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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 10/5/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Teach for America Teachers: How Long Do They Teach? Why Do They Leave?**

Education Week

By: Morgaen L. Donaldson and Susan Moore Johnson

October 4, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/04/kappan\\_donaldson.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/04/kappan_donaldson.html)

Few observers doubt that Teach For America (TFA) has high aspirations. Established in 1990, TFA strives to close persistent racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in U.S. public education by recruiting high-achieving college graduates to teach for two years in low-income urban and rural schools. In recent years, applications to TFA have soared, especially at highly selective colleges. In 2009-10, for example, 18% of Harvard University's seniors applied to the program. Proposing to expand its teaching corps from 7,300 to 13,000 over the next five years, TFA recently won \$50 million in the federal i3 (Investing in Innovation) competition and succeeded in raising \$10 million in matching funds.

TFA's rapid growth and success in garnering financial support from public and private sources exhilarates some — and angers others. Proponents vigorously cite the program's merits, contending that TFA attracts academically strong and motivated young people who would otherwise not consider teaching, especially in high-poverty schools. Its detractors, with equal passion, argue that by requiring only a two-year commitment from corps members who have received only five weeks of formal preparation, TFA undermines efforts to stabilize and improve staffing in the very schools most overwhelmed by teacher turnover and most in need of consistency in the classroom. Moreover, critics argue that TFA compromises teaching as a profession by minimizing the importance of preservice preparation and casting teaching as a prelude to the higher-status careers that many corps members enter after their TFA experience. Some cynically assert that the program functions primarily as a résumé booster for ambitious upper-middle-class college graduates, intent on fashioning the most compelling application to the nation's top law or medical schools.

Debates about whether TFA can revive chronically failing schools or will further aggravate the problems facing these schools often turn on competing claims about how long TFA teachers stay on the job. Critics conclude that corps members routinely leave their school after their two-year commitment, if not before. For their part, TFA relies on internal surveys, which show that 60% of corps members remain in education, holding various roles at various levels of the system.

Until now, however, solid information about how long TFA teachers actually remain in teaching and in their low-income schools has not been available to policy makers and school officials. Our large-scale, nationwide analysis of TFA teacher turnover presents a more detailed picture of which TFAers stay, which ones leave the profession and some suggestions about why they leave. In our study, we learned:

Nearly two-thirds (60.5%) of TFA teachers continue as public school teachers beyond their two-year commitment. More than half (56.4%) leave their initial placements in low-income schools after two years, but 43.6% stay longer. By their fifth year, 14.8% continue to teach in the same low-income schools to which they were originally assigned.

Our findings suggest two explanations for how long TFA teachers stay in the profession and in their placement schools. The first involves their initial intentions and their background in education before entering TFA; the second is the working conditions in their schools.

### *WHY RETENTION MATTERS*

Teacher retention, particularly in low-income schools such as those where TFA teachers are placed, is critically important. Attrition, already high among new teachers across the nation (Ingersoll, 2002), has its greatest impact in low-income, high-minority schools. In the most recent data available, 21% of teachers at high-poverty schools leave their schools annually, compared to 14% of their counterparts in low-poverty settings (Planty et al., 2008). As teachers transfer within districts, they typically leave schools that enroll lower-income students and enter schools with higher-income students (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004).

This revolving-door effect (Ingersoll, 2004) leaves the very schools that most need stability and continuity perpetually searching for new teachers to replace those who leave. When teachers leave their schools after only a few years, those schools incur substantial costs. Most importantly, students are likely to suffer. Novices typically fill vacancies. As a result, students are taught by a stream of first-year teachers who are, on average, less effective than their more experienced counterparts (Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rockoff, 2004). When effective teachers leave, schools also lose their investment in formal and informal professional development (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Moreover, routinely high levels of teacher turnover impede a school's efforts to coordinate curriculum, to track and share important information about students as they move from grade to grade, and to maintain productive relationships with parents and the local community. Quite simply, they cannot build instructional capacity. Given such high stakes, knowing more about TFA teachers' careers in low-income schools and in the profession more broadly is essential.

