

THE IMPACT OF HOUSING ON TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN RURAL AREAS: A CASE STUDY

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Are the SECU apartment complexes helping to attract and retain teachers?

What challenges do counties face in trying to implement a similar program?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2006, the State Employees' Credit Union (SECU) Foundation has partnered with local nonprofits and school districts to construct four apartment complexes in Hertford, Dare, and Hoke Counties. These two-bedroom units equipped with numerous amenities are leased almost exclusively to teachers for below market-rate prices. In the absence of teacher pay raises, many rural LEAs continue to face difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers. This paper examines the impact of the SECU teacher housing complexes and the potential viability of expanding this type of development statewide. While we ultimately find that recruiting and retaining teachers requires a myriad of strategies, we believe that teacher housing is an asset to the community and should be recognized as a valuable recruitment tool.

BACKGROUND

The concept of communal teacher housing developed during the late 1800s. Prior to that, "boarding around" was a common practice for teachers in rural communities.¹ Housing for single teachers relocating from cities did not exist, so families shared the responsibility of providing food and lodging for their children's teachers. Dissatisfaction with that arrangement eventually led to the construction of "teacherages" across the nation. The first teacherage was built in 1894 in Hall County Nebraska with the intention of providing a safe, convenient, and comfortable environment for teachers to live and grow professionally.² The teacherage offered more privacy for teachers, but it also served as a local hub for parents and students. The idea spread quickly, and by 1922 there were nearly 3,000 teacherages across the United States.³

Although teacherages are no longer common, the model inspired the SECU Foundation to develop similar housing projects in areas of North Carolina that struggle with retaining teachers. Prior to the program's inception, the Foundation had been searching for a project related to education. Through discussions, they realized that several areas lacked affordable and/or quality housing for young teachers. The lack of housing forced teachers to commute long distances or find work in a different district. High turnover rates in Hertford County inspired community leaders to designate Ahoskie as the first site for an apartment complex.⁴

Hertford Pointe opened its doors to teachers in 2007. Prior to its construction, lack of unsubsidized housing made it difficult for teachers to find a place to live within the county.⁵ Hertford County Schools and Partners for Hertford Schools worked with the SECU Foundation to develop the 24-unit complex. The apartments are located on 10 acres of land in proximity to the local high school and largest elementary school in the county.⁶ Teachers

¹ Spencer J. Maxcy, "The Teacherage in American Rural Education." *The Journal of General Education* Vol. 30, No. 4 (WINTER 1979): 267-274. |

² *Ibid.* | ³ *Ibid.* | ⁴ *Conversations with Jim Barber, Mark Twisdale, James Eure, and David King, SECU Foundation.* | ⁵ *Ibid.* | ⁶ *Ibid.*



currently pay \$625 a month to rent a two-bedroom two-bathroom apartment, which may be shared with a spouse or roommate. The complex has rented at capacity every year since it opened.⁷

In 2008, SECU, Dare County Schools, and the Dare Education Foundation opened a similar teacher housing complex in Kill Devil Hills to address the lack of affordable housing in the area. Market rate rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Dare County is \$924 a month⁸, but teachers living at Run Hill Ridge in Kill Devil Hills pay only \$750. Dare's second apartment complex, which began housing teachers in 2011, is located on Hatteras Island. This complex not only addresses the need for affordable housing, but also minimizes the commute for teachers who were previously forced to live off the island. The fourth teacher housing complex opened June 2013 in Hoke County.⁹ Like Hertford Pointe, these three complexes have garnered extensive interest from the teaching community.

