

SOUTH DAKOTA TEACHER ADEQUACY STUDY

Purpose

The study was undertaken to determine South Dakota school district superintendents' perceptions regarding the adequacy of available teacher candidates for open teaching positions within their districts during the previous three school years. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Determine the quantity and quality of teacher candidates applying for open teaching positions within school districts across South Dakota.
- Identify the relative adequacy of applicants for open teaching positions at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, as well as for each of the various teaching content areas.
- Discern general trends in applicant adequacy during the previous three school years.
- Ascertain possible reasons why potential candidates for open positions decided to not apply for opening within the superintendents' districts.
- Identify superintendents' suggestions for potential approaches to enhancing the adequacy of the candidate pool for open teaching positions within their districts.
- Explore possible reasons why teachers chose to leave school districts or the profession prior to their normal retirement age.

Methodology

Data for the study were collected through the email administration of a Google[®] Forms survey instrument to approximately 154 school district superintendents throughout South Dakota. The survey is comprised of multiple choice, scaled, and open-ended items that request information and perceptions regarding the adequacy of available applicants for open teaching positions within their districts during the

past three school years. The surveys were initially emailed to the superintendents in late December 2013 with a follow-up mailing in early January 2014. Data collection ended in mid-January.

Response Rate

A total of 130 superintendents returned completed surveys by the end of the data collection period for a usable response rate of 84.4%.

Demographic Information

1. Approximate *school district enrollment* during the current (2013-2014) school year.

Number responding	=	119 districts (91.5% of total sample)
Enrollment range	=	100 – 13,915 students
Average enrollment	=	773 students
Enrollment distribution:		
25 th percentile	=	225 students
50 th percentile	=	340 students (median)
75 th percentile	=	700 students

The response rate and district enrollment range indicates that participating superintendents represented a very wide range of school districts in terms of size and geographic location across South Dakota. While the average district enrollment was 773 students, approximately half of those participating represented school districts with enrollments above or below 340 students.

2. Approximate number of years of experience as superintendent *of the current school district.*

Number responding	=	119 districts (91.5% of total sample)
Experience range	=	1 – 34 years
Average experience	=	6.9 years
Median experience	=	5.0 years

Responses demonstrate a wide range of experience for superintendents within their current school districts. While the average experience is nearly 7 years, about half of those responding have been in their current districts for 5 years.

3. Approximate number of years of experience as superintendent *within South Dakota.*

Number responding	=	119 districts (91.5% of total sample)
Experience range	=	1 – 35 years
Average experience	=	10.2 years
Median experience	=	8.0 years

Responses demonstrate a wide range of experience for superintendents within South Dakota. While the average experience is just over 10 years, about half of those responding have been superintendents in South Dakota for 8 years.

Findings

Study findings will be summarized with chart and graphs accompanied by brief narratives highlighting the salient findings.

4. Number of school districts attempting to recruit and hire candidates for open teaching positions within the past three school years (2011-12 through 2013-14).

	No.	%
Yes	126	96.9
No	4	3.1

Nearly all school districts in South Dakota (96.9%) have attempted to recruit and hire candidates for open teaching positions within the past three school years (2011-12 through 2013-14).

5. Approximate number of open teaching positions per year school districts *have attempted to fill* on average during past three school years.

Openings/Year	No.	%
1-3	76	60.3
4-6	29	23.0
6-10	7	5.6
More than 10	14	11.1

While the majority of school districts (60.3%) have attempted to fill three or fewer open teaching positions per year, more than a tenth of them have attempted to fill 10 or more open positions.

6. Number of districts filling each open teaching position.

	No.	%
Yes	105	82.7
No	22	17.3

More than three quarters (82.7%) of all school districts with open teaching positions were successful in filling each of those open positions.

7. The percentage of open teaching positions filled in those districts *that did not fill each position*.

Percentage filled	No.	%
Up to 50%	14	51.8
Greater than 50%	13	48.2

About half (51.8%) of those districts that were not successful in filling each of their open teaching positions were able to fill fewer than half of the positions that were open.

8. Number of open teaching positions within the district – *by grade level.*

Grade Level	No.	%
Elementary	102	81.2
Middle/Junior High	97	77.6
High School	102	81.2
All Levels	80	64.0

Note: Total sums to more than 100.0% due to multiple responses.

Similar numbers of open teaching positions during the past three school years have occurred at the elementary (81.2%), middle/junior high (77.6%), and high school (81.2%) grade levels. Nearly two thirds (64.0%) of all participating superintendents indicated they had openings at all three grade levels during this time.

