

## **New Teachers and Old Pay Structures: An Analysis of How Teacher Pay Influences Job Acceptance of First-Year Teachers**

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### Abstract

This study identified whether compensation packages were a factor in first-year teacher's decisions to accept a teaching position in the states of Colorado and Louisiana. This study involved (a) identifying the components of a school district's compensation package that were factors in the job acceptance decisions as indicated by respondents and (b) indicating other factors besides compensation that played a major role in job acceptance decisions.

The study surveyed a sample of 12 school districts in Colorado and Louisiana during the 2000-2001 academic school year. It included first-year teachers in the 12 approved school districts that had no previous teaching experience in other school districts. There were 229 first-year teachers from Colorado and Louisiana in the sample. Data was gathered through a survey instrument that was specifically designed for this study.

### Introduction

Many American citizens are proud of the educational advantages offered to our schoolchildren. Nevertheless, our educational system may be decaying from within by a dilemma that has continued to plague many teaching candidates (Cummings, 1994). Cummings (1994) stated that this problem is the historically low teacher compensation packages. Potential teaching candidates often ask the questions, "Will I make enough money to support my family?" and "How important is money in the job that I am challenged to do?" (Cummings, 1994).

Teacher compensation at its most fundamental level refers to the entire package a person may receive in the form of money, benefits, and other nonfinancial rewards (Belcher & Atchinson, 1987). Nonetheless, teacher compensation has always seemed to be a policy target for education incentives, either consciously or unconsciously (Odden, 1995). Many policymakers and practitioners at the local, state, and federal level would like to pay new teachers differently (i.e., in a way that provides incentives for improving practice as well as student performance) (Odden & Kelley, 1997). Nevertheless, teacher compensation has basically remained constant for many decades. In many school districts across the country, teachers are paid according to a single salary schedule that provides salary increases for

education units, degrees, and years of teaching experience (Odden, 1995). Disregarding dissatisfaction with actual dollar amounts, teachers in most cases, see themselves as being treated fairly by this compensation structure (Odden, 1995).

As a result, any teacher or administrator must acknowledge the fact that he or she knows of education school sites where morale is high, educators are working diligently, children are learning, and the compensation system is not meeting the financial needs of the teachers on staff. According to English (1992), an open-minded inquiry would not only ask “How can the pay structure in school districts be changed to recognize and reward those qualities?” but equally “Why do people accept/not accept employment in the teaching field solely based on the compensation system offered to them?”

According to the research report by the American Federation of Teachers (1998), compensation is a critical factor as to whether a potential candidate accepts a teaching position. Furthermore, this report goes on to state that across the United States many potential candidates are now choosing other fields besides teaching because of the better paying opportunities. Human resources personnel in school districts across the United States are struggling to design compensation systems or improve existing compensation systems to keep these potential candidates from pursuing careers with much greater financial incentives. With a void in the research literature on this topic, human resources personnel in school districts have a limited research body in which to design effective compensation systems to influence teacher’s job acceptance decisions. As a result, many compensation packages have been designed around the United States without understanding the critical decision-making process that a potential teaching candidate makes before they accept a teaching position (Recruiting New Teachers, 2000).

To provide background information on how compensation packages play a part in job acceptance decisions, it is important to take a look over the past decade at the fluctuations of teacher compensation as compared with other professions. According to the American Federation of Teachers (1998), in the early 1990’s corporate downsizing contributed to a poor job market for new college graduates. However, beginning in 1995, unemployment fell and the labor market for new college graduates was extremely lucrative. According to the American Federation of Teachers (1998), during the past few years, salary offers for college graduates in all fields have grown at twice the rate as those for new teachers. In 1998, new college graduates received an average salary offer in excess of \$35,500 compared to an average beginning teacher salary of \$25,735.

Between 1990 and 1995, the growth in beginning teacher salaries outpaced beginning salaries in fields requiring similar educational credentials. Nonetheless, since 1995, teacher salaries have increased just 8 percent, the slowest rate of any field (Recruiting New Teachers, 2000). Salaries in all other fields except chemistry and sales/marketing grew at least twice as fast as teaching (American Federation of Teachers, 2000). During the 1990s, teacher salaries increased closely at the same rate of pay as liberal arts graduates, but beginning teacher salaries lost ground to beginning salaries in engineering, business administration, math/statistics, and computer science (American Federation of Teachers, 1998). As a result of these reports it is evident that teachers get paid far less than other professionals (McQueen, 2000). According to

McQueen (2000), “the teaching profession isn’t even in the horse race when it comes to pay with the major fields of science and engineering.”