The SECU Foundation collaborates with local school boards and 501c3 organizations to construct housing. In the past, school systems have donated surplus land for development, and city and county governments have also worked closely with the foundation to ensure that the infrastructure is in place. SECU finances construction with an interest-free loan, which the sponsoring 501c3 organization repays over the course of fifteen years. After paying off the loan, the nonprofits will own the apartment complexes and may use rental income to supplement education in the county. For this reason, the SECU Foundation only works with nonprofits devoted solely to education with the hope that the rental profits will eventually become a source of supplemental education income for the district.¹⁰

CHALLENGES RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS

The face of education has changed tremendously over the past twenty years. Nearly half of the teacher work force are Baby Boomers approaching retirement. When many of them began teaching, the average teacher age was 36. By 2008, the average teacher was 42 years old.¹¹ The shift toward retirement has also brought about changes in experience. Research shows that in 1988 the typical teacher had about 15 years of experience, but by 2008 the modal response was only one or two years.¹² This trend is evident in North Carolina as well.¹³ Districts are replacing retirees with inexperienced

teachers. This may be problematic since beginning teachers have the highest rate of attrition in the profession; nearly 50 percent of new teachers leave within the first five years.¹⁴ Novice teachers need extensive support and mentorship, and many recent college graduates prefer to teach close to home.¹⁵

Low-income and minority students are more likely to be impacted by teacher turnover, and taught by novice teachers. More than two-thirds of North Carolina's 115 LEAs are considered rural.¹⁶ These remote areas of the state also contain the majority of the state's "hard-to-staff" schools. Hard-to-staff schools report that at least half of the student population is below grade level in reading and math, and eligible for free or reduced price lunch. These schools typically have an annual turnover rate of 15 percent or higher.¹⁷ During the 2012-2013 school year, more than half of schools in the state reported having at least 40 percent of their student populations made up of low-income students. Many of the schools that report having the largest percentages of low-income students are located in rural areas.¹⁸ Frequent mobility among teachers in these areas impacts student achievement in numerous ways. Resigning teachers are frequently replaced with novice teachers who, according to research, are disproportionately assigned to teach low income and minority students.¹⁹ Studies indicate that the inexperience and high attrition among novice teachers may only serve to further exacerbate the achievement gap for underserved populations.²⁰

Some states use monetary incentives to retain teachers in hard-to-staff areas, but teacher pay in North Carolina is based primarily on years of experience. The starting salary for first year teachers is \$30,800. According to the 2013-2014 Teacher Salary Schedule, it would take a teacher 16 years to make \$40,000.²¹ However, recession-induced salary freezes have prevented North Carolina's teachers from advancing through the salary schedule for the past 6 years. North Carolina ranks 46th in the nation for average teacher salary, with educators earning 82 percent of the national average.²² Over the past ten years, teacher salaries in this state have declined by 15.7 percent, after adjusting for inflation.²³ Many districts choose to supplement teacher salaries annually, but supplements vary from \$147 to \$6,031 depending on the LEA. Supplements are completely optional, and in 2010-2011, nine LEAs did not provide teachers with any additional income.²⁴ The counties that border Georgia have the additional burden of competing with higher pay across state lines, where the average teacher salary is \$6,000 more than North Carolina.²⁵

⁷ Conversation with James Eure, SECU Hertford Branch. | ⁸ US Department of Housing and Urban Development, <http://www.huduser.org/portals/datasets/fmr.html> | ⁹ Marc Rapport, "SECU Foundation-Backed Teacher Housing Project Complete." Credit Union Times, June 12 2013. | ¹⁰ Conversation with Mark Twisdale, Executive Director SECU Foundation. |

¹¹ National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "Who Will Teach? Experience Matters." (2010) | ¹² Ibid. | ¹³ National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, <http://nctaf.org>. See Appendix A. | ¹⁴ Ibid. | ¹⁵ Donald Boyd et al, "The Draw of Home: How Teachers' Preferences for Proximity Disadvantage Urban Schools." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2005): 113-132 | ¹⁶ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Cedars report, Created 2013 | ¹⁷ "Recruiting Teachers for Hard to Staff Schools: Solutions for North Carolina and the Nation" Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2001) | ¹⁸ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Title I Report 2012-2013 | ¹⁹ Charles Clotfelter et al, "Who Teaches Whom?" Economics of Education Review 24, no. 4 (2005): 377-392 | ²⁰ Ibid. | ²¹ North Carolina's FY14 Budget, page 322. | ²² National Education Association, Rankings and Estimates Report 2013. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, North Carolina also ranks 46th in the nation. | ²³ National Education Association, Rankings and Estimates Report 2013 | ²⁴ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Local Salary Supplements 2010-2011 | ²⁵ Survey respondent mentioned this issue. According to the NCES, Average Teacher Pay in Georgia is \$52,845



