

Hard-to-staff Australian schools: How can we ensure that all students have access to quality teachers?

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Abstract

How can we ensure that all children have access to an effective teacher, regardless of their sector, home location, and educational trajectory? This chapter will make the case for attracting and retaining effective teachers, outline the challenges facing Australia to do so, and consider some potential policy responses.

While overall education outcomes in Australia are relatively high (OECD, 2013), we face an ongoing issue in raising the outcomes of particular groups of students. Those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those in rural and remote schools achieve at lower levels than their more privileged urban counterparts, both in terms of academic achievement (ACARA, 2014) and other outcomes such as years of education completed (Lamb et al., 2004). These poorer outcomes have long-term effects on students' life trajectories and incomes, and on Australia's economic and social strength (Barrett, 2012; Barro & Lee, 2010; Leigh & Ryan, 2008).

A body of research has demonstrated that teachers are the most important school-based resource for improving students' outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 2003; OECD, 2005a). However, attracting and retaining teachers is more problematic for rural and remote schools, and for urban schools in disadvantaged areas (DEECD, 2011; McKenzie et. al., 2014; Productivity Commission, 2012) – precisely those schools in which students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are concentrated. Growing teacher shortages in critical areas such as mathematics and sciences, especially senior school chemistry and physics, are likely to impact most heavily on these schools (Preston, 2001, cited in Martinez, 2004; Productivity Commission, 2012).

If Australia is to improve the educational outcomes of its most vulnerable students, then policymakers need to answer two key questions: How do we attract and retain teachers to hard-to-staff schools located in urban, rural and remote locations? And how can we shape policy to attract and retain quality teachers in these schools? The first of these questions is about ensuring that demand for teachers is met with an adequate supply. In addition, unless schools and systems consider issues of quality – not just drawing teachers to a school, but the quality of who comes, and who stays – we run the risk of continually reproducing inequalities between different groups of students in years to come.

This chapter will analyse current staffing policies in light of these questions. Overall, policies have tended to have a focus on the first question, striving to attract teachers, any teachers, in each subject area to hard-to-staff schools, to ensure students receive some education in that area (regardless of the quality of that experience). While there are policy initiatives that are concerned with teacher quality, their prevalence and breadth is unlikely to address adequately these critical issues.

We conclude by considering some options that research suggests should be considered by policymakers to increase the capability of hard-to-staff schools to attract and retain effective staff. These include regulatory frameworks that support a more even playing field between government and non-government sectors (Rice, 2008), strategies to attract effective principals to disadvantaged schools (Beteille et. al., 2009), and improved professional learning and leadership opportunities in these schools (Rice 2010, 2014).

Introduction

While there has been some concern about recent declines in Australian students' performance in international testing programs, it nonetheless remains high by international standards, with Australian students scoring significantly above OECD averages (Thompson, de Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013). The overall level of student achievement matters because it has a strong impact on societal outcomes that are important for all of us, chief amongst these being economic productivity and social cohesion (Dinis da Costa et al. 2014, Shomos & Forbes, 2014). The gap between our weakest and strongest students also matters, and the low achievement of some student groups has flow-on effects for both individuals and society. Low achievement is associated with a higher likelihood of dropping out of school (Rumberger, 2012), poorer physical and mental health (Berkman et. al., 2011), lower levels of social trust and less civic engagement through voting and volunteering (Dinis da Costa et. al., 2014), and weaker labour market outcomes including lower earnings (Barrett, 2012; Shomos & Forbes, 2014).