### *WHETHER, WHEN, AND WHY*

In 2007, we set out to understand whether, when, and why TFA teachers left the teaching profession and/or their low-income placement schools. We surveyed all members of three cohorts (entering in 2000, 2001, and 2002) from all TFA sites across the country and asked them to provide information about their work lives in the four to six years since they began teaching. They reported whether and when they left public teaching and/or their initial school and they explained why.

Sixty-two percent of the total population completed the survey for a final sample of 2,029 individuals. We used a statistical approach, called "discrete-time survival analysis," to estimate teachers' unbiased probability of leaving their schools or the profession in a given year. We were able to focus on the choices that the teachers made — to stay at their school, change schools, or leave teaching — because we could identify and set aside career changes due to involuntary transfers, layoffs, and dismissals.

#### *How long are TFA teachers' careers?*

We expected to find that a large proportion of TFA teachers in our sample would have left teaching after completing their two-year obligation to TFA. But, we found that 60.5% of teachers taught in K-12 schools longer than two years and more than one third (35.5%) taught for more than four years. After five years, 27.8% were still in teaching. This retention rate is markedly lower than the 50% estimated for new teachers across all types of schools (Smith & Ingersoll, 2003). Good data are not currently available that would allow us to compare TFA teachers' turnover to teachers' turnover in similar high-poverty schools, although reports from Philadelphia suggest that the rates may be roughly comparable (Neild, Useem, Travers, & Lesnick, 2003).

Most people would be surprised to learn that a substantial percentage of TFA teachers — 43.6% — remained in their initial, low-income placement school beyond their two-year obligation. However, many individuals who stayed in teaching did leave their original placement schools at some point. About half of those who remained in teaching after their third year had changed schools. And, after the fourth year, only 14.8% continued to teach in their original school. This level of turnover is very problematic from the perspective of low-income schools and their students.

#### *How did TFA teachers' original plans and education influence their retention?*

When we examined the survey responses, we found two explanations for these teachers' career choices. The first emerged from self-reports about their original plans when they applied to TFA as well as evidence about their prior educational preparation.

Although most people think TFA corps members are much alike, we found two distinct subgroups in this sample of over 2,000 teachers. Those in one subgroup had short-term expectations for a teaching career from the start, thus fitting the "two-years-and-out" picture that most people have in mind when they think of TFA. Teachers in the other subgroup had more traditional, longer-term expectations for a teaching career.

The majority (56.59%) of those in the sample indicated that, when they applied to TFA, they had planned to teach for two years or less. Such intentions were especially apparent for nearly one-tenth (9.28%) of the sample who had applied to graduate school in another field and then deferred their enrollment for two years while teaching in TFA. Controlling for demographic and placement variables, in years 1-3, those who had deferred graduate school before enrolling in TFA were significantly and substantially more likely to leave teaching than those who had not deferred graduate school.

In contrast, nearly half (43.41%) of the sample said that, from the beginning, they had expected to teach longer than TFA's requirement. Notably, 11.34% reported that they had intended to make teaching a lifelong career when they entered TFA. Some (3.34%) had already completed a traditional teacher preparation program; others (5.28%) had majored or minored in education; and an additional 5.82% of the sample had taken pedagogical classes as undergraduates. Thus, almost 12% of the sample had some training in teaching, whether a major or minor in education, completion of a teacher preparation program, or completion of a teaching methods class, before enrolling in TFA. Moreover, 6.94% of the sample had applied to another teaching job in addition to TFA. These actions signal a deeper commitment to teaching that preceded their TFA experience.

