4) Accountability (Student Performance) Factors.
Reason to Leave

Comparison of exit rates between Elementary and Secondary teachers. According to Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow (2016) 7.1% of all Elementary school teachers and 8.3% of all Secondary school teachers leave the profession annually. This number was derived from examining all School and Staffing Survey data and the Teacher Follow Up Survey data from the 1987-1988 wave through the 2008-2009 wave. In their survey study of Elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers in West Central Florida, Marlow and Hiermeier (1987) found that the "Most likely leavers" in the education field were single male secondary teachers were most likely to leave outright, followed by married male secondary school teachers.

Age. The age when a teacher leaves the profession has been largely studied. Research has shown that that younger teachers leave more often than older teachers. For example, using the 1991–1992 Teacher Follow Up Survey (TFS), linked with data from the 1990–1991 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) teacher and administrator questionnaires, Ingersoll (2001) studied multiple factors that could potentially effect teacher attrition. He found that the age of teachers was one of the strongest predictors in the likelihood of turnover. “Both younger (less than 30 years) and older (greater than 50 years) teachers are more likely to depart than are middle-aged teachers” (p.516, 518). He also found that the relative odds of a young teacher leaving the profession were 171% higher than for middle-aged teachers. Using the 1987-1988 SASS and 1989 TFS, Boe et al (1997) examined the attrition rates of special education teachers and general education teachers, looking at the differences between those who stayed in the profession, those who moved to another state but stayed in the profession, and those who left the profession altogether. It was found that age had a U-shaped function, with the youngest teachers and the oldest teachers leaving the profession the most, while those who were middle aged were most
likely to stay. Ingersoll (2001) found similar results for general education teachers. Sass et al (2012) examined a database from public school teachers in Texas over a twenty-two year span (1988 to 2010), which was obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). They only considered teachers who entered and left the position between 1988 and 2010, and found that the risk of leaving the profession was much greater for younger adults and mid-adulthood teachers. In her examination of the 1987-1988 SASS, Karge (1993) found that beginning public school teachers (those who worked in the profession for less than three years) who worked full time, were female, were single, and were considered older than the norm were “especially susceptible to the stresses and isolation of elementary school teaching” (p.11). Age had a positive correlation with attrition, and found older beginning teachers were more likely to leave teaching than their younger counterparts.

**Personal life factors.** Childcare and/or child rearing tends to fall under a personal reasons category when examined in research articles. In their examination of the 1988-1989 Teacher Follow-Up Survey, Hammer and Rohr (1992) found that the main reason most female teachers leaving the teaching profession chose was for childcare/child rearing. According to Ingersoll (2001), 33% of migration (teachers moving from one school to another) and 45% of attrition were attributed to personal reasons, such as departures for pregnancy, child rearing, health problems, and family moves. Robinson, Munn, and MacDonald (1992) surveyed trained teachers who left the profession and what factors influenced their return. Almost half of their sample left because of child care, or as they called it, “domestic commitments.” In their study, no males chose this as the main reason for leaving, and 3 out of 4 women who chose to leave due to childcare or domestic commitments indicated their intention to return to the profession eventually.
**Salary and job benefits.** Salaries and job benefits and their relationship to teacher attrition have been studied in the past. The results all seem to point in a similar direction: the lower the salary and poorer the benefits, the more likely a teacher is going to resign. For example, Hahs-Vaughn and Scherff (2008) used the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey to examine individual and school characteristics, mentoring, and induction activities that affect a beginning English teachers’ or English Language Arts teachers’ (all grade levels, 1-12) attrition, mobility, and retention. Of all their results, salary was the only factor that was statistically significant in determining if a teacher would leave the profession. In another study of the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and Teacher Follow-Up Survey, Scherff and Hahs-Vaughn (2008) found that of all English teachers who participated in the surveys, teachers who were male and earned less than $20,000 during the academic year were more likely to leave teaching as opposed to staying in teaching. In their meta-analysis of 34 studies of 63 attrition moderators, Borman and Dowling (2008) found a correlation between salary and attrition in teachers with 0-5 years of experience. Specifically, the likelihood of a teacher leaving decreased as salary increased. Certo and Englebright Fox (2002) conducted a series of focus groups and telephone interviews, asking current and former teachers in Virginia what they believed were the organizational influences on teacher attrition and retention. One of the most mentioned causes of attrition was low salary; however, teachers generally gave two or more reasons. “Top reasons included the following, with the most reported reason listed first: lack of administrative support, hectic/stressful schedules, insufficient salary and no opportunities for job sharing/childrearing” (p.68).

**Career changes.** Some teachers leave the profession altogether and choose a different career path. In their examination of the 1988-1989 Teacher Follow-Up Survey, Hammer and
Rohr (1992) found that about 19% of public and 22% of private school teachers chose better pay or other career opportunities as their main reason for leaving the field. Knepper et al. (2000) examined the progress of a group of teachers in 1997 that had graduated from college in 1992/1993. They found that one in five teachers had permanently left teaching by 1997. Of this group, over one quarter of those said that they left to pursue a career outside of teaching. Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) examined data from the 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS). Their study’s purposes were to quantify trends in three components of teacher turnover, and to investigate claims of excessive teacher turnover as the predominant source of teacher shortage. They found that about one fourth of general education leavers transfer to a completely different career. Ingersoll (2001) found that 42% of all teachers who depart from the profession reported job dissatisfaction or the desire to pursue a better job, another career, or to improve career opportunities in or out of education in his study of the 1991-1992 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) and 1990-1991 School and Staffing Survey (SASS).

**Dissatisfaction within the school.** The SASS and TFS both ask questions about teacher dissatisfaction within the school. Specifically, these surveys inquire about class size, workplace conditions, discipline problems, dissatisfaction with the school administration, and dissatisfaction with student assessments and school accountability measures. This section examined literature on workplace conditions and classroom factors (size, composition, behavior) and their relation to attrition. There has been an increase in literature discussing workplace conditions attributing to attrition. According to National Education Association (2006), “workplace conditions” are defined as teaching assignments, working relationships among teachers, support for new teachers, support for students, curricular support, resources and materials, assessment, professional development, professional influence and career growth,
facilities, and principal’s leadership. Due to the limitation of wording in the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), the school factors that were considered for this study were facilities/resources (“working conditions” as the TFS defines them), class size, discipline, principal/administration leadership skills, and autonomy.

Shakrani (2008) studied data from a national survey conducted in 2006–07 conducted by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF). It was found that teachers changed schools “in pursuit of better working conditions” (Shakrani, 2008, p. 1). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) reported on their past studies involving the School and Staffing Survey Teacher Follow Up-Surveys of 1991-1992, 1994-1995, and 2000-2001. They found a pattern between teacher attrition and dissatisfaction with poor working conditions in schools and school districts. The higher the dissatisfaction with working conditions, the higher the attrition rates. “…these data suggest that the roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within schools and districts” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, p. 4). Feng (2010) in his study of Florida teachers also found that higher levels of behavioral problems and disciplinary incidents were associated with greater levels of teacher turnover. Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (2005) conducted a study to examine the reasons teachers migrate to other schools or leave altogether. Using a survey of 1,071 teachers in California, following up with telephone interviews, examining student demographic data, and examining teacher salary data, they found that the strongest predictor of turnover problems was teachers’ rating of school conditions.

