

The 2005 QSIC Study on Teacher Recruitment and Salaries

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This paper is intended to provide a brief overview/introduction to the final report of a study commissioned by the Quality Schools Interim Committee (QSIC) in 2005. As part of its examination of the educational needs and costs related to the basic system of public education in Montana, QSIC requested proposals from within the Montana University System for an economic analysis of teacher recruitment in relation to compensation. Dr. Christiana Stoddard and Dr. Douglas Young, economics professors at Montana State University-Bozeman, were selected to conduct the study. Their final report is titled [Recruitment, Retention, and Salaries of Teachers and Other School Personnel in Montana](#). The report focused largely on comparisons of Montana with other states and on differences within Montana.

The report emphasizes the important role that non-salary factors play in recruitment and retention difficulties. Stoddard and Young looked closely at the impact that rates of enrollment growth (or decline) can have. States with rapidly expanding enrollment generally report having more difficulty hiring, pay more, and keep more of their teacher preparation program graduates in state. These high-growth states also attract candidates from other states. The inverse is true for states with declining enrollment, they tend to have less hiring difficulty, lower pay, and export more new teachers.

In 2005, Montana had experienced almost a decade of steady enrollment decreases, and confirming the above demand and supply dynamic, Stoddard and Young found that difficulties with recruitment and retention in Montana were at or below national averages, and that average teacher salaries in Montana were declining in relation to national averages.¹

The other non-salary factor Stoddard and Young confirmed to be a powerful driver of recruitment and retention problems was district isolation. When examining data within Montana, the study found that smaller and more isolated² districts had lower starting salaries, higher rates of turnover, more difficulty hiring, and higher rates of misassigned teachers. The researchers acknowledged a correlation between the variables isolation and salary, but through regression analysis found that they operate independently as well, meaning that low salary districts have more recruitment and retention difficulties when controlling for isolation, and isolated districts have greater difficulties when controlling for salary.

In their conclusion, Stoddard and Young acknowledge some limitations in the report due to incomplete and inconsistent data on compensation and hiring. While the report does not include specific policy recommendations, it does suggest that concentrating pay increases in isolated and low-paying districts would likely do more to improve recruitment and retention problems than increasing salaries statewide.

¹ The QSIC report shows the ratio of Montana average teacher salaries to US average teacher salaries as .88 in 1990, .76 in 1999, and .78 in 2005. Using the same data source used in the report (US ED [Digest of Education Statistics](#)) for 2014, this ratio has climbed to .88. The [NEA's 2015 Rankings & Estimates](#) report shows Montana ranked 28th in [average](#) teacher salaries; the 2005 NEA report ranked Montana 45th. The QSIC report notes that [starting](#) teacher salaries in Montana ranked lowest among the states in 2004; [NEA data](#) from 2013 show Montana to still have the lowest starting teacher salaries.

² This study used population density as a measure of district isolation. Montana policymakers might consider the question of just what is the best measure of isolation in Montana.