

Critical Issues Analysis

Teacher Reactions to St. Louis School Transfer Policy: Executive Summary

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What were the teachers' reactions to the school transfer program in St. Louis? Did teachers in different settings react differently to the policy-driven program? Did teachers' attitudes toward the policy itself make a difference in their workplace attitudes? In short, the answer to both questions is - yes.

In June, 2013, the Missouri Supreme Court upheld a state law enabling students in unaccredited school districts to transfer to other schools in the same or neighboring districts. This policy and its implementation quickly became highly controversial. The mass media paid much attention to the effect of the program on students and families but less is known about the teachers' reactions, as employees, in both schools that lost accreditation and that received transfer students.

A survey of 336 teachers in one of the unaccredited districts whose students were able to transfer to an out-of-district school ("sending schools") and schools that received transfer students ("receiving schools") reveal interesting results concerning both their attitude toward the policy and their workplace attitudes after the transfer program went into effect. (See below for more information about how the study was conducted.)

- As a group, the teachers showed only moderate support for the school transfer policy (mean score of 3.27 on a 6-point scale). However, the teachers working in schools in the "sending" district reported statistically significant lower mean levels of support toward the school transfer policy than teachers in "receiving" districts (2.63 vs. 3.5, respectively, on a 6-point scale).
- Teachers in "sending" schools reported significantly lower levels of intent to remain with their school district than teachers in "receiving" schools (3.22 vs. 3.60, on a 5-point scale).
- Teachers in both "sending" and "receiving" districts reported relatively high levels of employee engagement (a sense of connection to their work activities) (5.91 on a 7-point scale) and occupational commitment (attachment to their occupation) (5.37 on a 7-point scale). There were no significant differences teachers in sending and receiving districts in these workplace attitudes.

Further analysis indicates that teacher support for the transfer policy was related to workplace attitudes.

- Teachers who were more supportive of the transfer policy reported higher levels of work engagement and higher levels of intent to remain on the job in their district.

The type of school district in which the teacher worked was also related to teacher attitudes and reported behavior on the job.

- Teachers in “sending” schools reported higher levels of work engagement than teachers working in “receiving” schools.
- Teachers in “sending” schools reported higher levels of engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors than teachers in “receiving” schools. They were more likely to report working cooperatively with other teachers such as helping new teachers and sharing information with coworkers.

Implications of Findings

The transfer policy resulted in loss of students and resources for schools in the unaccredited district. Rather than finding lower workplace morale in this district, the results of this study show higher work engagement and cooperative relations among teachers. Despite the threats posed by loss of resources and students, or perhaps because of these threats, the results suggest the teachers were trying to work together to enhance both employee job performance and the performance of the schools.

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How the data were collected

To examine teachers’ workplace reactions to the school transfer policy, we surveyed teachers at both sending and receiving schools in October, 2013. We contacted superintendents of the two districts that had lost their accreditation and one agreed to have its schools participate in the study. We contacted ten of the school districts who were eligible to receive students. Six agreed to participate. The survey was administered through Qualtrics. The researchers created a cover email explaining the purpose of the study and requesting teacher participation. The email also contained a link to the survey. Due to the sensitive nature of the data desired, in most cases, the districts agreed to participate only if they distributed this email to its teachers rather than provide teacher emails directly to the researchers. Because of this restriction, we were not able to send out additional reminders to recipients to respond to the survey. We received 339 responses, 91 from the sending district, 245 from receiving districts, and 3 who declined to indicate whether they taught in a “sending” or “receiving” school. In addition, all but two of the districts (one which sent students and one which received students) did not report the number of teachers who received the survey, precluding calculation of a response rate. For the two districts that did report, the response rate was 19.7% for the sending district and 10.7% for the receiving district. Data were analyzed using ANOVA and multiple regression with clustered standard errors.