This study of compensation packages as a factor in prospective teacher’s job acceptance decisions is critical to the research literature in the field of education. It involves identifying what component(s) of a school districts compensation system are most and least helpful in influencing potential teachers job acceptance decisions and identifying other factors (i.e., staying close to home, being with extended family) which are related to the decision-making processes of the prospective teachers.

The main research questions for the study included:

1. What components of a school districts’ compensation package are factors in prospective teacher’s job acceptance decisions?
2. What other factors besides compensation (i.e. staying close to home) play a major role in prospective teacher’s job acceptance decisions?

### Review of Literature

Compensation packages are extremely important to prospective teachers. Goodlad (1984) reported that the majority of teachers did not enter the profession for money, but for the intrinsic satisfaction of working with children. However, when teachers decided not to enter the profession, they indicated that low pay was the main reason for not accepting a teaching position. In a review of literature on salary and behavior, Ferris and Winkler (1986) found that higher beginning salary levels influenced more able individuals into teaching and that higher salaries reduced teacher turnover rates.

Research shows that while having a positive impact on student achievement appears to be the primary motivator of teachers, salaries also play an important role (Winston, 1994). In addition, research indicates that teacher behavior is strongly affected by salary levels, including the decision to enter the profession, the decision to remain in a school district (vs. moving to another district with higher salaries) and the decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession (Conley & Levinson, 1993).

As many states move toward performance-based standards for teacher preparation and licensure, some policymakers and a handful of districts have begun to link teacher compensation to student performance. The most common reward for teachers for the development of advanced skills and competencies is through salary incentives to National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification. In twenty-three states and about eighty-five school districts, teachers receive bonuses or salary increases for attaining National Board certification (Stevenson, 1998).

Some states have rewarded teachers based on overall student performance in schools rather than in individual classrooms in an attempt to foster collegial work environments in schools and guard against bias in issuing rewards. Fourteen states provide all teachers with monetary rewards for achieving performance criteria including student achievement goals and

often criteria such as drop out and attendance rates (Zingheim & Schuster, 1995). In nine of these states—Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah—some portion or the entire reward can be used for salary bonuses for teachers (Stevenson, 1998).

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2000) many states do not have programs that provide compensation to teachers based on student performance or other indicators of demonstrated skills and knowledge. Furthermore, many state statutes require school districts to adopt a salary schedule based on the teacher's education, prior experience, and experience in the district. Although these requirements do not preclude districts from adopting performance-based criteria, it at least ensures that education level and years of experience will be part of any pay calculations.

Since a few states do pay teachers, at least in part, on student achievement, two districts in Colorado have become national leaders in the performance pay movement: Denver Public Schools and Douglas County. In 1993-94, Douglas County developed a performance pay plan, ratified by 96 percent of its teachers, to provide base pay similar to a single salary schedule and bonuses based on teacher knowledge and skills (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2000). This plan revises the years of experience component of the salary schedule, so that teachers receive annual increments only for years of experience in which their performance was judged proficient in principal evaluations. Additionally, the National Conference of State Legislatures (2000) stated that in addition to general base pay, teachers could receive bonuses through five different programs. These programs are Outstanding teachers, Site responsibility pay, Group Incentive, District responsibility pay, and Skill blocks.

Under the outstanding teacher program teachers rated as outstanding based on assessment and instruction, knowledge of content and pedagogy, and collaboration and partnerships, will receive a bonus. During the year, teachers develop a portfolio demonstrating skills and competencies. In the area of site responsibility pay, teachers are paid for participating in activities above and beyond the normal course of classroom instruction, such as special work with individual students and school committees. The reward decisions are determined at the building level. In the group incentive program, teachers receive additional compensation for participating in an optional school-wide activity with teachers in the school building and working cooperatively toward common goals.

The final two categories are district responsibility pay and skill block programs. Under the district responsibility pay program, additional pay is granted for participating in specified district professional activities such as serving on committees and task forces. Consequently, in the skill block category, teachers receive a stipend for successful completion of each skill block, district selected, designed and developed skill training courses that include an assessment of teacher skill acquisition.