There has been debate over whether a large class size (over 30 students per class) predicts a new teacher leaving their job. Some studies have shown that classes that are larger in size tend to increase the probability of a teacher leaving. For example, Feng (2010) studied new teachers in Florida. He found that those new to the profession usually teach in more challenging schools,
generally with larger class sizes. This experience negatively impacts a new teacher’s viewpoint on teaching and increases the likelihood of a teacher leaving. Another study by Price and Terry (2015) examined the relationship between small class size in early elementary grades and teacher job satisfaction using 20 elementary schools and 135 teachers. Their results indicated that higher levels of satisfaction were associated with fewer children assigned to a class, and this lead to a lower likelihood of a teacher leaving the profession.

Conversely, there have also been studies that have found that class size is not important in a teacher deciding to leave. For example, Thompson (2011) found that class size has little to no influence on a newer teacher’s decision to leave. The participants of this study were teachers in their first three years of teaching in six school districts located in the west central and southern regions of the state of Mississippi. These teachers were given a survey that addressed the following areas that could possibly affect rural middle school attrition: salary; class size; student behavior in the classroom; social activity within the rural area; administrative support; obtaining suitable housing in the rural area; teacher preparedness; working conditions; and the social economic status of the rural school district and its ability to provide adequate resources for effective instruction to the teachers. Out of the factors examined, Thompson (2011) found that class size was the second lowest ranked factor influencing attrition, ranking eighth out of the nine factors. In his meta-analysis of literature pertaining to teacher attrition, Allen (2005) deemed that the impact of class size on attrition should be declared “inconclusive”. Of the ten studies he examined, six found a correlation between an increase in class size and teacher attrition, and two found no statistically significant correlation. Allen (2005) also found there was a disagreement among the six studies when comparing class size to other working conditions.
Some studies said class size was more significant than other conditions, while other studies indicated class size was the least significant predictor of attrition.

Student discipline is another issue that could influence a teacher’s decision to leave. Feng (2010) found a positive relationship between the amount of “disciplinary incidents” (where a student’s behavior requires disciplinary action) reported by a new teacher (with 0-2 years of experience) and the likelihood of a new teacher leaving the profession. Feng (2010) reported an odds ratio of 1.5249 (p < .01), meaning the odds of teachers leaving the profession were 1.525 times higher for teachers who reported high instances of disciplinary instances compared to teachers who did not report high instances of disciplinary instances. “…the number of teacher-specific mean disciplinary incidents per students is associated with a higher likelihood of leaving a school for teachers with 0–2 years of experience” (Feng, 2010, p. 29). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) also pointed out that a large portion of teachers in their study indicated they left because of disciplinary problems. “But even more of them indicated that one of four different school working conditions was behind their decision to quit: student discipline problems; lack of support from the school administration; poor student motivation; and lack of teacher influence over schoolwide and classroom decision making” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, p. 3). Certo and Englebright Fox (2002) found a similar pattern in their study of teachers in Virginia. They found that when teachers were asked why they left, or why they believed their peers left the profession, student discipline problems was among the top three reasons given. However, Thompson (2011) found when examining student behavior in the rural Mississippi school setting that children’s behavior in the classroom had very little to some influence on newer teachers leaving the rural school district, and had slightly less, but still some influence on these teachers leaving the teaching profession entirely.
Without a supportive administration, a teacher can feel helpless, and therefore may want to leave. Teachers with more controlling principals are more likely to leave the profession than teachers with less controlling principals. Urick (2012) studied the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and in her examination of the SASS, she identified four types of teachers (integrated, transitioned, balkanized, and limited) and three types of principals (integrating, controlling, and balkanizing). The type of identification given to the principal and teacher helped predict the likelihood of teacher attrition. Integrating principals reported high leadership skills and that their leadership was shared with their teachers and were least likely to experience teacher attrition. Controlling principals indicated high leadership but did not share leadership roles with their teachers. Balkanizing principals reported limited leadership in their position but high leadership from teachers. Teachers who had controlling principals were more likely to leave than those with any other principal type. In their survey study of Elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers in West Central Florida, Marlow and Hierlmeier (1987) found that “leavers” (those teachers who left teaching altogether) tended to come from large schools where principals were perceived as stifling creativity.

As education policies such as No Child Left Behind and Common Core State Standards continue to dictate what a child must learn, teachers have been losing a sense of autonomy in the classroom. In their qualitative study where they interviewed beginning teachers, Crocco and Costigan (2007) found that, “Under the curricular and pedagogical impositions of scripted lessons and mandated curriculum, patterns associated nationwide with high-stakes testing, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the phenomenon known as the “narrowing of curriculum,” new teachers in New York City (NYC) find their personal and professional identity thwarted, creativity and autonomy undermined…” (p. 512). Ford, Van Sickle, Clark, Fazio-
Brunson, and Schween (2015) found similar results when studying 37 elementary teachers from five districts across Louisiana after their first 2 years under the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Teachers in their study reported a lack of autonomy, especially within the newly adopted CCSS, and feelings of loss of control (loss of autonomy in the ability to make lesson decisions) over their situation. Certo and Englebright Fox (2002) also found that autonomy was incredibly important in a teacher’s career in their study of Virginia teachers. “Teachers wanted more autonomy with regard to decisions made about school policy and student learning” (p. 65).

**Accountability.** Accountability and its relationship to attrition has become a topic of interest as of late. Tye and O’Brien (2002) reported that teachers left the profession due to the increased levels of accountability and pressure associated with high-stakes testing, based on a survey they distributed to teachers who graduated from the Chapman University in California. It has also been observed by Sass, Flores, Claeys and Perez (2012) that teachers who have entered the profession during the new high stakes testing era are more likely to leave than those who had become teachers prior to accountability measures becoming so prominent. Their study examined public school teachers in Texas who entered and left the profession between 1988 and 2010, using a database from public school teachers that was obtained through the Texas Education Agency. They found that higher accountability standards had a significant negative impact on teacher retention.

Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2016) examined if the implementation of accountability measures, such as establishing standards, using the standardized assessments for English and Mathematics to measure whether a school’s students meet the standards, and applying rewards or sanctions, is related to the subsequent departure of teachers from schools. Using the 2003–2004
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Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2004–2005 Teacher Follow-up Survey, they found that some steps in school accountability were strongly related to teacher turnover. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2016) also found that the impact of these school accountability measures strongly depended on teachers’ working conditions in their school. Specifically, how schools performed overall on the Mathematics and English assessments affected retention and turnover. Schools that performed better had better retention than lower-performing schools. These low performing schools received lower funds, these lower funds impacted a teacher’s compensation. This, in turn, influenced a teacher’s decision to stay or leave the profession.

Likelihood of Return

This section discusses the current research on the likelihood of a teacher returning based on the reasons they left. Some areas have been studied more than others, but overall the research is limited.

Regardless of why one left, there are teachers who will return to the field eventually. For example, using the Teacher Service Record of Illinois, DeAngelis and Presley (2011) examined teachers who both left the profession and returned between 1971 and 2006. Their results indicated that about 1/4 to 1/3 of teachers examined returned to the profession. In Robinson, Mun, and MacDonald (1992), they found that 3 out of 4 teachers surveyed who left the profession indicated they would like to return. Interestingly, there are also reports that teachers who have been recently hired are actually teachers returning to the field. DeAngelis and Presley (2011) reported that between the 1980s and the 1990s, somewhere between 25% and 40% of all “new hires” were actually former teachers. Grissom and Reininger (2012) also examined how many new hires are actually former teachers. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 cohort, they examined former teachers who worked between the years 1980 and 2004. It
was found that most re-entrants were female and less likely to be married. They also found that of those who returned, 48% returned after one year, 67% of the re-entrants returned between 1 and 2 years, and 14% return after their fifth year out of the profession. Boe et al. (1997) used the 1987-1988 SASS and 1989 TFS to examine the attrition rates and return rates of special education teachers and general education teachers. It was found that of the sample of teachers who indicated they left the profession, 26% indicated they would be interested in returning within 1 year, 41% indicated they would be interested in returning "at some future time," and 33% reported they never intended to return.

