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# Why Do So Many Teachers Quit Their Jobs? Because They Hate Their Bosses

By John Tierney

*We thought they were fleeing poor training or poor salaries, but it looks like principals are the problem.*



Jim Young/Reuters

What's the reason so many new teachers quit the profession or move to a different school? The heavy workload? Low salary? A paucity of classroom resources? An absence of autonomy? The "always-on," continually demanding nature of the work? None of the above. The main reason is their principals.

To find out what factors influence novice teachers' decisions to leave the teaching profession, Peter Youngs, associate professor of educational policy at Michigan State University and Ben Pogodzinski of Wayne State University, working with two other colleagues at Michigan State, surveyed 184 beginning

teachers of grades one through eight in eleven large school districts in Michigan and Indiana. [Their study](#) was recently published in *Elementary School Journal*.

The researchers found that the most important factor influencing commitment was the beginning teacher's perception of how well the school principal worked with the teaching staff as a whole. This was a stronger factor than the adequacy of resources, the extent of a teacher's administrative duties, the manageability of his or her workload, or the frequency of professional-development opportunities.

These findings are especially significant because high turnover rate among new teachers is a big problem. Roughly a third of teachers in their first two years either change schools or quit teaching altogether. This ends up being costly to school districts -- forcing them to recruit, hire, and train new teachers. And spending all that time getting newcomers up to speed also limits schools' ability to implement new reforms. This is especially problematic in low-income urban schools that have difficulties attracting and holding onto teachers in the first place.

The new research affirms much of what earlier studies have found. For example, an earlier (2003) [multiyear study](#) of 50 teachers in Massachusetts found that teachers who left the profession often "described principals who were arbitrary, abusive, or neglectful." Other studies also have established a link between administrative climate and teacher retention.

None of this should be too surprising. Business researchers have long known that an employee's relationship with a boss is a leading factor in job retention. A 2007 Florida State [study](#), for instance, surveyed more than 700 people in a wide range of professions and found that people who clashed with their supervisors "experienced more exhaustion, job tension, nervousness, depressed mood and mistrust."

In the case of the novice teachers, poor relations with principals come through in disagreements over school or district policies, evaluations of teacher performance, and expectations that teacher work beyond their contractual requirements. The atmosphere of distrust is often magnified as the teachers discuss their complaints with one another. And it's not just novice teachers whose work lives are affected by the school's head. My own experience in an independent school confirmed the overwhelming importance of the principal's managerial style and its effect on teachers' job satisfaction.

According to Youngs, one obvious upshot of this research is that training programs for principals in university or professional-development programs need to emphasize interpersonal skills as well as leadership skills. "The focus," [he said](#), "would be on how principals could increase their knowledge of setting a healthy, productive school climate and understanding ways that their actions and leadership can impact new teachers' attitudes and outcomes."

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