## Procedures/Methods

A quantitative research design utilizing survey research was employed in this study. The sample included a total of two hundred twenty-nine (229) first-year teachers (42% response rate) in the states of Colorado and Louisiana. These two hundred twenty-nine (229) teachers represented twelve (12) school districts (six (6) from Colorado and six (6) from Louisiana).

In agreement with human resources departments of the participating school districts, the survey (attached in Appendix A) was mailed to teachers in early January 2001. This survey allowed teachers in the selected sample to indicate the component(s) of compensation packages that were factors in their job acceptance decisions. Teachers in the sample had two weeks to complete and return the survey.

The survey instrument contained 14 questions clustered into 4 subcategories that were entitled: Personal Data, Community Data, Compensation Packages and Incentive Features, and Additional Data. The rationale for these questions was to understand how important each question was in their job acceptance decisions. Data was analyzed using chi-square analyses, independent sample t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to find teacher perceptions on the most effective compensation packages offered by school districts.

Since this research study incorporated a new survey instrument, it was necessary to establish the content validity of the instrument. After the initial development of the questions based upon a review of literature, a panel of educational researchers and practitioners reviewed the instrument to validate the survey for content validity. Selected faculty members in the School of Education at Colorado State University received a draft of the survey for review. These faculty members received as well a brief summary of the study's intent and significance, a description of the sample group to be surveyed, known limitations of the study, and the desired beneficial results of the study. They reviewed the content and construction of the survey and noted suggestions for the revision of the instrument. As requested, the panel of faculty members commented on the appropriateness of the survey questions, the clarity of language, and the length and format of the instrument. On the basis of their input, modification of the questionnaire occurred until collaborative agreement determined the survey attained content validity. The researcher's major professor made final revisions to the survey instrument (Appendix A) utilized in this study.

To ensure the reliability of the survey instrument, the researcher did a pilot study to get feedback from teachers in regard to the design and readability of the instrument. A convenience sample of 50 teachers total from Colorado and Louisiana were used to pilot the survey instrument. The teachers in the convenience sample were contacted by mail and provided with written documentation that described the study and provided a consent form that asked for participation. After consent forms were returned, teachers were mailed a copy of the survey instrument. These teachers recommended changes to the survey instrument. With input from the teachers in the convenience sample the survey instrument used in this study was finalized.

## Findings

The respondents in this study were asked on question 7 of the survey instrument (Appendix A) to choose the item which best described their preference for teaching in their current school district. Respondents had five total choices from which to select on this question: (a) preferences to teach in their hometown, (b) teach near family/friends, (c) teach in a specific geographical location, (d) teach for the compensation package offered, and (e) teach in their home state. Responses were coded “1” for a “No” selection and “2” for a “Yes” selection. Figure 1 shows the mean scores for respondents by gender related to question 7.

According to Figure 1, female respondents displayed a slightly stronger preference for teaching in their hometown and near family/friends than male respondents. However, male respondents in this study had greater preferences for teaching in their school districts because of geographical location of the job, compensation package offered, and teaching in their home state.