High concentrations of poverty and low teacher pay both contribute to high turnover in rural and hard-to-staff schools.²⁶ In 2012, North Carolina had a system-level turnover of 12.13 percent.²⁷ This number is slightly higher than the state turnover rate since it includes teachers who continued teaching but switched districts. The 10 districts with the highest average turnover are all rural LEAs reporting rates higher than 18 percent (See Figure 1). In 2011-2012, 24 percent of North Carolina’s resigning teachers left their schools for a new career or to teach in a different state, LEA, or charter school. That does not include an additional seven percent of educators who remained in the district after switching to a non-teaching

position.²⁸ Teacher mobility comes with a price. Turnover forces districts to cover the costs for additional recruitment, processing, and orientation. A 2004 pilot study of Granville County Schools revealed that the cost of attrition at the district and school levels totaled more than \$780,000.²⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor estimates the median cost of turnover per teacher to be around \$8,000 nationwide.³⁰

TEACHER INCENTIVES

In order to combat these challenges, several states offer incentives to teachers. Louisiana, Georgia, California, Arkansas, and Mississippi provide assistance for teachers purchasing homes in targeted areas. Mississippi also offers loan forgiveness and moving assistance to teachers in 47 districts identified as “critical shortages areas.”³¹ Other states like Massachusetts offer scholarships and sizeable stipends to teachers working and pursuing a master’s degree in certain districts.³²

Research in Florida showed that higher salaries were associated with a lower probability of leaving.³³ However, higher salaries are not necessarily the only solution to the problem of teacher attrition. According to the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 28 percent of teachers in the state who stay at their schools report school leadership as the main factor contributing to their willingness to continue teaching. Instructional practices and support also make a big difference to 16 percent of respondents.³⁴ Numerous studies have demonstrated that teachers respond to school culture, and strong school leadership and mentorship programs could increase retention.³⁵

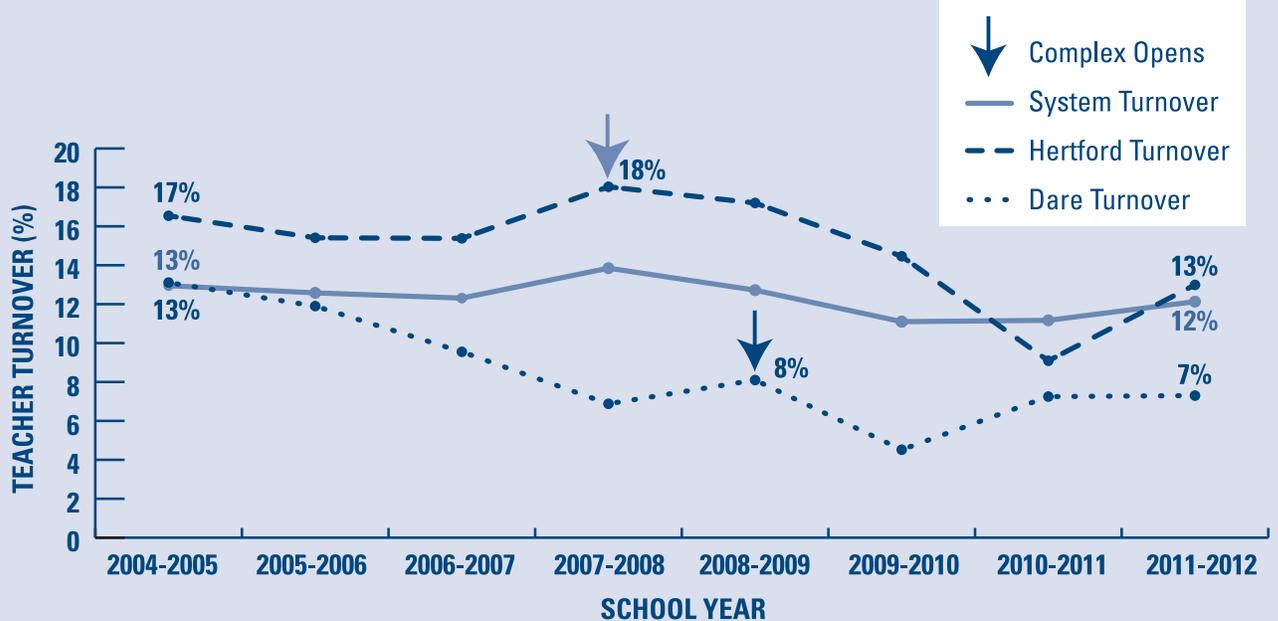
FIGURE 1: HIGHEST FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE TURNOVER RATES