In fact, those who displayed an early commitment to teaching did stay in the classroom longer than other TFA peers. For example, 71.3% of education majors taught longer than four years, while only about half that proportion in the entire sample — 35.5% — taught that long. Of those with an education major or minor, 62.4% taught for longer than four years as did 53.0% of those who had applied for another teaching job, again a much higher proportion than the overall sample. These groups are small, but noteworthy because they had substantially higher retention rates than others in the sample. It is impossible to say whether these teachers' longer stay in the classroom was due to their initial commitment to teaching or to the success they achieved with their students as a result of the knowledge and skill they acquired through undergraduate studies in education. In an earlier study, we found that new teachers' "sense of success" with their students figured centrally in their decisions about whether to continue teaching (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Given the limited induction and support that the TFA teachers probably received in their high-need schools, it seems likely that both their prior coursework and their original intentions played a role in their career decisions.

These findings show that Teach For America teachers are far from being exclusively short-term in their intentions or actions. Some appear to use the program as a path to an extended career in teaching. They may choose TFA as a way to bypass longer preparation programs, licensing requirements, or the bureaucratic obstacles associated with landing a teaching job, especially in a large, urban district. They also may have wanted the status and camaraderie that come with becoming TFA corps members. Whatever their reasons, it seems clear that a considerable proportion of those in the sample expected to make a longer-term commitment to teaching from the start.

#### *Why did TFA teachers leave teaching or transfer to other schools?*

Our survey also provided insight into why some TFA corps members decided to leave teaching. When asked to select the most influential factor in their decision to leave teaching, the top reasons selected were:

- To pursue a position other than K-12 teacher (34.93%);
- To take courses to improve career opportunities in education (11.79%); or
- To take courses to improve career opportunities outside of education (10.26%).

These top three reasons relate to the teachers' interest in professional advancement, either outside or inside education. However, the fourth reason, cited by nearly one-tenth of the teachers (9.83%), was poor administrative leadership at their school. In addition, some attributed their decision to other deficiencies in their working conditions — lack of collaboration (2.11%), inadequate discipline (2.98%), or general dissatisfaction with their job description and responsibilities (2.84%). Therefore, nearly 18% of those who left teaching cited such school-based factors as the primary reason for their departure.

Beyond teachers' self-reports about working conditions, our analysis revealed that their teaching assignments affected retention. Those who were assigned to teach more challenging assignments — split grades, multiple subjects, or out-of-field courses, for which they were not prepared — were more likely to resign from teaching or leave their jobs than those with single-grade, single-subject, or in-field assignments (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). For example, 76.2% of math teachers with a math major taught more than two years, compared with 60.0% of math teachers without a math major. Fifty percent of math teachers without a major in math left teaching within 2.51 years, while half of those with a math major left within 4.08 years.

Those with short-term intentions not only chose to leave teaching in favor of other professional opportunities, but also because they found their working conditions to be subpar. By contrast, when individuals with long-term intentions left teaching, they tended to leave, not because they preferred a different profession or were dissatisfied with their work, but because of a major life change, such as pregnancy or child-rearing.

Notably, not all of those who left teaching within six years permanently abandoned the field of education. When we asked respondents who had left what they were doing now, we learned that 21.0% held positions in K-12 schools and 10.7% had returned to the classroom as teachers. Contrary to popular expectations, only 3.7% were lawyers and 1.6% were medical professionals.

We found that teachers who reported or provided evidence of longer-term intentions — for example, by having taken courses in education — remained in teaching and in their original school in much higher proportions than those with short-term intentions. We asked teachers who stayed in teaching, but had left their original placement school, why they had made the change. Six percent had been reassigned through an involuntary transfer. Among others who chose to transfer, the reason most often cited was a change in residence (29%). However, more than one-third reported transferring because they were dissatisfied with their original school — poor administrative leadership (16%), lack of philosophical alignment (14%), lack of discipline (3%), or dissatisfaction with job responsibilities (2%). For those who remained in teaching, working conditions were central in deciding to leave their original placement.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides much-needed information about the careers of TFA teachers. The good news is that nearly two-thirds stay in teaching beyond their two-year commitment. However, less than a quarter stay in their initial, low-income school for more than three years. Given TFA's commitment to closing the achievement gap — a goal shared by many other fast-track preparation programs — this revolving door transfer of teachers from the schools that most need skilled, experienced teachers remains a serious problem.