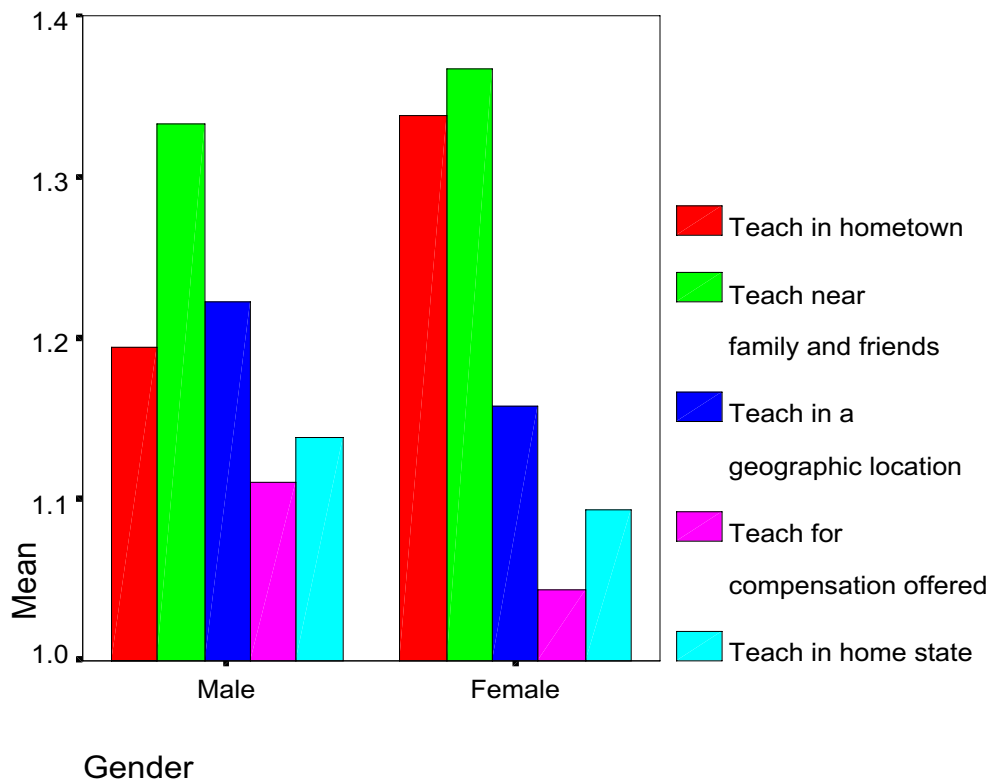


Figure 1. Mean Scores by Gender for Preferences for Teaching in Current School District

Five one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to explore whether these preferential differences were statistically significant. The results from these ANOVA's appear in Table 1, and show that none of these mean differences were statistically significant.

Table 1

Mixed ANOVA Comparing Preferences of Teaching by Gender

Job Preference	SS	df	MS	F	sig. of F
Teach in Home Town					
Between Groups	.590	1	.590	2.779	.097
Within Groups	36.747	173	.212		
Totals	37.337	174			
Teach Near Family/Friends					
Between Groups	.032	1	.032	.138	.710
Within Groups	40.288	173	.233		
Totals	40.320	174			
Teach in Geographic Region					
Between Groups	.117	1	.117	.818	.367
Within Groups	24.740	173	.143		
Totals	24.857	174			
Compensation Package					
Between Groups	.132	1	.132	2.457	.119
Within Groups	9.297	173	.053		
Totals	9.429	174			
Teach in Home State					
Between Groups	.059	1	.059	.633	.427
Within Groups	16.090	173	.093		
Totals	16.149	174			

Question 7 on the survey instrument (Appendix A) was also analyzed by the ethnicity of respondents to check if there were any statistically significant differences between Ethnic Minority and Caucasian respondents in this study. Figure 2 gives the mean scores for respondents by ethnicity in this study.