LEA	RANK	5-YEAR AVG. TURNOVER (%)	REGION
Weldon City	1	25.36	3
Halifax	2	23.87	3
Northampton	3	21.95	3
Hoke	4	20.79	4
Pamlico	5	20.54	2
Edgecombe	6	18.67	3
Person	7	18.66	5
Warren	8	18.48	3
Vance	9	18.43	3
Washington	10	18.12	1
North Carolina	--	12.19	--

Source: 2011-2012 Teacher Turnover Report, NCDPI.

²⁶ Charles Clotfelter et al, “Would higher salaries keep teachers in high-poverty schools? Evidence from a policy intervention in North Carolina” *Journal of Public Economics* 92, no. 5 (2008): 1352-1370 | ²⁷ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, *Teacher turnover report 2011-2012* | ²⁸ *Ibid.* | ²⁹ Gary Barnes et al, “The Cost of Teacher Turnover in Five School Districts: A Pilot Study.” *National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. See Appendix B.* | ³⁰ Li Feng, “Combating teacher shortages: Who Leaves, Who Moves, and Why” *Electronic Theses, Treatises, and Dissertations Paper 4479 (2006)* | ³¹ *Rural School and Community Trust, http://www.ruraledu.org* | ³² *Massachusetts Department of Education, www.doe.mass.edu* | ³³ Li Feng, “Combating teacher shortages: Who Leaves, Who Moves, and Why” *Electronic Theses, Treatises, and Dissertations Paper 4479 (2006)* | ³⁴ *North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2012* | ³⁵ *NECS “Beginning Teacher Attrition and Mobility”; Jerry Lowe “Rural Education”*

FIGURE 2: TURNOVER TRENDS IN NORTH CAROLINA 2004-2012



Source: 2011-2012 Teacher Turnover Report, NCDPI.

TURNOVER TRENDS

Since 2005, turnover at the state level has remained relatively stable, but rates have changed dramatically in Hertford and Dare counties (see Figure 3). Around the time Hertford Pointe opened (designated by the striped arrow), turnover was about 18 percent in the district. Although we do not have enough information to demonstrate causality, it is interesting to observe the downward turnover trend in Hertford since 2008. Similarly, Dare County (checkered arrow) has not reported turnover as high as 8 percent since 2008-2009, the same year Run Hill Ridge opened. There is limited information available about the relationship between the availability of housing and the teachers who choose to live in these complexes, so it is impossible to reach any firm conclusions about the true impact of housing on turnover in Hertford and Dare. Housing may be one of many factors contributing to the overall downward turnover trend in both counties.