**Comparison of return rates between Elementary and Secondary teachers.** As it stands, there is limited research that specifically examines which group of teachers (Elementary teachers or Secondary teachers) returns more. For example, DeAngelis (2013) pointed out that “females who left high schools were significantly less likely to return to the same school, even controlling for subject assignment, compared to those who left elementary/middle schools” (p. 24). As most of the literature has not focused on which group of teachers (elementary vs. secondary as a whole) leaves more, but in conjunction with another teacher characteristic (i.e. gender or age), this study contributed to the limited research available on the individual groups’ reasons for leaving and their return rates.

**Age.** This study examined age as an influencing factor in the likelihood of returning to the profession. As a teacher’s age increases, perhaps the likelihood of their return decreases. Or perhaps the inverse is true. Several studies examined how age affects the likelihood of a teacher returning to the profession, and this study aimed to help create additional literature on the topic. DeAngelis (2013) used Teacher Service Record (TSR) files from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to examine the factors that influence attrition, and what factors play a role in
returning to teaching. She divided age into two groups (older than 30 years old, and under 30 years old). The results of her study indicated that female teachers who were younger at the time of exit were less likely to return. In contrast, those who were older at the time of exit were more likely to return eventually. Specifically, it was found that “females who were 30-40 years old at the time of exit also were more likely to return to their former school or district compared to younger female leavers, whereas older females were similarly likely to return” (p.19).

Male teachers’ return rates, on the other hand, had no significant association with age. Beaudin (1995) used data from the Michigan State Department of Education teacher files (comprising of the years 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1984, 1985), and found that teachers who began teaching at a later age were more likely to return than their younger counterparts.

**Personal life factors.** Dolton and his colleagues (2015) established that 52% of women who leave for child rearing purposes do return to the profession at a later date. This leads one to assume that once their children are grown enough to either be in day-care or perhaps even school age, mothers will return to teach. It has been noted that women are more likely to return than men (DeAngelis, 2013; Robinson, Munn, & MacDonald, 1992). These women often express high interest in returning, and a large portion of women that respond left due to pregnancy (Robinson, Munn, & MacDonald, 1992). There are other reasons a teacher leaves the profession, such as moving to a different area or needing time to treat health issues. Moving to a different area does not necessarily mean a teacher will not return to the profession upon settling in. The same is true for some health issues. Upon recovery, perhaps a teacher will want to return to the field. Over 2/3 of teachers surveyed by Robinson, Munn, and MacDonald (1992) who left teaching did so due to personal issues, for example, health issues or moving, said they had considered returning eventually.
**Salary and job benefits.** Using data from the Illinois Teacher Service Record (TSR), the Illinois Teacher Certification Information System (TCIS), and Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages data compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, DeAngelis (2013) found that higher wages were associated with a higher likelihood of a teacher returning to the profession.

“The results for both male and female leavers indicate that higher alternative wages in the county were associated with greater odds of returning…both female and male leavers who earned higher teaching salaries at the time of exit were more likely to return both to the profession and to their former school or district than those who earned lower salaries, even after controlling for factors that contribute to salary differentials including degree level, years of experience, and region of the state” (DeAngelis, 2013, p. 17).

Grissom and Reininger (2012) also found that teachers, regardless of gender, who earned higher salaries at the time of exit, controlling for other factors that affect teacher pay, were more likely to return to the profession. Singer (1993) examined longitudinal data to track 2,695 special educators who were hired by the Michigan public schools between 1972 and 1981 and stopped teaching between 1973 and 1983. The goal of the study was to determine their rate of reentry into Michigan public schools by 1985. It was concluded that the economic factors and need for money influenced likelihood of return.

**Career changes.** There has been little formal research done when it comes to examining teachers who have left the profession, changed careers, and returned to teaching at a later date. Personal accounts indicate that some teachers who leave and switch careers return to teaching when they feel more mentally ready. According to an article from TES Magazine (2016), one
teacher left the profession after one year. For the next five years, she worked as a museum learning coordinator, briefly worked as a teacher in Peru, and finally worked at an orphanage in Mexico. After six years out of the profession, she eventually returned. Her reason for returning after switching careers included that she was more mature, more ready to teach. Another personal account was written by a teacher, who only used the username “Melanie” for the blog Those Who Teach. The article June 2015 “Why I’m Returning to the Classroom After Leaving for One Year: A Reader Reflects,” describes how Melanie left the profession after teaching fifth grade for seven years. For one year, Melanie worked an office job. “After one year of sitting in a cubicle, I realize how much I miss being a teacher. The things I miss the most are the students, the sharing (the learning community created with fellow teachers), and the time off” (Why I’m Returning, 2015). She concluded that the career change was not what she needed. She came to the realization that she needed to change schools, work under a better administration, and she needed more of a sense of purpose. Teaching gave her that sense of purpose, but she felt that she needed to leave the profession for a while to understand this. However, these accounts are personal and do not contain information that is generalizable. This study will add information to the body of knowledge currently available on the likelihood of a teacher returning to the field after leaving due to career changes.

**Dissatisfaction within the school.** When addressing the issue of the likelihood of a teacher returning to the profession if they left due to dissatisfaction within the school, the research has been quite limited. There is little information available on teachers who left due to workplace conditions, class size, or class behavior, accountability practices, and the likelihood of these teachers returning. It appears that the focus of literature is on administration. This study aimed to add formal analysis to these missing topics. This section will cover what research has
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said thus far on the topic of the likelihood of a teacher returning to the profession based on whether they left due to dissatisfaction with administration.

In their survey of study of the relationships between the authentic leadership of building principals and the trust, engagement, and intention to return of their teaching staffs, Bird, Wang, Watson, and Murray (2012) found a strong relationship between teacher trust and principal engagement, engagement and ratings of principals' authentic leadership, trust and ratings of principals' authentic leadership. They surveyed 39 K-12 public schools in a southeastern state, 28 principals and 714 teachers, and concluded that, “These strong relationships suggest that the more positively teachers rated their principals' authentic leadership skills, the more they trust their principals and the more they are engaged in school activities” (p.431). Bird, Wang, Watson, and Murray (2012) concluded that trust and a good relationship with a principal increase the likelihood of a teacher returning to the profession and serve as an overall buffer to prevent teachers from resigning.

**Accountability.** Studying accountability as a reason for returning is incredibly important, if teachers are leaving due to these increased accountability measures, perhaps it is in the interest to policy makers and administration to create rules and regulations that are less stringent. Perhaps these new Common Core State Standards are scaring away younger teachers. However, there has been little formal research conducted on the process of a teacher returning to the teaching profession after leaving due to accountability issues. This study sought to fill in some of the void in the literature.

In summary, there are teachers who left the profession who will return to the field eventually. Though some research has been conducted on those who return, overall the research is limited. This study contributed to the existing body of literature, covering the likelihood of a
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teacher leaving due to personal life factors, salary and job benefits, career changes, dissatisfaction with school, and accountability, and the likelihood of their return.

Research Questions

This study’s purpose was to test the likelihood of a teacher returning to the field based on the reasons they gave for leaving. There were two questions asked.

1. Are there differences in the odds of return when examining ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic), age of the teacher, gender, and grade level (secondary teachers compared to elementary teachers)?