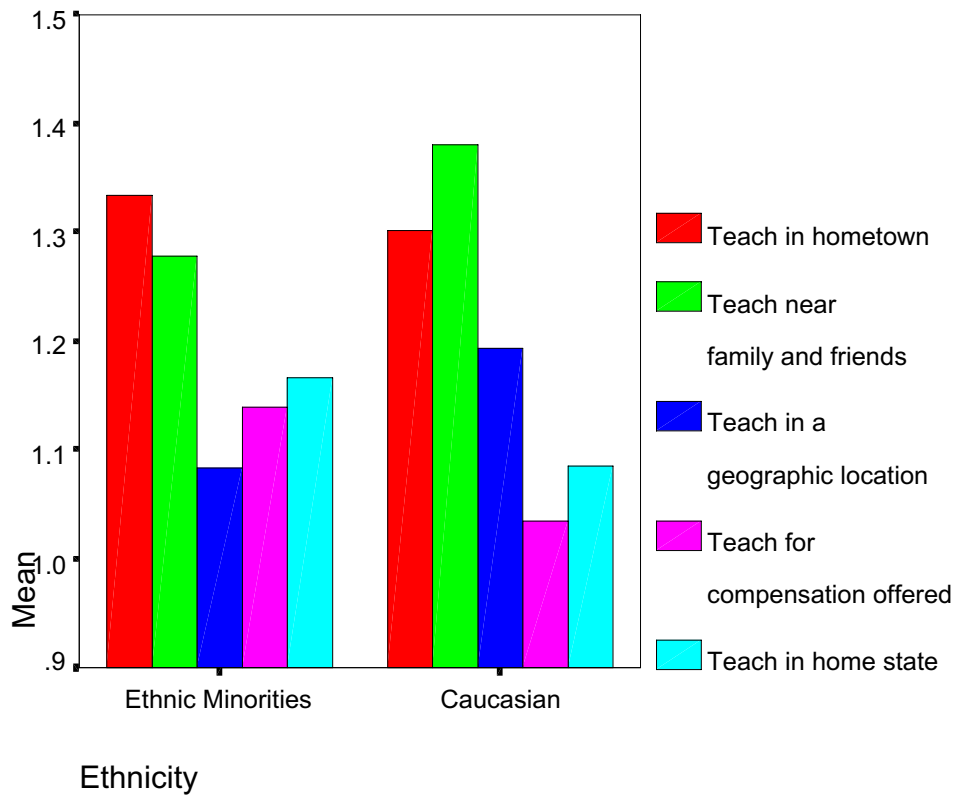


Figure 2. Mean Scores by Ethnicity of Preference for Teaching in Current School District

Figure 2 illustrates some very interesting potential trends between Ethnic Minority respondents and Caucasian respondents. Ethnic Minority preferences for teaching in their hometown and teaching in their home state were higher than Caucasian respondents. It is also worthy to note that Ethnic Minorities also had a greater preference for teaching in their current school district because of the compensation package which was offered. It seems that the type of compensation package offered may be a determining factor whether Ethnic Minorities accept a teaching position.

Five one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were done on the mean scores from Figure 2 to check to see if any of the preferences for teaching in the current school district showed any statistically significant differences between Ethnic Minorities and Caucasian respondents. Table 2 shows the results of the ANOVA test.

Table 2

Mixed ANOVA Comparing Preferences of Teaching by Ethnicity

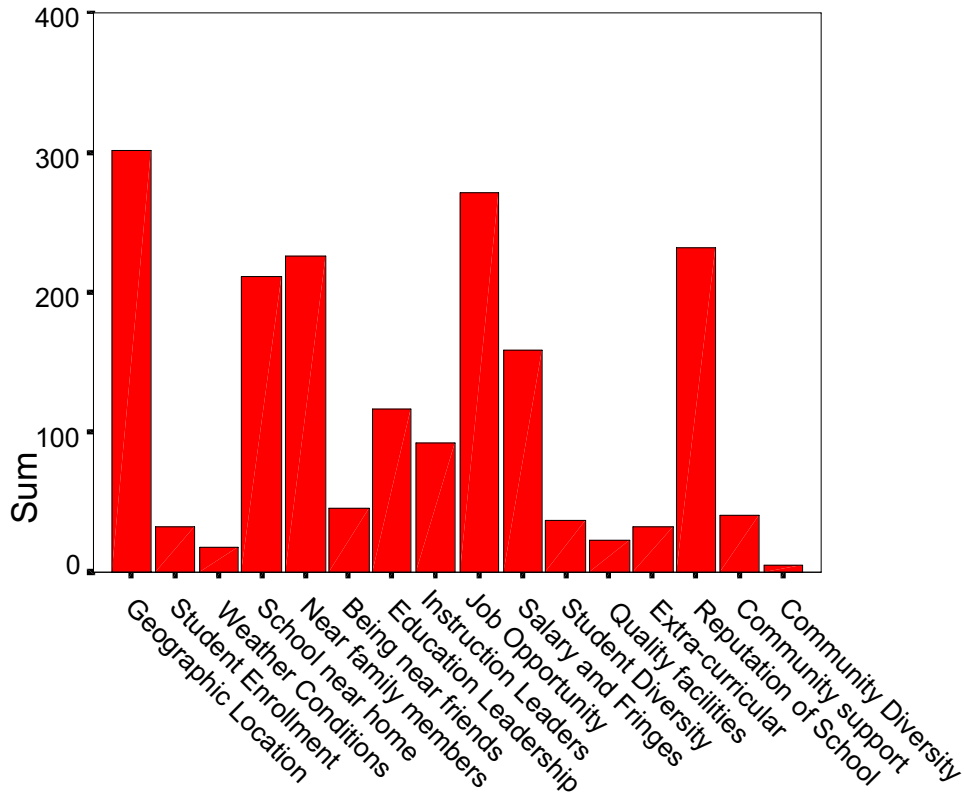
Job Preference	SS	df	MS	F	sig. of F
Teach in Home Town					
Between Groups	.028	1	.028	.129	.720
Within Groups	37.309	173	.216		
Totals	37.337	174			
Teach Near Family/Friends					
Between Groups	.306	1	.306	1.325	.251
Within Groups	40.014	173	.231		
Totals	40.320	174			
Teach in Geographic Region					
Between Groups	.352	1	.352	2.483	.117
Within Groups	24.505	173	.142		
Totals	24.857	174			
Compensation Package					
Between Groups	.303	1	.303	5.742	.018*
Within Groups	9.126	173	.052		
Totals	9.429	174			
Teach in Home State					
Between Groups	.185	1	.185	2.000	.159
Within Groups	15.964	173	.093		
Totals	16.149	174			

