

Teacher Labor Markets in Metro Atlanta During the COVID-19 Pandemic

We analyze the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher labor market decisions in two large school districts in metro Atlanta: Gwinnett County Public Schools and DeKalb County School District. After schools were forced to close in spring 2020, teachers in both districts were more likely to continue teaching the following fall than in pre-pandemic years. Correspondingly, in fall 2020, the proportion of newly hired teachers in each district was less than in prior years. As the general labor market improved, retention rates returned to pre-pandemic levels.

What did we learn?

Attrition in both districts initially decreased after the onset of the pandemic. Compared to the pre-pandemic trend, attrition in Gwinnett remains lower while DeKalb is slightly higher. We found similar patterns for teachers in “hard-to-staff” subjects. In both districts, a gradual upward trend over time in the departure of teachers with 30 or more years of experience remained.

The proportion of new hires in both districts initially dropped soon after the start of the pandemic. The proportion of new teachers, especially special education teachers, in Gwinnett has since increased relative to the pre-pandemic period. In DeKalb, the proportion of new teachers is well below pre-pandemic levels, though changes have not impacted average student-teacher ratios.

What are the policy implications?

While retention rates appear to be returning to pre-pandemic levels, challenges to recruiting and retaining teachers remain, particularly in “high-need” areas like math, science, and special education. Careful analysis of pandemic-era financial incentives, such as those used by the two districts in this study, are warranted to determine if these policies could help address teacher shortages in specific subject areas moving forward.

Researchers

Sarah S. Barry
Tim R. Sass

Published

January 2023
<https://doi.org/10.57709/rf76-1543>

What questions did we answer?

1. How did teacher retention change during the pandemic?
2. How did the pandemic affect trends in teacher hiring?
3. Did the pandemic exacerbate staffing challenges in traditionally “hard-to-staff” areas, like science, math, special education, foreign languages, and ESL?

What data did we use?

We used administrative data from Gwinnett and DeKalb, covering SY 2016-17 through fall of SY 2021-22. The data include information on teacher employment status as well as information on teacher experience, certification, subject area taught, school assignment, and teacher demographic characteristics.

Why is this issue important?

The COVID-19 pandemic affected teachers in myriad, unprecedented ways. Changes in instructional mode, coupled with general health and economic concerns brought on by the pandemic, negatively impacted teachers and led to increases in levels of stress and burnout. This had led many to wonder if the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing challenges to teacher retention and teacher shortages in specific subject areas.

What will we study next?

This study is part of our ongoing work to understand the effects of the pandemic on students and teachers in metro-Atlanta and to analyze the impacts of various recovery strategies. We hope to extend this work to consider how policy interventions, such as teacher bonuses, have affected teacher labor markets throughout the metro area.

Want to learn more?

A report is available at gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications

The **Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education (MAPLE)** is a component of the **Georgia Policy Labs (GPL)**, a research collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies committed to leveraging the power of data to drive policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

Suggested citation

Barry, S. S. & Sass, T. R. (2023). *Teacher Labor Markets in Metro Atlanta During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Georgia Policy Labs.