2. Controlling for gender, age of the teacher, ethnicity, and grade level, what are the odds of return for each category for leaving (1. Personal life factors; 2. Salary, other job benefits, and career factors; 3. Dissatisfaction with school factors; and 4. Accountability factors) and which category has the highest return rate?

2A. Does age moderate the average return rate?

Methods

Sample

The information was gathered from the U.S. Department of Education’s 2012-2013 Teacher Follow-Up survey (TFS) Former Teacher Questionnaire, which is part of the School and Staffing Survey (SASS), specifically examining teachers that indicated on the survey that they would consider returning to teach. The TFS sampled all eligible teachers who responded to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Teacher Survey in the previous year. There are four questionnaires that made up the TFS. Two were for respondents who were first-year public
school teachers in the 2012 SASS, and the two were for the remainder of the sample. Within those two groups, one questionnaire was for current teachers only and one only for teachers who left the field.

The SASS Teacher Questionnaire asked for the teacher's home address, e-mail address, and contact information for two people who would know the whereabouts of the teacher. There were two surveys available, an online version and a paper version. If a teacher provided an email address in their SASS survey, a link to the online version of the TFS was sent to the sampled teachers’ e-mail addresses. For teachers who did not provide a valid e-mail address, questionnaires were sent to both their home and e-mail addresses. While it was encouraged that teachers fill out the online version of the TFS, teachers were informed that they could request a paper questionnaire at any time. Respondents who received paper questionnaires first received the TFS-1, which determined whether they would be sent a former or current teacher questionnaire. The TFS-1 was mailed out in September 2013. Principals were also asked to provide the current occupational status of all teachers in the school that were sampled for SASS for accurate survey disbursement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This study examined former “new” teachers (with less than 5 years of experience) who taught any grade (elementary and secondary teachers) in a public school setting.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics website, which houses the SASS database,

“The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) is a system of related questionnaires that provide descriptive data on the context of elementary and secondary education and policymakers a variety of statistics on the condition of education in the United States.
The SASS system covers a wide range of topics from teacher demand, teacher and principal characteristics, general conditions in schools, principals' and teachers' perceptions of school climate and problems in their schools, teacher compensation, district hiring and retention practices, to basic characteristics of the student population” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

About 4,400 teachers responded to the 2012-2013 SASS. The Teacher Follow-Up Survey, which is distributed one year after the SASS, collected information from teachers who have indicated they left the profession. One thousand six hundred teachers (1,600) indicated they left the teaching profession after the 2012-2013 school year. The information collected in the questionnaire includes current occupation, primary activity, plans to remain in their current position, plans for further education, plans for returning to teaching, reasons for leaving teaching, possible areas of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teaching, salary, marital status, number of children, and reasons for retirement. This study took into consideration all teachers that have been identified as “leavers,” and who have left within the first five years of teaching. The total N of the sample was 366 (N=366). Of the 366, 83 (22.7%) identified as male, 283 (77.3%) identified as female. There were 27 (7.3%) teachers that identified as Hispanic, 26 (7.1%) that identified as African American, and 313 (85.6%) teachers identified as Caucasian. In terms of grade level, 165 (45.2%) teachers taught in the elementary school level and 201 (54.8%) of teachers taught in the secondary school level. Two hundred forty seven (247, 67.5%) teachers indicated they would consider returning to the teaching profession at some point, while 119 (32.5%) teachers indicated they would not return.
Variables

The TFS has a dichotomous variable that categorizes grade level by elementary or secondary schools. Gender and ethnicity were considered control variables in this study. In this study, age was examined as both a moderator and a control variable. A moderating variable is a variable that affects the strength and/or direction of the relationship between dependent and independent variables. As age has been studied and found to be a strong influence on the return rates and attrition rates of teachers, it was considered a moderator in this study.

The dependent variable was the single question “Would you consider returning to the position of a K–12 teacher?” with the answers being “Yes” or “No.” For years of experience teaching (TOTYREXP_S), this study only looked at those teachers who have had 5 years or fewer of teaching experience. No other years of experience were examined in this study. For gender (GENDER_S), the dummy coding was 1 = male teachers and 0 = female teachers. Ethnicity (RACETH_T) was controlled for, and this study only considered those who have identified as Hispanic, African-American, or White (non-Hispanic). This variable was divided into two independent control variables. An African-American teacher dummy code was created where White (non-Hispanic) teachers = 0, Hispanic teachers = 0, and African American teachers = 1. The second variable was for Hispanic teachers, where White (non-Hispanic) teachers = 0, African-American teachers = 0, and Hispanic teachers = 1.

Age of the teacher was a moderator and a variable of interest for the research questions in this study. The age variable (AGE_TF) a continuous variable, with the range being 21-73 years old (mean age 32.79, mode age 26 years old). The grade level a teacher formerly taught was also included in this study. The TFS has two grade level variables. For this study, the variable that placed all K-8 teachers in one group (Elementary) and all high school teachers (9-12) in a second
Intention to Return

group (Secondary). This variable was dummy coded to compare elementary teachers to secondary teachers, with elementary teachers = 0 and secondary teachers = 1.

There are twenty two (22) items that the survey uses as identifiers of why a teacher left the profession. Of these factors, thirteen (13) were used in this study. These variables fall under one of four categories that the TFS created. These categories are Personal Life Factors ($\alpha = .310$); Salary, Benefits, and Career Factors ($\alpha = .719$); Dissatisfaction with School Factors ($\alpha = .870$); and Accountability (Student Performance) Factors ($\alpha = .766$). These questions were asked in a Likert-Scale, where teachers were asked on a scale of 1-5 if they agreed with a statement or not (1 = Not at Important to 5 = Extremely Important).

Table 1 provides information on every variable of interest under the four established TFS categories, as well as a table providing the amount of teachers per year of experience, and return rates by level of teaching (elementary or secondary) and category. There are two (2) variables for Personal Life Factors, three (3) variables for Salary, Benefits, and Career Factors, five (5) for Dissatisfaction with School Factors, and two (2) for Accountability (Student Performance) Factors. Table 2 gives the sample size of each individual group examined in this study. Table 3 provides information on how many teachers left per year of experience. For example, 86 teachers left teaching after one year of experience in the field.

| Table 1 |
| --- | --- |
| **TFS Categories and Reasons for Leaving** |  |
| **Category** | **Reason for Leaving** |
| Personal Life Factors | • Moved  
• Personal Life Reasons |
| Salary, Benefits, and Career Factors | • Needed Higher Salary  
• Needed Better Benefits |
| Intention to Return | • Took Additional College Courses within Education  
|                     | • Took Additional College Courses outside of Education  
| Dissatisfaction with School Factors | • Not Enough Autonomy  
|                     | • Class Size Issues  
|                     | • Workplace Conditions  
|                     | • Discipline Problems  
|                     | • Administration Issues  
| Accountability (Student Performance) Factors | • Accountability Impacted Teaching  
|                     | • Accountability Impacted Compensation, Benefits, or Rewards  

Table 2  
*Descriptives of Return and Control Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Dummy Code)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (0)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (1)</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (0)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Teachers (0)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Teachers (1)</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>85.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Age range 21-73 years  
Mode age: 26 years old (14.9%)  
Mean age: 32.79 years old