\*p &lt; .05

Results from Table 2 show that a statistically significant difference existed between Ethnic Minorities and Caucasian respondents in regard to their preference for teaching because of the compensation package offered by their school districts. Ethnic minorities placed a greater value on teaching in their current school district for this reason. Subsequent analyses were run on the two other independent variables in this study, which were age and grade level of teaching assignment, but no statistically significant differences were found.

Another way of confirming the reasons for job acceptance was available in this study. Respondents were asked on question 14 of the survey instrument (Appendix A) to rank the three most important reasons for accepting their current teaching assignments. Respondents were

given three blanks on the survey instrument to rank their reasons for selecting their particular job assignment.



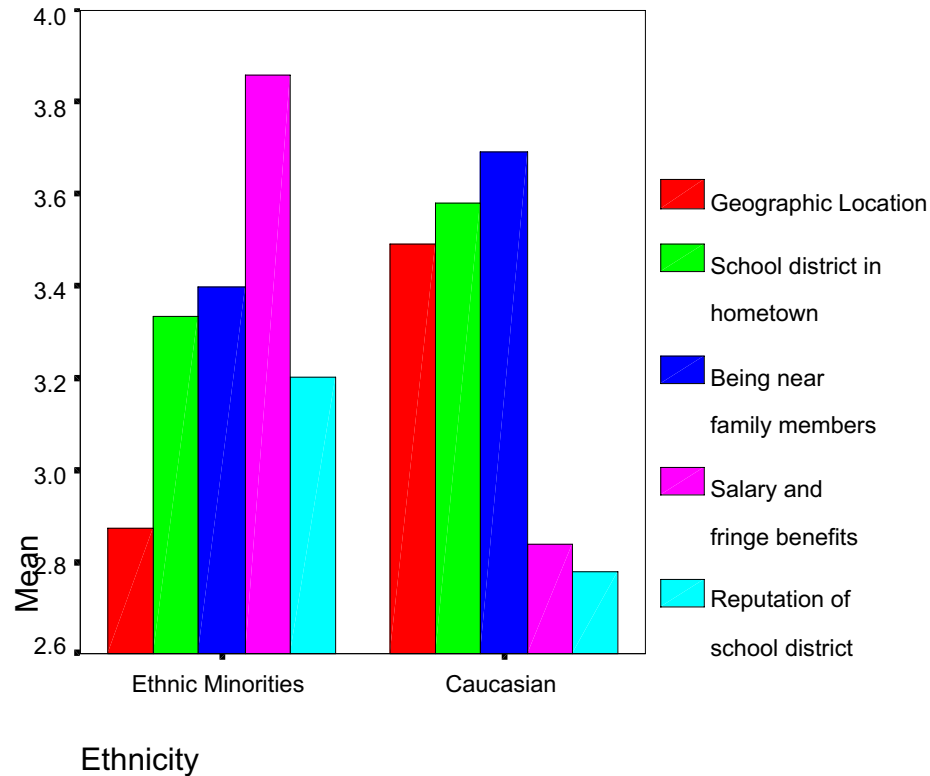
### Reasons for Job Acceptance

Figure 3. Respondents Ratings of the Most Important Reasons for Job Acceptance

The researcher weighted the top three choices for respondents. The weights used for the three most important reasons for job acceptance were “5” for the first important reason for job acceptance, “3” for the second important reason for job acceptance, and “1” for the third important reason for job acceptance. Figure 3 shows the sums of the seventeen choices that respondents were allowed to choose from as the important reasons for selecting a job in their current school district.