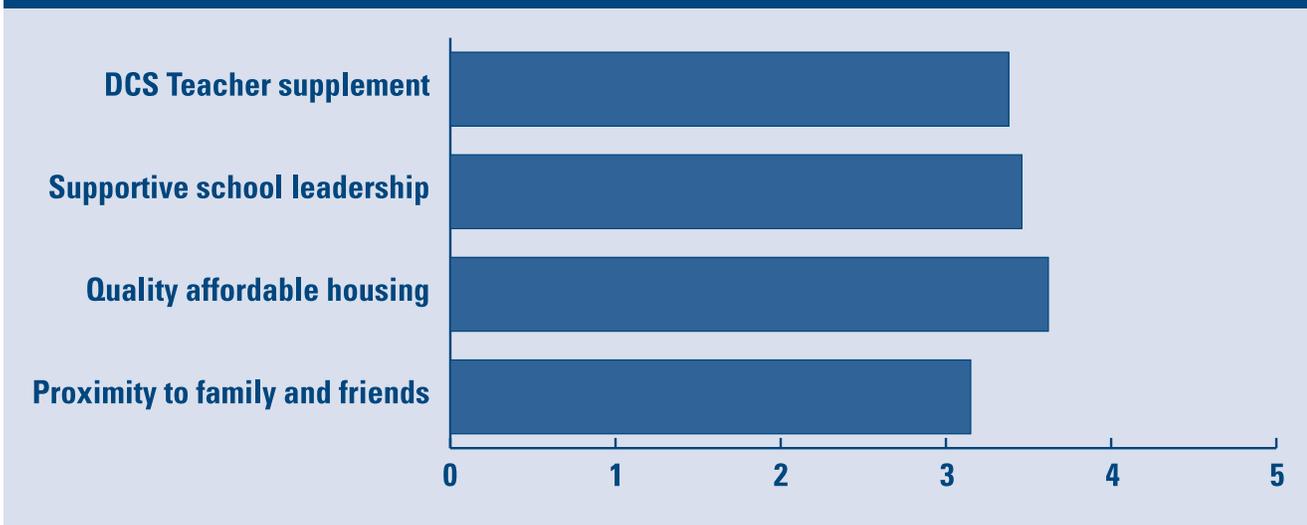
SURVEY RESULTS

We sent a survey to the superintendents of all 115 LEAs and received 40 responses. Eighty-three percent of respondents represented a rural district. The survey questions focused on the difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers, in addition to overall awareness about the SECU teacher housing complexes. Sixty-three percent of respondents replied that the recruitment of teachers is a challenge for their districts. Fifty-three percent reported that teacher retention is a challenge. The majority of respondents (68 percent) recruited most of their new teachers from UNC system education programs in 2012-2013.

Consistent with the annual teacher turnover reports, most teachers leave their schools due to retirement, but many districts are also seeing teachers relocate because of low pay and lack of social activities. One respondent even noted that limited dating opportunities for teachers impacts retention in his district. The districts that reported not having difficulties with recruitment and retention cited strong school culture and growth opportunities as reasons why teachers prefer to continue working in those areas. Eighty percent ranked higher pay as the number one need for teachers in their districts.

The majority of respondents did not see the availability of housing as an issue, but the affordability of housing in the area is a problem for 53 percent of respondents. When asked about the SECU teacher housing projects, 65 percent had previously heard about the developments, although 40 percent of all respondents noted that lack of information would prevent them from taking advantage of this opportunity. Five of the ten districts with the highest turnover rates responded to the survey. For these districts in particular, housing is an issue across the board. Respondents from three of the five LEAs have heard of the SECU complexes and two have not. One district has already worked with the SECU Foundation to construct a complex in their county, but for the four remaining respondents who have not, lack of information and the size of the loan were the most commonly cited challenges to proceeding with this type of project.

FIGURE 3: TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES



CASE STUDY: RUN HILL RIDGE

For the purposes of this case study, we chose to focus on the Run Hill Ridge apartment complex in Kill Devil Hills. Although the needs for teachers in this area differ from some of the previously mentioned trends in more rural communities, we were able to gather the most information about this particular complex with the help of the Dare Education Foundation. A brief analysis revealed that of the 50 residents who have lived in Run Hill Ridge since 2008, the majority have worked in Kill Devil Hills and taught at the high school level. On average, residents occupied their units for 33 months.

We were able to survey 13 former and current residents. Respondents began working for Dare County Schools from as early as 1995 to as recently as 2011. Twelve have been teaching for at least five years, and 12 intend to continue teaching this upcoming school year. The majority of the teachers reported that affordable housing did impact their decision to teach in Dare, although none listed it as the main reason they decided to teach there. Three of four former residents eventually left Run Hill Ridge after purchasing homes in the area.