Table 3  
*Years of Teaching Experience Before Leaving*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Years</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 provides the intention to return rates of just elementary teachers studied in the example. Table 5 provides the overall intention to return rates of just secondary teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Return Rates of Elementary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would Return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would Not Return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Return Rates of Secondary Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would Return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would Not Return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 6-11 provide the intention to return rates of specific groups of teachers based on the reasons they left and the reason’s level of influence. To get these results, the Cross Tabulation function in SPSS was used. The columns represent the original reason for leaving, using the averaged categorical variables of (1) Personal Life Factors; (2) the Salary, Career, and Benefits Factors; (3) the Dissatisfaction with School Factors; and (4) the Accountability Factors. The rows examine the level of influence that each reason had in the teacher’s decision to leave. As these were averages, the rows were placed into ranges. Teachers whose scores ranged from 1.0-1.9 indicated the reason was “Not at all important” in influencing their reason to leave, 3.0-3.9 indicated the reason was “Moderately important” in influencing their reason to leave, and 5.0 was “Extremely important” in their reason to leave. The layer for the charts was the dependent
Intention to Return

variable, which asks whether or not the teacher intended to return. Table 6 examines just elementary teachers who indicated they would return and Table 7 gives the percent of secondary teachers who indicated they would consider returning by reason. Table 8 examines this same trend but with all African American teachers and Table 9 provides information on all Hispanic teachers who indicated they would consider returning. In Tables 10 and 11, all male and female teachers who indicated they would consider returning are examined.

When examining Table 6, of all those elementary teachers who intended to return to teaching, 15.7% said personal life factors said that personal life factors was not at all important. 32.4% said it was moderately important in influencing why they originally left, and 33.6% indicated it was extremely important in why they originally left. In this same chart, Salary, Benefits, and Career; Dissatisfaction with School, and Accountability Factors were not deemed important in their original decision to leave, with the majority of teachers ranking these categories between 1.0-1.9 in level of importance.

Of all those secondary teachers who intended to return to teaching, Personal life factors was deemed the most important reason for leaving, with 35.9% indicating it was extremely important in why they originally left. For secondary teachers, Salary, Benefits, and Career; Dissatisfaction with School, and Accountability measures were not at all important in their original decision to leave, each having the majority of teachers ranking them between 1.0-1.9 in importance.

Among African American teachers who intended to return to teaching, the categories of Personal Life Factors and Salary, Benefits, and Career Factors had the highest influence when considering their initial departure from teaching. Teachers ranked these categories as moderately influential (with most teachers indicating a rank of 3.0-3.9) to their decision to leave teaching. Of
All African American teachers, 59.9% said Personal Life Factors was moderately influential in their initial reason for leaving, and 431% said Salary, Benefits, and Career factors was moderately influential. Once again, Dissatisfaction with School Factors, and Accountability Factors were not at all important in their original decision to leave.

Among the Hispanic teachers who intended to return to teaching, 53.1% said personal life was very important in why they left, 45.8% ranked Salary, Benefits, and Career as slightly important as to why they initially left, and 50.8% said Dissatisfaction with School Factors were slightly important as to why they left. In this same chart, 65.3% of all Hispanic teachers who intended to return to teaching said Accountability measures deemed not at all important in their original decision to leave.

When examining all male who intended to return to teaching, 64.3% of those that left due to Personal Life Factors indicated it was moderately important in why they originally left. Among male teachers, the largest portion said that Salary, Benefits, and Career Factors were deemed moderately important as to why they originally left (43.6%); the majority of male teachers said Dissatisfaction with School was not important (60.5%), and most male teachers (45.5%) indicated that Accountability Factors were not at all important in their original decision to leave. Of all female teachers who intended to return to teaching, the largest group of those who intended to return said that Personal Life Factors were the most important reason as to why they originally left (37.8%). The majority of female teachers said that Salary, Benefits, and Career; Dissatisfaction with School, and Accountability measures were not deemed important in their original decision to leave.

| Table 6 |
### Return Rates of Elementary Teachers by Reason for Leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Level of Influence</th>
<th>Personal Life</th>
<th>Salary, Benefits, Career</th>
<th>Dissatisfaction with School</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00 – 1.9: Not at all Important</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0-2.9</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0-3.9: Moderately Important</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0-4.9</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 – Extremely Important</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7

### Return Rates of Secondary Teachers by Reason for Leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Level of Influence</th>
<th>Personal Life</th>
<th>Salary, Benefits, Career</th>
<th>Dissatisfaction with School</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00 – 1.9: Not at all Important</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0-2.9</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0-3.9: Moderately Important</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0-4.9</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 – Extremely Important</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8

### Return Rates of African American Teachers by Reason for Leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Level of Influence</th>
<th>Personal Life</th>
<th>Salary, Benefits, Career</th>
<th>Dissatisfaction with School</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00 – 1.9: Not at all Important</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving</td>
<td>Average Level of Influence</td>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>Salary, Benefits, Career</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Important</td>
<td>1.00 – 1.9:</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.0-2.9</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.0-3.9: Moderately Important</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.0-4.9</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.0 – Extremely Important</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10

*Return Rates of Male Teachers by Reason for Leaving*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Leaving</th>
<th>Average Level of Influence</th>
<th>Personal Life</th>
<th>Salary, Benefits, Career</th>
<th>Dissatisfaction with School</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Important</td>
<td>1.00 – 1.9:</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.0-2.9</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To answer the research question regarding the overall return rate for each individual reason for leaving, four new variables were created. Each variable was the average of all answers under their respective category. The two Personal life factors were averaged into PLAvg. The four Salary, other benefits, and career factors were averaged into SBCAvg. The five answers that fell under the Dissatisfaction with School category were averaged into DwSAvg. Finally, the two questions concerning Accountability were averaged into AccAvg. An interaction term was created for each average was created to examine whether age was a moderator. Four interactions were examined (Age x PLAvg; Age x SBCAge; Age x DwSAvg; and Age x AccAvg). Refer to Table 1 for variables that fall under each category.
**Personal life factors.** The TFS divides this category into several sub-reasons for leaving. The first question examined in this group was “Because I wanted to take a job more conveniently located OR because I moved.” Teachers who left the profession to move out of the country are not included in the survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This item was studied for the fact that perhaps a teacher had moved to a different area where they were unable to teach at first. The second question covers more subject matter. This question states “Because of personal life reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family).” The individual reasons (health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family) were not separate in this survey. Instead, they were placed under one umbrella question.

**Salary, other job benefits and career factors.** Two questions were studied within this category. The first reason for leaving states “Because I wanted or needed a higher salary.” “Because I needed better benefits than I received at last year’s school” is another question that was considered within this category. It is assumed that the TFS defines “benefits” under health care programs, pensions, retirement incentives, etc. However, the TFS does not give a specific definition of what “benefits” entails. “Because I decided to take courses to improve career opportunities within the field of education” and “Because I decided to take courses to improve career opportunities outside the field of education” were also included in this study.

**Dissatisfaction with school factors.** Within the classroom factors heading, two questions were examined. The first reason for leaving under this category was “Because I did not have enough autonomy over my classroom at last year’s school.” Teachers who feel constricted and do not feel as if they have some freedom to teach within their own classroom are more likely to leave. The second reason that falls under the classroom factors category is “Because I was dissatisfied with the large number of students I taught at last year’s school.”
Workplace conditions was also examined, using the statement “Because I was dissatisfied with workplace conditions (e.g., facilities, classroom resources, school safety) at last year’s school.” The reason “Because student discipline problems were an issue at last year’s school,” was taken into consideration as well. Administration problems, as examined by the statement, “Because I was dissatisfied with administration at last year’s school,” were also examined.