Figure 3 shows that the top six reasons for job acceptance by respondents in this study were geographical location, school district being in their hometown, being with family, availability of job opportunity, salary and fringe benefits, and the reputation of the school district. The reason entitled “availability of job opportunity” was removed from the top reasons for job acceptance because the researcher assumed that respondents would only take a teaching position where the opportunity was made available. Therefore, only the top five reasons for job acceptance were analyzed further against the independent variables ethnicity, gender, age, and grade level of teaching assignments.

Figure 4 shows the mean scores by ethnicity of respondents in relation to the top five reasons for job acceptance.



**Figure 4.** Mean Scores by Ethnicity in Relation to the Top Five Important Reasons for Job Acceptance

According to Figure 4, Caucasian respondents showed greater importance ratings for being in a certain geographical location, the school district being in their hometown, and being near family members. Ethnic Minorities, however, showed a greater interest in the salary and fringe benefits of their teaching position than Caucasian respondents. Also, Ethnic Minorities placed a higher value on the reputation of the school district than Caucasian respondents.

Five one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) was used to check for any statistically significant differences between Ethnic Minorities and Caucasian respondents in relation to the top five most important reasons for job acceptance. Table 14 shows the results of the ANOVA table.

Table 3

Mixed ANOVA Comparing the Top Five Important Reasons for Job Acceptance by Ethnicity

Reason for Job	SS	df	MS	F	sig. of F
<b>Geographic Location</b>					
Between Groups	5.015	1	5.015	1.803	.183
Within Groups	241.997	87	2.782		
Totals	247.011	88			
<b>School District in Hometown</b>					
Between Groups	.600	1	.600	.220	.641
Within Groups	158.333	58	2.730		
Totals	158.933	59			
<b>Being Near Family Members</b>					
Between Groups	.717	1	.717	.366	.547
Within Groups	117.477	60	1.958		
Totals	118.194	61			
<b>Salary Schedule/Fringe Benefits</b>					
Between Groups	10.553	1	10.553	3.782	.058
Within Groups	136.741	49	2.791		
Totals	147.294	50			
<b>Reputation of School District</b>					
Between Groups	1.565	1	1.565	.680	.412
Within Groups	184.044	80	2.301		
Totals	185.610	81			

Table 3 shows that out of the top five reasons for job acceptance no statistically significant differences were found between Ethnic Minorities and Caucasian respondents. However, it is important to note that the salary/fringe benefits ( $p = .058$ ) was very close to being statistically significant. Therefore, school districts should be aware that Ethnic Minorities may value their compensation package more than Caucasian respondents. Subsequent analyses were run on the other independent variables in this study, which were age, gender, and grade level of teaching assignment, but, no statistically significant differences were found.

In response to the research questions utilized in this study, the top five reasons for job acceptance are geographical location, school being in their hometown, being near family members, salary and fringe benefits, and the reputation of the school district. This study also found that Ethnic Minorities valued their compensation packages more than Caucasian

respondents. It is also worthy to note that even though it was statistically non-significant male respondents valued their compensation packages more than female respondents.

## **Conclusion**

Prospective teachers are now leaving their educational programs with many more opportunities than ever before (Scanlon, 2000). In order for the field of education to get the teachers it desires, more compensation and incentives will be especially important in the job acceptance decisions of prospective teachers. The incentives can be in the form of loan forgiveness on student loans, sign-on bonuses, and tuition assistance for graduate work. These are the conditions as stated in the expectancy theory that is found in the educational literature surrounding the topic of teacher compensation.

Furthermore, school districts in today's society are asking teachers to do more than ever in regards to student performance on standardized tests. With high-stakes tests such as the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) and Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP), used in Colorado and Louisiana respectively, new opportunities are presented to pay teachers in a different way. This new way of paying teachers differently is especially important since the legislatures in many states are now judging the quality of school districts by the performance of students on these high-stakes tests.

School districts can no longer afford to keep these monetary incentives from prospective teachers. If school districts continue to withhold monetary incentives from teachers, the teaching pool will continue to dwindle to a point where only a very small percentage of teachers will even be certified to teach (Scanlon, 2000). Therefore, a new and concerted effort should be made to put the best offer on the table for prospective teachers to seriously consider the field of education.