Of particular interest to us were the teachers' opinions about the impact of Run Hill Ridge on their ability to live and teach in Dare County. Eight agreed that the low rent allows them to live comfortably, and eight reported that Run Hill Ridge contributes to their job satisfaction. Teachers rated quality affordable housing as the largest contributor to their desire to continue teaching in Dare County with an average of 3.62,³⁶ slightly higher than supportive school leadership (See Figure 3).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study had several limitations, namely the lack of information about complex residents, and the low survey response rates. The following recommendations are designed to address these limitations in addition to providing some direction for future actions. Given the numerous stakeholders involved in teacher recruitment and retention, these recommendations address policies at multiple levels. Working together, the State, LEAs, and the SECU Foundation could make tremendous strides toward reducing turnover in North Carolina.

SECU FOUNDATION:

- **Provide all residents with entrance/exit survey to monitor program impact.** Currently there is not enough information available to establish a correlation between housing and turnover. Collecting data from teachers at the beginning and end of their stay will build the capacity of the program in addition to providing an evidence-based model for other states to emulate.
- **Take a more proactive approach to raising awareness about the program.** Several counties that demonstrate a need for housing do not have the necessary information to move forward.³⁷ In order for the SECU Foundation to expand housing developments to other counties, they need to be more proactive about educating superintendents, HR directors, school board chairs, and principals about the program and how to apply for funding. This could be accomplished through presentations to superintendents and school board members, increased visibility online, and appropriate marketing materials for distribution.

³⁶ Ratings were determined by the number of stars (out of five) the respondent assigned to each category.



NORTH CAROLINA LEAS:

- **Share best practices across the state.** Many LEAs are already using creative incentives to recruit and retain teachers.³⁶ Communicating about this issue across district lines will foster a professional learning community and create a sense of shared vision.
- **Collaborate with nonprofits and foundations to sponsor teacher growth opportunities.** Previous research noted the importance of community-based professional development for teachers.³⁹ The lack of social opportunities and recreational activities often impacts a young teacher's decision to leave a rural area for an urban center. Given the demographics of the teacher workforce, this should not be taken lightly. Organized trips and activities coupled with professional development opportunities could potentially foster a stronger sense of community for residents in addition to supporting teacher development.

STATE:

- **Highlight all SECU housing opportunities on DPI website.** Although this initiative is not affiliated with the state, publicizing the housing opportunities online will raise awareness of the program and incentivize teachers looking to relocate.
- **Collaborate with state-funded nonprofit organizations and UNC system education programs to address teacher retention strategies for struggling LEAs.** The vast majority of areas with the highest average turnover rates are located in the eastern part of the state, mostly concentrated in Region 3. Organizations that already receive state funding could develop programs that address the needs of teachers throughout the state, particularly in high need areas. Helping

struggling districts identify and develop new strategies for teacher recruitment and retention could contribute to lower turnover in those areas and across North Carolina.

- **Conduct future research on teacher turnover in the state, and the returns on investment from monetary incentives.** Higher pay is an important incentive for many educators. North Carolina has been a leader in education on so many fronts that a more competitive teacher salary may truly help the state recruit and retain the most effective educators in the nation. More research is needed to determine the actual impact that a pay raise will have on reducing teacher turnover.