Low achievement in Australia, as elsewhere, is disproportionately concentrated among students from low-income backgrounds, those in rural and remote settings, and Indigenous groups (ACARA, 2014). These groups are predominantly located in schools that have the most difficulty attracting and retaining teaching staff: low socioeconomic status (SES) metropolitan schools, and rural and remote schools (Preston, 2003). If Australia is to increase the achievement of its weakest students and reduce the gap between those students and our high achievers, an important policy question is how to attract and retain the highest quality teachers to hard-to-staff schools,

When school systems establish policies to staff their schools, there are four main policy concerns to consider. The first is overall teacher supply – that is, are there adequate numbers of teachers to fill teaching vacancies? The second is the question of teacher quality: what are the mechanisms that will ensure that the pool of those entering into and remaining in teaching is of the highest possible quality? Third, is the question of retaining teachers, both within the teaching profession and within schools to ensure stability of relationships and programs. And finally, there is the distribution of quality: what does the distribution of teacher quality look like across schools? Are effective teachers concentrated in some schools more than others? Educational disadvantage is marked by weaker educational outcomes for identifiable groups from low SES backgrounds, rural and remote students, Indigenous students, and students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, the vast majority of whom attend government schools (SCRGSP, 2010). If Australian schools are to reduce the achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers, the question arises as to whether policymakers can ensure that a high proportion of the best teachers is attracted to, and remains in, low socioeconomic status (SES), rural and remote schools.

A note of caution:

While the terms *quality* and *effective* teachers are invoked in everyday discourse and in the media, there is much debate among researchers about how to define and identify teacher quality. Further, the degree to which teacher effectiveness is constant across the professional lifetime, or even across different locations, is not clear. While we discuss questions of teacher quality and its distribution across systems, we also acknowledge that defining, measuring and tracking teacher quality is a problematic yet to be satisfactorily resolved.

The current situation in Australia

The first policy concern is overall staffing supply. In Australia this is currently adequate in that there is a reasonable balance between the number of teaching vacancies, and the number of

teachers seeking work, although population shifts will see an increase in demand for teachers over the next 10 years (Productivity Commission, 2012; Weldon, 2015). However, this overall balance conceals areas of surplus and shortage, with primary teachers being in oversupply in most states, and staffing shortages apparent in some key secondary subject specialties (notably mathematics and science) and for teachers of students with additional needs (Productivity Commission, 2012). In addition, there are noted shortages by geography, with rural and remote schools in some areas reporting ongoing issues with identifying suitable staff (Productivity Commission, 2012; Weldon, 2015), as well as persistent problems with out-of-field teaching of subjects in secondary schools including history, geography, English, Languages Other Than English (LOTE), general science, mathematics, physics, computing/IT, chemistry and biology (Weldon, 2015). Undersupply is likely to impact most heavily on hard-to-staff schools, which already report struggling to identify appropriate staff. For example, when principals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused schools were asked about the degree of difficulty they had experienced in the past 12 months to suitably fill staff vacancies across the curriculum, 34.3% reported “major difficulty”, whereas the figure for principals of other schools was 6.7% (McKenzie et. al., 2014). Oversupply, in contrast, may impact on system quality overall: where government systems employ graduates on a first-come-first-served basis, talented graduates may decide to seek a position elsewhere (whether in a non-government school or outside of teaching altogether) rather than wait years for a position.

The second policy concern, overall teacher quality, is largely dealt with by Australian education systems through entry regulations that require relevant tertiary qualifications for professional entry to the profession, and through the provision of professional learning following entry. Teacher workforce entry requirements in Australia are relatively high by international standards. Of the teachers in the National Teaching Workforce Dataset, 84.78% had a bachelor degree and 9.32% had a postgraduate degree (Willett, Segal, & Walford, 2014), and in comparison with many overseas jurisdictions, there is minimal employment of unqualified staff as teachers in Australian schools (McKenzie et al., 2014). However, entry into teaching courses varies greatly by teacher education provider across the country; some universities and regional campuses accept students into teacher education with low ATAR scores, or no ATAR at all. By comparison with many overseas jurisdictions, there is minimal employment of unqualified staff as teachers in Australian schools (McKenzie et al., 2014), in terms of graduation from a registered teacher education program. The large number of government enquiries into teacher education over the past 20 years (Dinham, 2013) reflects ongoing concern about whether those who graduate from teaching courses are adequately equipped to teach effectively. Despite the findings and recommendations stemming from these reviews, teacher quality remains a persistent political and public issue. We also know little about whether teachers are matched to their individual schools, especially where appointment occurs at a system level and there is no opportunity for local selection of staff. From a career development perspective there is a need for further knowledge about how teachers develop across the life course, how they progress from beginning to mid-career into veteran, and the impact this has on their effectiveness over time. The development of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) national standards for teachers and school leaders has been one policy response to align teacher education and development across the career to a set of agreed standards as a lever to increase quality.