9. Number of open teaching positions within the district – *by content area.*

Grade Level	No.	%
Special Education/ELL	75	61.0
English/Language Arts	72	58.5
Math	69	56.1
Science	58	47.2
Social Studies	48	39.0
CTE	45	36.6
Visual/Performing Arts	30	24.4
Health/PE	24	19.5
World/Foreign Language	22	17.9

Note: Total sums to more than 100.0% due to multiple responses.

The greatest number of open teaching positions during the past three school years has occurred in Special Education/ELL (61.0%), English/Language Arts (58.5%), and Mathematics (56.1%). In contrast, the fewest open teaching positions during the past three school years has occurred in World/Foreign Language (17.9%), Health/PE (19.5%), and Visual/Performing Arts (24.4%).

10. Superintendent ratings of adequacy of applicant pool – *overall*.

	No.	Mean	Percent Adequate	Percent Inadequate
Overall	126	1.85	1.6	78.6

Note: (1) Mean scores on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0.

(2) Percent adequate = percent adequate + percent very adequate

(3) percent inadequate = percent inadequate + percent very inadequate

More than three quarters (78.6%) of responding superintendents considered the overall applicant pool to be inadequate or very inadequate during the past three school years.

11. Superintendent ratings of adequacy of applicant pool – *by grade level*.

Grade Level	No.	Mean	Percent Adequate	Percent Inadequate
Elementary	122	3.18	44.2	27.0
Middle/Junior High	114	2.20	2.6	64.9
High School	121	1.64	1.6	86.0

Note: (1) Mean scores on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0.

(2) Percent adequate = percent adequate + percent very adequate

(3) Percent inadequate = percent inadequate + percent very inadequate

Superintendents considered the applicant pool for open teaching positions at the high school (86.0%) and middle/junior high school (64.9%) levels to be much less adequate than open elementary teaching positions (27.0%).

12. Superintendent ratings of adequacy of applicant pool – *by content area.*

Grade Level	No.	Mean	Percent Adequate	Percent Inadequate
Health/PE	69	3.19	30.4	17.4
Social Studies	84	2.89	27.4	34.5
English/Lang. Arts	97	2.29	10.3	80.4
Visual/Perform. Arts	65	2.18	4.6	66.2
Math	95	1.75	1.0	82.1
Special Educ./ELL	94	1.72	4.2	81.9
World/Foreign Lang.	63	1.70	1.6	84.1
CTE	81	1.64	1.2	84.0
Science	91	1.59	2.2	86.8

Note: (1) Mean scores on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0.

(2) Percent adequate = percent adequate + percent very adequate

(3) Percent inadequate = percent inadequate + percent very inadequate

Superintendents considered the applicant pool for open teaching positions science (86.8%), Career and Technical Education (84.0%), and World/Foreign Language (84.1%) to be less adequate than any other content areas. Health/Physical Education (17.4%) and Social Studies (34.5%) were considered the content areas producing the most adequate applicant pool.

13. Number of districts filling open teaching positions with *less qualified than expected* applicants.

	No.	%
Yes	88	70.4
No	37	29.6

Nearly three quarters (70.4%) of superintendents indicated that they had to fill open teaching positions with applicants who were less qualified than they had hoped to find.

14. Superintendent ratings of adequacy of *qualifications* of less than qualified applicants.

	No.	Mean	Percent Adequate	Percent Inadequate
Less than qualified	100	2.58	11.0	49.5

Note: (1) Mean scores on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0.

(2) Percent adequate = percent adequate + percent very adequate

(3) Percent inadequate = percent inadequate + percent very inadequate

Superintendents considered nearly half (49.5%) of those less than qualified applicants to be inadequately qualified for the positions for which they were applying.

15. Superintendent perceptions of the general trend in attracting qualified applicants during the past three school years.

Trend	No.	%
Becoming <i>more</i> difficult	115	92.0
Becoming <i>less</i> difficult	1	0.8
Difficulty remaining <i>same</i>	6	4.8
No observable trend	3	2.4

The great majority of superintendents (92.0%) believes that attracting qualified applicants for open teaching positions within their districts has become more difficult during the past three school years. Less than one percent (0.8%) believes that attracting qualified applicants is becoming less difficult.

16. Superintendent open-ended *comments regarding the adequacy of the size and quality of applicants* for open teaching positions within their school districts during the past three years. (A total of 99 comments were submitted; comments with five or more responses included.)

Comment	No.	%
Secondary positions more difficult to fill	19	19.2
Fewer applicants each year	13	13.1
Specialty teaching areas difficult to fill	11	11.1
Math and science positions difficult to fill	9	9.1
Applicant pool too small to allow choice	9	9.1
Quality of applicants diminishing each year	8	8.1
Elementary positions also getting more difficult to fill each year	6	6.1
Federal highly-qualified requirements creating fewer applicants each year	6	6.1
Rural location of district discourages applicants	6	6.1
Cannot compete with salaries of neighboring states	5	5.0

Note: Total sums to more than 100.0% due to multiple responses.