Accountability (Student performance) factors. “Because I was dissatisfied with how student assessments and school accountability measures impacted my teaching or curriculum at last year’s school,” and “Because I was dissatisfied with how some of my compensation, benefits, or rewards were tied to the performance of my students at last year’s school” are the two newest factors to be studied by the SASS and the Former Teacher Follow Up Survey. These two questions were examined to determine if accountability measures influenced a teacher’s likelihood of leaving.

Analysis

For the first research question, “Are there differences in the odds of return for ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, Hispanic), age of the teacher, gender, and grade level (secondary teachers compared to elementary teachers)?” a single logistic regression was run, with all variables in a single “block.” The dependent variable was Return, which asks, “Would you consider returning to the position of a K-12 teacher?” As the dependent variable was dichotomous, logistic regression was the most appropriate method to use. Age was a continuous variable. Gender was dummy coded 0 = female teachers, 1 = male teachers. Grade level was dummy coded as well, with 0 = elementary school teachers, and 1 = secondary school teachers.
A frequency table providing information on ethnicity, age, and grade level taught at time of exit was given. Correlations of ethnicity, age, gender, and grade level on Return were also performed.

For the second research question, “Controlling for gender, ethnicity, grade level, and age what are the odds of return for each category for leaving (1. Personal life factors; 2. Salary, other job benefits, and career factors; 3. Dissatisfaction with school factors; and 4. Accountability factors) and which category has the highest return rate?” a logistic regression analysis was performed. To obtain an overall return rate, each category’s variables were averaged. There were four separate averages/variables. Personal life factors had two variables. These two variables were averaged together into a single variable called PLAvg. Salary, benefits, and career factors had four variables, which were also averaged together into a single variable, SBCAvg. Dissatisfaction with School had five variables, and these variables were averaged into a single variable, DwSAvg. Finally, the two variables under the Accountability (Student Performance) category were averaged into a single variable, AccAvg. The control variables were all placed into a single block. Each of the averages was then added in their own block. An interaction term was created for each average was created to examine whether age was a moderator. Four interactions were examined (Age x PLAvg; Age x SBCAge; Age x DwSAvg; and Age x AccAvg). The interaction terms were also placed in their own block, following the independent variables. The standardized regression weights were calculated for each the averages, and the interactions. The age variable was not standardized as age difference by year is of interest in this study. The ethnicity codes, gender, and secondary teacher variable were also not standardized, as these are dummy coded variables.

The significance level for both research questions was $\alpha = .05$. SPSS 23 was used for all calculations. The data set was weighted using the Teacher Final Weight variable (TFNLWGT).
Results

Research Question 1: Are there differences in the odds of return when examining ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, Hispanic), age of the teacher, gender, and grade level (secondary teachers compared to elementary teachers)?

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>r</th>
<th>-2LL</th>
<th>NR^2</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>OR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.736**</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>5,532.701</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.479**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>54761.5</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.172**</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>19.343</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.188*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.125**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.808**</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>898.700</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.446**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Teacher</td>
<td>.212**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.911**</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>1,734.753</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.487*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.175**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.027**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>774.540</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.027*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates significance at .05 level
** indicates significance at .01 level
Hispanic: 1 = Hispanic, 0 = Caucasian
African American: 1 = African American, 0 = Caucasian
Gender: 1 = Male, 0 = Female
Secondary Teacher: 1 = Secondary Teacher, 0 = Elementary Teacher

Table 12 provides the correlations and regression results (with unstandardized β as these are all dummy coded variables). When examining the ethnicity, the correlation between African American teachers and return rates was small, negative, and nonsignificant (r = -.003, p > .05). There was no significant difference between the return rates of African American teachers and Caucasian teachers (β = .006, OR = 1.006, Wald = .024, p < .01). The correlation between return rates and Hispanic teachers was nonsignificant, weak, and positive (r = .008, p > .05). However,
Hispanic teachers were significantly more likely to plan to return than their Caucasian peers ($\beta = .172$, $OR = 1.188$, Wald = 19.343, $p < .01$). Using the calculation ($OR-1)*100$, this means that Hispanic teachers were 18.8% more likely to return than Caucasian teachers were. Perhaps this result is due to other variable that could be related to Hispanic teachers’ return rates that were controlled for in the study. There was also an incredibly small number of Hispanic teachers in this study (N=26). This small number would lead to a higher chance of the variable becoming significant. Another possible reason could be due to the fact that 67.6% of all Hispanic teachers who left indicated their intent to return, which is a large proportion.

When comparing the average return rates of the age variable, there was a significant relationship between age and return. The correlation between return rates and age was small, positive, and significant ($r = .175$, $p < .01$). For every one year increase in age, a teacher was 2.7% more likely to plan to return to the field ($\beta = .027$, $OR = 1.13$, Wald = 774.540, $p < .01$).

When comparing the average return rates of the gender variable, there was a significant difference in return rates between the genders. The correlation between return rates and gender was small, negative, and significant ($r = -.125$, $p < .01$). Male teachers were 55.4% less likely than female teachers to indicate intention return to the field ($\beta = -.808$, $OR = .446$, Wald = 898.700, $p < .01$).

In terms of grade level, there was a significant difference in return rates between elementary and secondary teachers. The correlation between return rates and grade level was weak, positive, and significant ($r = .212$, $p < .01$). Secondary teachers were 148.7% more likely than elementary teachers to intend to return to the field ($\beta = .911$, $OR = 2.487$, Wald = 1,734.753, $p < .01$).
In general, Hispanic teachers were more likely to indicate intention return to the profession than their Caucasian peers, while there was no difference in return rates between Caucasian and African American peers. Male teachers were less likely to plan to return to teaching than female teachers. As age increased, the likelihood of a teacher returning also increased. Secondary level teachers were also more likely to indicate their intention return to teaching than elementary level teachers.

**Research Question 2:** Controlling for gender, age of the teacher, ethnicity, and grade level, what are the odds of return for each category for leaving (Personal life factors; Salary, other job benefits, and career factors; Dissatisfaction with school factors; and Accountability factors) and which category has the highest return rate? Does age moderate the return rate?
### Table 13

**Research Question 2: Return rates of group averages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>r</th>
<th>-2LL</th>
<th>NR²</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>OR</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-686**</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>3.901.358</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.504</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.047**</td>
<td>42,462.0</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.476**</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>124.752</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-.076**</td>
<td>1.061**</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.764.257</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.889</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.157**</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>.241**</td>
<td>1.061**</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.764.257</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.889</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>1.061**</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.764.257</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.889</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 14**

**Age x Reason Interaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>20-29 Year Olds</th>
<th>30-39 Year Olds</th>
<th>40-40 Year Olds</th>
<th>50-59 Year Olds</th>
<th>60+ Year Olds</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLAvg</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBCAvg</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DwSAvg</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AccAvg</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 provides the correlations and regression results for this research question, with the dummy coded variables being unstandardized coefficients (β) and the other variables being
standardized (β*). When controlling for gender, ethnicity, grade level, and age, the average of the personal life factors was significantly related to return. The correlation between PLAvg and return was weak, positive, and significant (r = .136, p < .01). Teachers who scored 1 standard deviation higher on leaving for personal life were 64% more likely to indicate an interest in returning to teaching (β* = .495, Wald = 261.925, p < .01). The correlation between SBCAvg and return was weak, negative, and significant (r = -.058, p < .01). Teachers who scored 1 standard deviation higher on leaving for salary, benefits, and career were 97% more likely to indicate an interest in returning to teaching, when controlling for gender, ethnicity, grade level, and age (β* = .679, Wald = 338.224, p < .01).