The third policy concern, retention, presents a more mixed picture: overall retention within the teaching profession is relatively high (Productivity Commission, 2012), although there are reports of significant attrition from the career in the first three to five years. However, retention within schools is a different question – schools may be able to employ sufficient staff, but if those staff leave frequently and need to be replaced, there are detrimental effects on the schools concerned

and on their students (Ronfeldt et al., 2011). While there is relatively little empirical research on levels of turnover in Australian schools, overseas research finds that teacher turnover is highest in those schools that are already more likely to have problems attracting staff – low SES, rural and remote schools (Barbieri, Rosetti, & Sestito, 2011; Falch & Strom, 2005, Scafidi et al., 2007) – and that high teacher turnover tends to have the strongest negative effects in low SES schools (Ronfeldt et. al., 2011). In Australia, principal reports of difficulties in retaining staff are greatest in disadvantaged schools, particularly in remote schools (Productivity Commission, 2012).

The fourth policy concern, distribution of teacher quality across schools, is a different matter. Overseas studies, mostly in the United States, have used teacher value-add measures in the form of relative increases in student test scores to examine teacher quality across systems and concluded that teacher quality tends to be poorest in hard-to-staff schools. However, differences in the staffing practices of the U.S. mean that it is difficult to generalise from these studies to the Australian situation. There is little research on the distribution of teacher quality across schools in Australia but the challenges schools in some sites face in identifying and keeping teachers suggest that these schools are likely to have less choice in regard to their staff, and may need to make do with a less capable or more poorly qualified teacher in order to provide requisite programs.

This lack of knowledge is partly due to the relatively slow development in Australia of comprehensive national datasets on teachers and teacher movement within the profession, although the recent establishment of the National Teaching Workforce Dataset (DET, 2014) is a step in the right direction. There is also less of a tradition within Australia of government providing researchers with access to de-identified data for analysis, a well-established practice in some overseas jurisdictions. The paucity of large-scale research on teacher populations points to the need for governments to work more closely with researchers to determine patterns of teacher retention, movement and attrition, together with the factors driving these phenomena. Individual longitudinal studies, such as the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice program of research (FIT-Choice; www.fitchoice.org) are important in providing insights into who chooses teaching and why (Richardson & Watt, 2006) and how these initial career motivations play out over time with regard to teaching style, career effort and persistence, leadership and professional learning aspirations, as well as personal wellbeing and health (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008). Without these types of studies policymakers run the risk of instituting initiatives to improve the supply of quality teachers that do little to alter patterns of recruitment, retention and attrition.

Are these concerns equally pressing for policymakers?

Education systems shape staffing policy with varying degrees of attention to these staffing concerns. These might be considered to form a hierarchy of system staffing needs, as outlined in Figure 1 below. The notion of a hierarchy of needs is, of course, taken from Maslow's (1943) famous hierarchy of human needs.