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## Appendix

Please circle the correct response that most closely describes your level of agreement or disagreement for the appropriate questions or write in the information in the space provided to respond to the survey. Carefully observe the importance of each question and answer as honestly as possible.

### **I. Personal Data**

1. Gender:

- 1) Male
- 2) Female

2. Please indicate your age:

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1) 20-24 | 5) 40-44 |
| 2) 25-29 | 6) 45-49 |
| 3) 30-34 | 7) 50-54 |
| 4) 35-39 | 8) 55+   |

3. Grade Level of Teaching:

- 1) Elementary
- 2) Middle/Junior High

- 3) High School
- 4) Alternative Middle Level School
- 5) Alternative High School

4. Indicate your ethnicity (Please choose only one item):

- 1) American Indian or Alaskan Native: All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.
- 2) Asian or Pacific Islander: All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. The areas include, for example, China, Japan, Korea, Philippine Islands, and Samoa.
- 3) African-American (Not of Hispanic Origin): All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Africa.
- 4) Hispanic: All persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central, or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- 5) White (Not of Hispanic Origin): All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe.
- 6) Bi-racial: (Please clarify)

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**II. Community Data**

5. What city do you consider to be your current hometown? \_\_\_\_\_  
City State ZIP

6. What is the current population (approx.) of your hometown? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Which ONE of the following best described your preference for teaching in your current school district?

- 1) I wanted to teach in my hometown.
- 2) I wanted to teach near my family/friends.
- 3) I wanted to teach in a specific geographical area of the United States.
- 4) I wanted to teach in this area because of the compensation package offered.
- 5) I wanted to teach in my home state.
- 6) None of the above

**III. Compensation Packages and Incentive Features**

8. Which of the following best describes the type of compensation package that was offered to you upon taking your current employment?

- 1) Traditional Single Salary Schedule
- 2) Traditional Single Salary Schedule with Incentive Pay
- 3) Performance Pay without the Single Salary Schedule
- 4) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

	Very	Some- what	Neutral	Not Very	Not At All
9. From question (8) above, please rate the importance of the compensation package you received in influencing your job acceptance.	1	2	3	4	5

10. As a part of your compensation package, please indicate what incentives were offered to you:

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| a) I was offered a sign-on bonus for accepting a job with my school district.               | Yes | No |
| b) I was offered loan forgiveness on my student loans as an incentive to accept employment. | Yes | No |
| c) I was offered tuition assistance for graduate work.                                      | Yes | No |
| d) I was offered incentives such as housing assistance and relocation benefits.             | Yes | No |
| e) I was offered a bonus for high student achievement.                                      | Yes | No |
| f) I was offered a monetary bonus for being certified in a high need subject area.          | Yes | No |

11. How important was each of the incentives listed below in your job acceptance decisions?

	Very	Some- what	Neutral	Not Very	Not At All	Not Offered
a) Sign-on bonus	1	2	3	4	5	6
b) Loan-forgiveness	1	2	3	4	5	6
c) Tuition assistance for graduate work	1	2	3	4	5	6
d) Housing assistance and relocation benefits	1	2	3	4	5	6
e) Salary bonus for high student achievement	1	2	3	4	5	6
f) Salary bonus for being certified in a high need subject area.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**IV. Additional Data**

12. Counting your school district as one, how many school districts offered you a teaching position for the 2000-2001 school year? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Where was your current job in the sequence of job offers?

- 1) first
- 2) second
- 3) third
- 4) fourth
- 5) fifth or higher

14. What were the three most important reasons you decided to join your school district (please choose from the choices below)?

1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
3<sup>rd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a) Geographical location               | I) Availability of Job Opportunity                |
| b) Student Enrollment Size             | j) Salary schedule/Fringe Benefits                |
| c) Weather conditions                  | k) Racial diversity of students                   |
| d) School district is in my hometown   | l) Quality of facilities                          |
| e) Near family members                 | m) Extra-curricular opportunities (i.e. coaching) |
| f) Near friends                        | n) Reputation of district                         |
| g) Quality of educational leadership   | o) Community support                              |
| h) Quality of instruction for students | p) Racial diversity of community                  |
|  | q) Other: _____                                   |

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!!!!**