When controlling for gender, ethnicity, grade level, and age, the return rate of DwSAvg was significant. The correlation between DwSAvg and return was significant, weak, and positive (r = .012, p < .05). Teachers who scored 1 standard deviation higher on leaving because of dissatisfaction with school were 14% less likely to indicate an interest in returning to teaching (β = -.144, Wald = 135.026, p < .05). When controlling for gender, ethnicity, grade level, age, the return rate of AccAvg was significant. The correlation between AccAvg and return was weak, positive, and significant (r = .057, p < .01). The logistic regression results indicated that teachers who scored 1 standard deviation higher on leaving for accountability were 33% less likely to indicate an interest in returning to teaching (β = -.375, Wald = 129.35, p < .01).

**Interactions with age.** Table 14 gives the average score that each age range gives for the level of influence each reason had when leaving. For example, teachers in the age range of 20-29 year olds on a scale of said Personal Life Factors was moderately influential in their reason for leaving (3.5); Salary, Career, and Benefits was not influential at all (1.66); Dissatisfaction with School was not influential at all (1.40), and Accountability was not influential at all (1.43).
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There was a significant, negative interaction between age and PLAvg ($\bar{X}_{\text{Age*PLAvg}} = 3.5, \beta^* = -0.138$, Wald = 338.224, $p < .01$). As a former teacher’s age increases, the likelihood of teachers who left for personal life reasons intending to return decreases by 13%. The interaction between SBCAvg and age was significant ($\bar{X}_{\text{Age*SBCAvg}} = 1.67, \beta^* = 0.021$, Wald = 338.224, $p < .01$). As a former teacher’s age increases, the likelihood of teachers who left because of salary, benefits, or career reasons intending to return increases by 2.1%. There was a significant interaction between age and DwSAvg ($\bar{X}_{\text{Age*DwSAvg}} = 1.53, \beta^* = 0.060$, Wald = 338.224, $p < .01$). As a former teacher’s age increases, the likelihood of a teacher who left because of dissatisfaction with school intending to return increases by 6.1%. The interaction between age and AccAvg was significant ($\bar{X}_{\text{Age*AccAvg}} = 1.49, \beta^* = -0.139$, Wald = 338.224, $p < .01$). As a former teacher’s age increases, the likelihood of a teacher who left because of accountability intending to return decreases by 13%.

These findings show that the age of a teacher influences the likelihood of a teacher indicating their intent to return to the profession. In the case of those teachers who left for personal life reasons and accountability reasons, a teacher who leaves at an “older” age (as their age at the time of exit increases), they are less likely to indicate they will return to the field. In the case of those teachers who left because of salary, career, benefits, or because they were dissatisfied with school, a teacher who leaves at a later age (as their age at the time of exit increases), the likelihood of these teachers indicating an intent to return to teaching will increase.

Summary of findings. Hispanic teachers were more likely to return to the profession than their Caucasian peers. African American teachers were less likely to return to teaching than Caucasian teachers. Male teachers were less likely to return to teaching than female teachers. As age increased, the likelihood of a teacher returning also increased. Secondary level teachers were
also more likely to return to teaching than elementary level teachers. On average, those who left for personal life reasons were more likely to return to teaching. On average, those who left because of salary, benefits or career reasons were also more likely to return to teaching. Those who left because they were dissatisfied with school were less likely to return. Teachers who left because of accountability measures were also less likely to return. The group with the highest return rate was the Salary, Benefits, and Career group, and the group with the lowest return rate were teachers who left for Accountability reasons. The interactions were all significant. As a teacher’s age increased, the likelihood of a teacher indicating their likelihood of returning increased for those who left because of salary, benefits and career and for those teachers who left because of dissatisfaction with school. However, as a teacher’s age increased, the likelihood of a teacher indicating their likelihood of returning decreased for those who left for personal life reasons or accountability reasons.

**Summary and Discussion**

The first research question examines the likelihood of the genders, grade levels, and ethnicities without exploring the reasons they left. Age was found to have a significant relationship to return, with the likelihood of intending to return increasing with age. This aligns with what DeAngelis (2013) found in her study, where older teachers (those 30 years or older) were more likely to return to the profession. Perhaps this is due to the fact that older female teachers are done with child rearing, and their children are in schools themselves and no longer require 24/7 care. Older teachers might be more sure that teaching is the profession for them, as with the teacher in the article from TES Magazine (2016). After six years out of the profession,
the teacher returned, saying that after switching careers, she was more mature, more ready to teach.

When comparing the average return rates of the gender variable, there was a significant difference in return rates between the genders. Male teachers were less likely than female teachers to indicate an intent to return to the field. This finding agrees with the study by Grissom and Reininger (2012), which found that most teachers who returned were female. The pressure of being a breadwinner might mean males go to more profitable fields. In terms of grade level, there was a significant difference in intention to return rates between elementary and secondary teachers. DeAngelis (2013) and Robinsons, Munn, & Macdonald (1992) found similar results. Secondary teachers were more likely than elementary teachers to indicate an intention return to the field. This goes against DeAngelis (2013) which found that female high school teachers were less likely to return than female elementary teachers. This finding is interesting, as Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow (2016) found that more secondary school teachers leave than elementary school teachers (8.3% compared to 7.1%). Even though they leave at a higher rate, these findings show they return at a higher rate. The stress of being an elementary teacher might be too high when compared to being a secondary teacher. School districts may have a higher success rate at getting high school teachers to return compared to elementary school teachers.

The second research question compared the four categories of interest to determine which group was the most likely to indicate an intention to return. On average, those who left for personal life reasons and those who left because of salary, benefits, or career reasons were more likely to indicate an intention return to teaching. These findings align with Robinson, Munn, & MacDonald, who found that 2/3 of the teachers who left due to personal life reasons said they considered returning at a later date. DeAngelis (2013), Grissom and Reininger (2012), and
Intention to Return

Singer (1993) all found a connection between salaries and return rates, with those who had higher salaries at the time of exit having a higher likelihood of return.

Those who left because they were dissatisfied with school and teachers who left because of accountability measures were less likely to intend to return. These findings align with previous research. Perhaps the teachers who left had negative relationships with their previous administration. As Bird, Wang, Watson, and Murray (2012) pointed out, those that had a strong relationship with their administration at the time of exit were more likely to return. The group with the highest intention to return rate was the Salary, Benefits, and Career group, and the group with the lowest intention to return rate were teachers who left for Accountability reasons. It appears that accountability negatively impacts a new teacher’s ability to teach more than anticipated, as these teachers are less likely to return if they leave because of accountability. Age was a moderating variable in this study, as there was a significant interaction between age and every category average. When examining teachers who left for personal life reasons and accountability reasons, a teacher who leaves at a later age is less likely to indicate they will return to the field when in comparison to younger teachers. Perhaps teachers who are older leave for more severe personal life reasons and have more difficulty adapting to new accountability measures than their younger peers. Conversely, teachers who left at a later age due to salary, career, benefits, or because they were dissatisfied with school, have a higher likelihood of indicating an intent to return to teaching when compared to younger teachers who left for these same reasons.
Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First and foremost, the TFS only examines one group of leavers at one point in time. This is not a longitudinal study. What may be true of this group of teachers may not be true of teachers past or those who may leave in the future. Another issue with the study itself was that not all questions on the SASS were used, just the most commonly researched questions. Some of the questions were left out purposefully, such as the personal life choice of leaving due to retirement. Such a reason for leaving the profession would not make sense for a new teacher. One possible way to fix the reliability would be to change the scale in the future. Perhaps change the reason that simply states “Because of personal life reasons (e.g., health, pregnancy/childcare, caring for family)” and expand it out to make health, pregnancy/childcare, and caring for the family individual questions. The accountability scale also had a low reliability, also possibly due to so few questions being used in the study. However, under the accountability section in the TFS, there was only one other question, which was left out of the study because it did not pertain to the research questions at hand. Once again, perhaps expanding on the section in the actual survey and adding additional questions may help increase the reliability in the future.