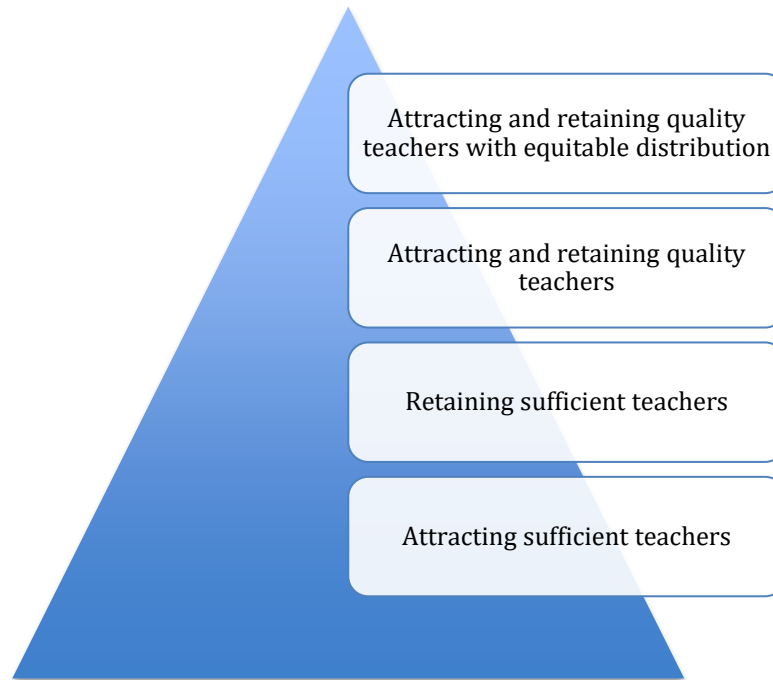


Figure 1. Hierarchy of staffing policy needs.

At the lowest level is the need for systems to attract a teacher, any teacher, to a difficult-to-staff school to ensure students receive some education (regardless of the quality of that experience). This is the level that generates the most pressing political pressure for governments (and to a lesser degree, Catholic schools): any failure on the part of an educational system to manage this requirement is obvious, and carries with it the potential for considerable political fallout in the form of media reports of classes without teachers. For this reason, education systems tend to focus on overall teacher supply numbers as the first priority. In times of teacher shortages, when this problem arises, policy responses tend to focus on advertising to increase recruitment, student scholarships and other employment incentives such as university fees debt cancellation (Lonsdale & Ingvarson, 2003; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991). Common school-level responses to supply issues include requiring teachers to teach out-of-field (i.e., teach a subject for which they do not hold qualifications) and restricting the subjects offered.

At the next level is the requirement to create in schools the type of stability in which trust and relationships can develop by fostering teacher retention at a site. However, excessive turnover at the school level, while having an impact on student education and staff morale (Ronfeldt et al., 2011) creates less of a political imperative, and subsequently may receive less attention in policy formation. Finally, if systems focus too much policy energy on these first two needs, quality and equity issues may be neglected because there is no attempt to focus on the top levels of teacher quality and its distribution across the system. If this happens, systems will fail to address the poorer student attainment evident in many hard-to-staff schools. Indeed, staffing policies may even serve to reinforce inequities if systems focus only attracting and retaining teachers (regardless of quality) in hard-to-staff schools. To what extent, then, do the staffing policies of Australian school systems address each of these levels of need: teacher attraction, teacher retention, teacher quality and equity of distribution?

Responding to policy concerns

School systems across Australia have responded to these staffing concerns in diverse ways. This discussion will outline current policy levers designed to address each of these concerns across Australia. We focus on government education systems, as it is the responsibility of state governments to provide education access for all students in all contexts who seek to enrol, and as a consequence, these systems experience the most demanding and complex staffing challenges.

All but one of the government education systems (the Australian Capital Territory) use a range of incentives to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools, and some also have specifically designed incentives to retain them. Mostly, these incentive schemes focus on remote and rural schools, but some also provide teachers with inducements to take up or remain in a position in hard-to-staff metropolitan schools in low SES suburbs (for example, Western Australia).

Transfer benefits are the most widely used form of incentive, and generally allow for transfer to a preferred location after a set period of service in a less desirable school setting. New South Wales., South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australian use a weighted system, where service in different types of schools is allocated different weights (with more weight for a stipulated period of service in the least-favoured settings), and weights count towards allocation of subsequent appointments. Weighted systems mean that teachers in hard-to-staff schools greatly increase their chances of gaining an appointment in a highly favoured setting after a set period of service. Some systems have also structured their weights systems to encourage teachers to remain in a rural or remote school, giving greater weight to lengthier periods of service (e.g., Queensland).

Housing benefits are common in states with a large number of very remote schools (Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, NSW and the Northern Territory). Some systems provide housing for teachers in remote locations, while in others rent subsidies of up to 100 per cent are provided. Most of these states also cover teachers' relocation expenses should they accept a position in a remote school, although payment may depend on completion of a minimum period of service. The Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia also pay for the travel costs of teachers and their families back to a major centre between one and three times per year for those placed in remote schools.