CONCLUSION

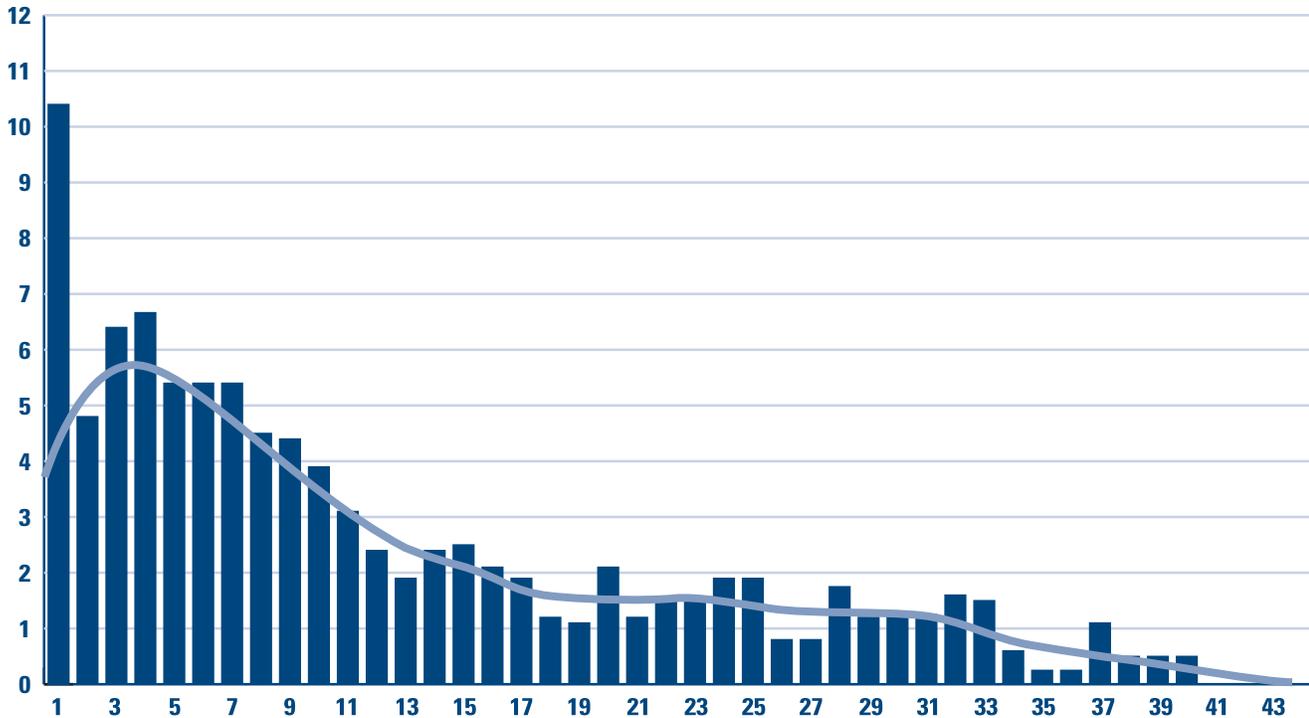
Reducing teacher turnover in high need areas will have to be a community effort. Many factors contribute to a teacher's decision to leave the classroom, so it will take multiple approaches to get a teacher to stay. In the absence of raises, LEAs must be creative about providing incentives that encourage teachers to remain in certain parts of the state. Quality affordable housing is an example of such an incentive. The apartment complexes financed by the SECU Foundation are a source of pride for the communities in which they are located, and greatly appreciated by teachers. In order for more districts to take advantage of this opportunity, the SECU Foundation will need to make information more readily available in addition to facilitating data collection to build capacity. Collaboration at the district and state level is also an essential piece to the puzzle, since the problem of teacher retention goes beyond housing. Working together to address the needs of teachers in this state will ensure the growth and satisfaction of our educators and ultimately, our students.

³⁶ Ratings were determined by the number of stars (out of five) the respondent assigned to each category. | ³⁷ Survey results | ³⁸ Survey results

³⁹ Hines, Dorothy and Kayla Siler (Mathis). "Regional Specific Incentives for Teacher Recruitment and Retention."

APPENDIX A – PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER EXPERIENCE DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH CAROLINA, FY 2007-2008

Source: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future



APPENDIX B – GRANVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS TURNOVER EXPENSES

Source: Gary Barnes et al "The Cost of Teacher Turnover in Five School Districts: A Pilot Study." National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

GCS COSTS OF TURNOVER

DISTRICT COSTS	TOTAL COSTS	COST PER LEAVER	COST PER MOVER
Recruitment	\$ 124,465.79	\$ 1,575.52	-----
Hiring	\$ 170,444.34	\$ 2,157.52	-----
Administrative Processing	\$ 53,976.90	\$ 683.25	-----
Training for First-Time Teachers	\$ 16,843.47	\$ 213.21	-----
Training for New Hires	\$ 96,147.34	\$ 1,092.58	\$ 1,092.58
Training for All Teachers	\$ 40,381.63	\$ 511.16	-----
Transfer	\$700.00	-----	\$ 77.78
All Turnover Activities	\$502,959.17	\$ 6,233.24	\$ 1,170.36



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