The size of the unweighted sample could also be a limitation of the study, as 366 is a small number. This number is so small because of how much the sample was limited. There were 1,600 teachers who were surveyed that left the field. Of this, only 366 were new teachers who left the field within the first five years of teaching. This study also did not control for degree type, degree specialization area, any additional certifications, and did not examine teachers who taught a combination of middle school and high school. These factors should be considered in future research, as they are important indicators of retention or attrition as well. Finally, the way
the dependent variable was worded is also an issue. The TFS uses the word “consider” when discussing returning. This is not a definitive answer, therefore it cannot be concluded that these teachers will return at some point in the future, only that they will take into the consideration the possibility of returning sometime in the future.

Conclusion

Teacher attrition has long been a focus in educational research in the United States. Finding the reasons why a teacher leaves the profession are paramount to improving the chances of keeping a teacher in the field longer. There is an abundance of information available when searching for why a teacher leaves. However, information on the likelihood of a teacher returning is harder to find. The purpose of this study was to help fill in this gap in knowledge. By examining the relationship between why a teacher leaves and the likelihood of returning based on said reasons, measures can be taken to improve conditions to reduce the likelihood of a teacher leaving the profession. This study specifically examined “new” teachers (those who have been teaching 5 years or fewer) across all grade levels. This study found that minority status teachers were less likely to return than Caucasian teachers were, secondary school teachers were more likely to return to the profession than elementary school teachers were, and that female teachers were more likely than male teachers to return to the field.

Out of the four categories that the TFS examines as potential reasons for leaving, the group with the highest likelihood of returning, on average, was teachers who left for salary, benefits, or career changes. Teachers were clearly not earning enough to justify staying in the field upon exit, but if the price is right, are more likely to return. This could mean that by providing better incentives upon re-entry could improve the chances of a teacher returning. In the
2012-2013 school year, the national average starting salary for new teachers was $36,141 (National Education Association, 2013). While this may sound like a comfortable salary, this number varies by state, which can make or break a new teacher’s living expenses. There is also a discrepancy in pay when you consider that the national average salary for a person with a bachelor’s degree is around $62,036 a year (Wang, 2018). In most states, teachers must attain a master’s degree or advanced certification, which will further their student debt beyond that of someone who graduated with a bachelor’s degree. How can teachers possibly balance purchasing school supplies for their classrooms, paying back student loans, paying for a house, and covering basic bills (phone, electricity, internet, water, etc.) on such a low salary? By improving salaries for teachers, school districts could take advantage of this group of teachers willing to come back, cutting costs on hiring new teachers and spending less time and money on training.

School districts also need to pay attention to why teachers left in order to retain new teachers and encourage teachers to return, as teachers who were dissatisfied with school conditions were less likely to indicate an interest in returning to teaching. Perhaps districts may want to implement administration professional development programs to create a supportive environment for teachers, where communication and autonomy flourish. Positive, supportive relationships between administration and new teachers are important, especially for retention purposes. As previously noted by Urick (2012), teachers who had controlling principals were more likely to leave than those with any other principal type. Marlow and Hierlmeier (1987) found that “leavers” (those teachers who left teaching altogether) tended to come from large schools where principals were perceived as stifling creativity. Evaluating teacher and principal relationships can not only prevent further attrition, but also by increasing positive relationships and supportive environments, districts can attract former teachers back to the field. School
districts should also look at how resources are allocated in individual schools. While this study did not examine the specific factors that contribute to dissatisfaction with school, school conditions were included in the average. It is important to ask if both the facilities are up to code and if teachers are receiving appropriate resources to teach their students. Shakrani (2008), Ingersoll and Smith (2003), Feng (2010), Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (2005) all found patterns between teacher attrition and dissatisfaction with poor working conditions in schools and school districts. The higher the dissatisfaction with working conditions, the higher the attrition rates. If schools can improve building conditions and properly allocate resources to ensure teachers have appropriate teaching materials, enough desks, books, etc. in their classrooms, not only can districts retain teachers, they can encourage former teachers to return.

Another suggestion would be to either alter the repercussions for poor student performance on state exams or better implement reforms in the future. Those who left for accountability reasons were among the lowest to return to the profession. Perhaps districts need to look at the perceived and actual punishments for poor performance, and look at overall implementation of reforms, especially for newer teachers. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2016) suggest that the implementation of accountability reforms, while overall are positive, are harming newer teachers more than helping "...the evidence shows that implementation of accountability reforms can contribute to school performance problems; if we overlook that fact, such reforms may backfire. If the way schools are managed and organized undermines the ability of teachers to feel successful in helping students learn—the very reason many of them went into teaching in the first place—such reforms may not only fail to solve the problems they seek to address, but may also end up making things worse" (p. 49). This problem with implementation may cause additional undue stress on new teachers, and may increase the likelihood of a new
teacher leaving the profession. Policy makers and administrators need to take into account not only the perceived repercussions with accountability measures, but also how these measures are implemented. Are they being introduced in a way that is beneficial to both the schools and the teachers? Are they providing enough autonomy, providing appropriate resources, and transitioning in a way that is easy to follow while enhancing learning? If these questions are not examined, not only will we continue to lose current teachers, encouraging former teachers to return will be increasingly difficult. By alleviating some of the issues, or changing some of the issues teachers have noted, districts not only may be able to retain current new teachers, but attract teachers who left.

**Implications**

This study has reaffirmed previous research that has shown that teachers who left for personal life reasons were more likely to return to the field. The findings of this study also supports the findings that have shown that teachers who are dissatisfied with schools are less likely to return. This knowledge can be used to create better school environments for new teachers. Examining the impact of accountability measures is a relatively newer branch of literature. In terms of contributing new knowledge under this topic, this study shows that new teachers are less likely to return to the field if they left for accountability reasons. With this knowledge in hand, policy makers, school boards, and administrators can tailor regulations and implementation of new reforms to prevent further attrition and retain new teachers.

**Future Research**

While individual reasons were not examined, the information generated from this study can be used in future research to examine the individual reasons a teacher left and how those
increase or decrease the likelihood of a teacher returning to the field. The TFS itself needs to be restructured, so the various aspects of personal life reasons can be examined on their own. By putting all reasons under one heading, we cannot determine which factors, such as pregnancy, child rearing, or health (either personal or family health issues), are more important indicators of leaving or return than others. Future research could and should examine these features, along with individual reasons for salary, benefits, career, dissatisfaction with school, and accountability measures, and determine which are the strongest predictors of exit and return to the field. A mixed methodology study could also be conducted, where teachers are interviewed and asked if their reasons for leaving reflect the national trends. As the TFS and SASS are not longitudinal studies, comparison studies of the 2012-2013 SASS and TFS and the newest 2015 SASS and TFS to see if there is a change in teacher trends.
References


Intention to Return


Why I’m Returning to the Classroom After Leaving for One Year: A Reader Reflects. (2015, June 14). Retrieved from Those Who Teach: Giving Voice to Good Teachers: https://thosewhoteach.wordpress.com/2015/06/14/returning-to-teaching-after-quitting-teaching/