Additional leave is provided as an incentive for teachers in remote settings (Queensland, South Australia, NSW, the Northern Territory and Western Australia); this is usually after several years in a remote school, to encourage teachers to continue in a position. Some additional leave benefits are minor and require no minimum period of service; they are in place to allow teachers to travel back to major centres for business or medical reasons. More generous leave is often provided as additional paid study leave of one term after a minimum period of service, in recognition of the difficulty teachers in these settings face in accessing professional development opportunities.

Cash incentives are very commonly used to encourage teachers to accept remote positions and to offset the additional costs of living there. In some states, cash incentives are structured to rise with years of continuous service, to encourage retention of teachers at the school. Other benefits may include induction programs and support networks, and immediate permanency in the teaching service. Scholarship schemes aimed at trainee teachers and linked to appointments in hard-to-staff schools are another mechanism used by some education systems to fill vacancies in these schools, and usually involve staggered payments during training, immediate permanency in the teaching service, and some additional payments in the first few years of service. Queensland's

Step into Teaching and New South Wales' *Teach Rural* scholarships are good examples. Such scholarships are also often targeted to specific subjects with shortages, such as mathematics and science.

Two state government education departments—Queensland and Tasmania—also have an element of compulsion in staffing policy: teachers with permanency agree to teach across the state, and Tasmanian teachers are required to complete some service in a non-urban school. While obviously personal circumstances are taken into account by staffing personnel, teachers seeking employment with either body know that they will be required to accept a posting in a hard-to-staff school at some point in their career; required, as opposed to requested, transfers into these schools can be carried out in both states.

In addition, a number of systems have recruitment mechanisms aimed at increasing the quality of those drawn into the teaching profession. Victoria, the ACT, Western Australia and the Northern Territory are partners in the *Teach for Australia* program, which recruits high-achieving graduates to work in disadvantaged settings. NSW runs a cadetship program that seeks to attract high achievers through a paid placement during teacher training and guaranteed permanency on completion. Scholarships for high-achieving trainee teachers (e.g., Queensland's *Step into Teaching*), are used by a number of states, offering financial support while training and sometimes bonuses on taking up a teaching position. Finally, some systems run “taster” programs that offer trainee teacher candidates or teachers in metropolitan settings the chance to have a teacher exchange year, or teaching practicum in a rural or remote location, in the hope that they will enjoy the experience and elect to transfer.

How do staffing policies measure up?

The policies summarised above tend to place the strongest emphasis on attracting teachers into a system and/or specific location. Incentives such as immediate permanency may work to draw teachers towards schools, but are likely to have little influence in holding them there. Policy incentives such as permanency are designed to attract new graduates, who may have the fewest professional resources to cope with the challenges they are likely to face in such settings. Depending on the design, weighted transfer systems may provide some capacity to retain teachers at a site if bonus weightings are applied to remaining in a school beyond a given minimum period.

Introducing a compulsion clause to teacher contracts in theory resolves some attraction issues. However, in practice the fact that teachers who have completed rural or remote service are usually excused from a period of further service may provide an incentive for young beginning teachers to get remote teaching “out of the way” quickly after graduation before family considerations (especially the education of their own children) complicate career decisions. Introducing compulsion is also problematic in that government schools do not operate in a vacuum. The government teachers best placed in the teaching job market—well-qualified, highly effective staff who have taught for some years—may be tempted to seek employment in non-government schools if they fear a forced transfer to an undesirable site.