When asked to comment on the size and quality of the applicant pool for open teaching positions, superintendents most frequently mentioned the difficulty of attracting qualified secondary school applicants (19.2%), getting fewer qualified applicants each year (13.1%), and the difficulty of attracting qualified specialty area applicants (11.1%) as most noteworthy.

17. Superintendent open-ended *suggestions for enhancing the adequacy of the size and quality of applicants* for open teaching positions within their school districts. (A total of 95vcomments were submitted; comments with five or more responses included.)

Suggestion	No.	%
Increase teacher pay and benefits	46	48.4
Enhance state funding of education	15	15.8
Make salary competitive with neighboring states	15	15.8
Assist teachers with educational costs	13	13.7
Develop enhanced respect for the profession	11	11.6
Increase efforts by universities to recruit and encourage candidates to enter teaching profession	10	10.5
Provide enhancements to attract applicants to rural areas	7	7.4

Note: Total sums to more than 100.0% due to multiple responses.

When asked to suggest means of enhancing the applicant pool for open teaching positions, superintendents most frequently mentioned increasing teacher pay and benefits (48.4%), enhancing state funding of education (15.8%), and making salaries competitive with neighboring states (15.8%).

18. Superintendent perceptions regarding *importance of reasons why potential applicants do not apply for teaching positions within their school districts.*

Reason	No.	Mean	Percent Important	Percent Unimportant
Low salary	126	4.06	73.0	6.3
Limited chances for salary incr.	125	3.87	66.4	10.4
Geographic location of district	126	3.44	55.6	25.4
Concern for excessive workload	125	3.32	45.6	28.0
District has small enrollment	124	2.67	25.8	46.0
Concern for level of preparation	124	2.36	12.1	62.1
Limited chance for prof. develop.	126	2.17	7.1	65.1
Concern for lack of admin. support	126	2.15	8.7	72.2

Note: (1) Mean scores on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0.

(2) Percent important = percent important + percent very important

(3) Percent unimportant = percent unimportant + percent very unimportant

Superintendents considered low salary (73.0%), limited chances for salary increases (66.4%), and geographic location of the school district (55.6%) to be the most important reasons that potential applicants do not apply for open teaching positions within their districts.

19. Number of districts in which *teachers have left for reasons other than retirement.*

	No.	%
Yes	108	85.7
No	18	14.3

Well over three quarters (85.7%) of superintendents indicated that at least one teacher had left their district (or the profession) during the previous three school years for reasons other than retirement.

20. Superintendent perceptions regarding importance of reasons *why teachers have left their district* for reasons other than retirement.

Reason	No.	Mean	Percent Important	Percent Unimportant
Low salary	115	3.89	70.0	13.9
Accommodate family	113	3.43	55.8	23.0
Limited potential for advancement	115	3.17	45.2	34.8
Excessive workload	114	3.05	38.6	36.0
Excessive paperwork/bureaucracy	115	3.01	36.5	37.4
Geographic location of district	112	2.93	36.6	39.3
Lack of community respect	115	2.37	14.8	65.2
Lack of student respect	115	2.29	13.9	68.7
District has small enrollment	114	2.25	14.9	62.3
Lack of administrative support	112	2.00	6.2	75.9

Note: (1) Mean scores on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0.

(2) Percent important = percent important + percent very important

(3) Percent unimportant = percent unimportant + percent very unimportant

Superintendents consider low salary (70.0%), the requirement to accommodate family needs (55.8%), and the limited potential for professional advancement (45.2%) to be the most important reasons that teachers leave their school districts prior to retirement.

21. Additional Comments.

A total of 23 superintendents shared final comments regarding the study and the survey instrument. All comments were made only once unless otherwise noted. Their comments are as follows:

- Thank you for conducting this study – we need factual information regarding the teacher shortage in South Dakota. (5 responses)
- Teachers need an adequate salary to live in South Dakota. (2 responses)
- Low pay determines whether or not an individual chooses to pursue a career as a teacher.
- Effective recruitment and retention is critical to all South Dakota school districts.
- The unlikelihood of substantially better salaries in the foreseeable future is discouraging many from becoming teachers in South Dakota.
- Teachers need stipends to participate in ongoing professional development.
- The governor, legislature, Department of Education, and Board of regents need to examine the possibility of systemic changes to enhance teaching opportunities within South Dakota.
- The governor needs to be more respectful of teachers in South Dakota.
- We need to make the teaching profession more attractive to potential teachers.