Cash incentives may work to both attract and retain teachers, and staggering benefits to increase with each year of continuous service is likely to assist retention, although these incentives do not address issues of teacher quality. However, the higher costs associated with goods and services, particularly in the most remote locations, may erode the incentive provided by salary bonuses. Housing benefits may both attract and retain, given that they provide teachers with savings on rent or mortgage costs, although again they are unlikely to differentiate in appeal to higher or

lower quality teachers. Additional leave for professional development or for business or medical reasons may or may not act as incentives, but are likely to be largely compensatory for fewer professional development opportunities and business facilities in more remote settings. Induction programs, mentoring and support networks for new staff are also used in some states and territories. While probably not increasing attraction to these sites, evidence from the U.S. indicates that they increase in-school teacher retention, and also reduce attrition from the teaching workforce (Ingersoll & Strong, 2012). For this reason, they should form an essential element of staffing policies across Australia, substantial in nature and appropriately funded. Benefits such as housing, relocation costs, and additional leave and salary for staff in remote settings are clearly compensatory, and would seem to be essential if suitably qualified people are to be attracted to more remote areas of the country.

Programs aimed at attracting higher quality candidates into the profession to teach in challenging settings (such as *Teach for Australia*) have some capacity to shape quality distribution across the system. This will depend on those entering the profession remaining in teaching and in challenging schools for long enough to sustain an impact. Some researchers have found that teacher retention (both in hard-to-staff schools and in teaching) in overseas equivalents such as *Teach for America* has not been strong (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005), but the Australian initiatives are relatively new and distinct from overseas versions, so the degree of long-term retention in hard-to-staff Australian schools is not yet fully known.

Overall, it is clear that the imperative to provide hard-to-staff schools with qualified staff members tends to dominate current policies, with less attention paid to teacher retention in these schools, and the least focus on the distribution of teacher quality. The need to improve student learning by drawing highly effective teachers to hard-to-staff settings does not feature strongly. In this respect, the research suggests some useful policy directions that may begin to tackle issues of distribution of staff quality, helping redress the educational disadvantages of students in hard-to-staff schools. To do this, the policy initiatives that might attract and hold quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools need to be considered.

What does the research suggest may work?

Research into the school preferences of more and less effective teachers points to some possible policy responses systems might consider. There is some evidence that more effective teachers express a stronger interest in taking on roles of leadership and responsibility within schools, and are more likely than less effective teachers to transfer schools to take up such positions (Rice, 2010, 2014). Differentiated staff funding models that provide for additional staff leadership roles in rural, remote and disadvantaged urban schools may be one potential policy response with which to shape the distribution of teacher quality in the direction of hard-to-staff schools. Provided these positions are regarded as genuine by teachers, giving them real power and transferable skills, this may be one important means of attracting and retaining effective teachers in these schools. Another study, which looked at different types of beginning teachers, found one group that was high on altruistic motivations to be a teacher, planned to be highly effortful, undertake professional development, and were highly satisfied with their choice of teaching. This profile of beginning teacher was also characterised by a desire to leave teaching within 5 years, and aspiring to leadership positions (Watt & Richardson, 2008). The authors concluded that if these people's ambition to seek leadership roles could be realised, it may be possible for their plans to leave teaching within 5 years to be postponed or abandoned.

Research suggests that more effective teachers place a high priority on opportunities for formal

and informal professional learning (Rice, 2010, 2014). While a number of systems currently offer additional leave for professional development to teachers in remote schools, often there are lengthy qualifying periods before becoming eligible (for example, four years of continuous service in a remote school in the Northern Territory), meaning that few teachers serving in these schools eventually enjoy the benefits. Shorter qualifying periods may be necessary if the best teachers are to be drawn to, and kept at, these sites.

School-level measures to increase teachers' voice in determining the professional development they can access are important: principals need to ensure they consult with staff rather than announce the school's professional development program for the year as a *fait accompli*. So, too, are system-wide measures to consult with teachers about their professional development requirements, and better tailor to teachers' needs those courses offered at a system level. Providing professional development that is high quality, relevant, sustained, intensive, and engages with teachers' current practices and knowledge, is important for the overall growth of the teaching profession, but is also vital to reducing staffing inequities. System policies to foster collaboration in professional learning at the local level through professional learning teams and local school networks are another means of fostering growth and building teacher retention.

Access to professional learning opportunities was in the past seen as a major disincentive for teachers to take up a position in a rural or remote setting as such learning was generally face-to-face (e.g., HREOC, 2000). Fortunately, the movement of both university education providers and departments of education into the online space has a real capacity to address this issue. To support attraction to and retention within less-favoured schools, systems may wish to consider providing targeted financial sponsorship for staff in these schools to access formal learning options (for example, to obtain a Masters degree). Targeted financial support to allow groups of staff in hard-to-staff schools to enrol in courses is another policy option to improve teacher capacity and retention.

School leadership is also an important consideration in improving the staffing and outcomes of hard-to-staff schools. Beteille et al. (2009) note that,

“More effective principals 1) are able to retain higher quality teachers and remove less effective teachers, 2) are able to attract and retain higher quality teachers to fill vacancies and 3) have teachers that improve at a greater pace than those in schools with less effective leadership” (p. iii)

This aligns with the work of Rice (2014), who found more effective teachers were more likely to cite lack of support from the school's principal as a reason to leave a school. Clearly, policies to attract and retain effective teachers in hard-to-staff schools will be most effective when combined with policies designed to attract, retain and develop quality school leaders in these settings. Principals, like teachers, need to be offered the types of professional environments, career paths and skill development opportunities that allow them to grow professionally. Principals also need to be supported in offering their staff a range of structured options for professional learning and career development.

Are there things to avoid?

In addition to policy actions that support the attraction and retention of effective teachers to less favoured settings, are there policy actions that may potentially worsen the situation, or be costly

but ineffectual? First, Rice's (2014) research found that less effective teachers gave greater importance to increased class-free time as a way to keep them in a school. In contrast, more effective teachers appeared to be positive about the time they spent with students. For this reason, increasing staff allocations to reduce teacher time in front of classes in less-favoured sites is a policy option that should be approached cautiously, as it might attract and retain those who are less capable in the classroom. A better form of differential treatment could be to provide higher levels of support staff to these schools, for example, in the form of teachers' aides who can undertake yard duty or reduce some of the administrative load that teachers shoulder. This would acknowledge the additional stressors placed on many teachers in more challenging settings, without acting as a force to attract and retain the least effective. By freeing up teachers to focus on time with their students, such an initiative may also act to attract and retain more effective teachers in these settings.

Second, there is now sound evidence that professional conditions within schools influence teachers' decisions to move towards or away from a school (Ingersoll, 2007). The capacity to exercise professional autonomy and judgement are important in attracting and holding teachers within a school, and this capacity appears to be particularly important for more effective teachers (Rice, 2010, 2014). In the U.S. context the decision of minority teachers to leave one school for another, or to leave teaching altogether was heavily influenced by the level of collective decision-making in the school and the degree of individual instructional classroom autonomy (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Initiatives that reduce teacher autonomy and voice could be detrimental. Achinstein, Ogawa and Spiegelman in the United States (2004) found that the use of prescriptive curricula allowing little room for teacher judgement occurred much more frequently in hard-to-staff Californian schools, where funding benefits were used to push "teacher-proof" programs. A desperate need for resources in these circumstances may mean that the schools have little option but to employ the programs. While some accountability is essential, the more governments and systems dictate when, how, and what teachers teach, the more likely they are to drive from schools those teachers most essential to students' success. Further, if restrictions are applied differentially to groups of schools according to student achievement level, then effective teachers may follow their professional freedom, to the detriment of the students who need them most.

We need to take seriously the complex and multidimensional nature of teacher motivation. A robust body of research is increasingly helping us understand that people who choose teaching as a career do so because they perceive themselves to have the ability to be a teacher. They want a career that allows them to work with people, especially children and adolescents, and they want to make a difference by contributing to a better future in a more equitable society. They are aware at the point of choosing the career that the demands are high and that the rewards of salary and prestige are modest. Empirical research over the last decade or so on initial teacher motivation as well as motivation among practising teachers has demonstrated that teacher motivations matter because they impact professional engagement, relational expectations, instructional practices, and student engagement and learning (Richardson & Watt, 2014). If teacher motivations that involve establishing positive relationships with students to improve their life chances are not able to be realised in particular school contexts, then it is likely that teachers will become dissatisfied with their work. If at the classroom level teachers are faced with difficult behaviours, managing constant interruptions, large classes, rule violations, failure to achieve goals, and sometimes verbal or even physical assaults (Kyriacou, 2001), then it is little wonder that their motivations are challenged and work satisfaction undermined, potentially leading to leaving the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2001; OECD, 2005b).

In public debates on school staffing additional pay for teachers in hard-to-staff schools resurfaces with regularity as a blunt policy instrument. But the capacity of additional pay to increase the attraction and retention of quality teachers in hard-to-staff sites is far from proven. While there is some evidence that increasing teacher pay generally may work to attract and retain more highly-qualified teachers in the teaching profession (Figlio, 1997), Haycock and Hanushek (2010) summarised that in the U.S., “some districts have found that even large financial incentives, in the absence of better working conditions, fail to attract and retain strong teachers in high-need schools.” (p. 51).

Finally, at a broader level, there is the issue of the stratification of schools. Australian school funding policies over the last twenty years have encouraged the establishment of significant numbers of non-government schools, which operate within different regulatory frameworks to government schools, and which in many instances have a much greater capacity to select which students they will enrol. As a result, the Australian school landscape has witnessed the migration of middle-class student enrolments away from government schools and the consequent residualisation of the government education sector (Ryan & Watson, 2004; Watson & Ryan, 2010). Increasing stratification narrows the student mix in schools, and some research shows this is reflected in Australian teachers’ preferences to work in independent, and to a lesser degree, Catholic schools, as opposed to government schools (Rice, 2008). Skewing of teacher preferences for schools is likely to exacerbate the staffing challenges faced by hard-to-staff schools, which predominantly sit within the government sector; these schools are likely to be forced to choose from an increasingly smaller pool of applicants for positions. One policy response could be to shape regulatory frameworks to even the playing field between government and non-government schools by requiring all schools receiving government funding to enrol a certain percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with poor achievement or behaviour.

There may be other actions that will also support the attraction and retention of effective staff in hard-to-staff schools. Teese and Lamb (2007) have noted that teacher training courses do not always cater for the variety of students teachers are required to teach, observing that, “The institutions responsible for the training of teachers do not systematically evaluate their programs from the perspective of the effectiveness of graduates in the widely varying contexts in which they teach, still less their relative effectiveness for different sub-groups of pupils at or across different sites” (p. 298). A useful strategy might be to support teacher candidates specifically to understand and work effectively in disadvantaged settings. The National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools program (founded by the University of Queensland and now in four other universities) is a good step forward in this regard.

In summary, research evidence provides some indications as to how systems might best attract and retain quality teachers in hard-to-staff settings. Current policies have the strongest focus on attracting teachers to hard-to-staff schools, with a lesser emphasis on retaining them; but, overall, policies may be inadvertently reinforcing traditional staffing choices in which new teachers commence their careers in a remote, rural or urban disadvantaged school, only to move towards more affluent suburban schools as they become more experienced.

We propose that if systems are to support hard-to-staff schools to attract and retain highly effective teachers, they need to build approaches to recruitment, retention and career development which have mutually reinforcing effects, in particular by:

- identifying those teacher candidates who have the motivation and capability to have a high impact working with disadvantaged students, and providing them with the educational experiences that allow them to flourish in challenging schools;
- building structures for professional learning and mutual support in hard-to-staff settings;
- providing additional opportunities for effective teachers to access leadership roles and sustain career development;
- ensuring that professional environments in hard-to-staff schools support teacher autonomy and voice;
- providing specific support, resources and incentives for hard-to-staff schools to work together through partnerships and network structures; and
- regulating and financing schools in all sectors in ways that more adequately reflect the relative challenge of the student populations they serve, to work against further stratification of schooling.

Ensuring that students in hard-to-staff settings have the same access to experienced and highly effective teachers as their peers in other schools is an ongoing challenge for Australian policymakers. However, it is a challenge that must be met. Consistently high quality staffing provides strong benefits for the students most dependent upon school for positive educational and life outcomes, and provides flow-on benefits for us all.

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