We were struck by the higher retention rates among teachers who initially had longer-term plans for teaching, especially those who had taken education courses in college. This seems to suggest that new teachers benefit from having more preservice preparation than fast-track programs usually provide. We need to learn more about the type, timing, and length of preparation that new teachers find most valuable.

The TFA teachers who stayed in teaching but changed schools reported that their decisions were significantly influenced by the working conditions in their initial school — the principal's leadership, their teaching assignment, student discipline, and the school's philosophy. These responses suggest that if hard-to-staff schools are to succeed in serving their low-income students, it won't be because they receive a steady stream of well-educated, committed novice teachers, but because they become places where those individuals find they can succeed and, therefore, choose to stay.

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **A waiver not a cop out**

Miami Herald

By: Editorial Board

October 4, 2011

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/10/04/2437086/a-waiver-not-a-cop-out.html>

The No Child Left Behind Act set a high goal when Congress passed it in 2002: All children in public schools will leave their grade proficient in the basics — reading and math.

So why would President Obama want to give states a way out of having to follow the law?

Unfortunately, this well-intentioned law, which garnered bipartisan support, also made few exceptions for children with learning disabilities or those still learning English. Plus, its grading system ignored real improvements by many students unless "proficiency" was reached by all.

Under NCLB performance goals, schools were graded based on students' test scores on state-created exams, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Federal money would go to the schools showing results, and failing schools would be under pressure to improve or have a new team of administrators and teachers move in to do the job.

In theory, this sounded great. In practice, though, we have had a hodge-podge of different state standards being measured against a laudable but ill-defined national goal in a global race to the top.

In Florida, schools that the state graded “A” based on their students’ FCAT performance found that many of those same students couldn’t cut it on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam, which compares students’ knowledge nationwide at grade level.

Still, over time, standards were pushed forward and the results are illuminating. Consider what happened between 1998, when state standards were being put into place, and 2009:

- Fourth-graders in Florida ranked at the bottom in NAEP scores in reading and math in 1998. By 2009, they scored above the national average in both. And low-income elementary school students of all races now are near the top nationally in math.
- African-American students now outperform African-American students in all but three states in NAEP fourth grade math tests.
- Fourth-grade Hispanic students met or outperformed all students in 31 states by 2009.
- High school graduation rates increased by 21 percent.
- The number of African-American and Latino students passing AP tests for college entry increased by 365 percent.

Standards and accountability make a difference. Despite criticism of the FCAT, the proof is in the results on national tests like the NAEP.

Now the Obama administration wants to hand out waivers for states to avoid the federal law’s 2014 deadline, when all students would have to be “proficient.” In exchange, states must show they are making serious strides to close achievement gaps and promote accountability, to get students ready for college or work.

States are lining up for the waivers, and for good reason: about 82 percent of schools nationwide won’t meet 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Still, a waiver must not become a cop out for true reforms.

The waivers will require states to devise teacher evaluations that take into account their students’ test results — a controversial but necessary step. Florida, which is among a dozen states that is receiving federal funding in the Race to the Top program, already is working on creating such a system. And as a leader in innovation and high standards — started by Gov. Jeb Bush and his predecessor, Gov. Lawton Chiles — Florida is primed to show results.

For four years Congress has had the chance to improve NCLB, but hasn’t acted. Now President Obama is giving states the opportunity to set the bar high. Go for it.

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## Florida House Democrats: McKay program still has flaws

Florida Times-Union

By: Matt Dixon

October 5, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/schools/2011-10-05/story/florida-house-democrats-mckay-program-still-has-flaws>

*The McKay Scholarship is criticized for being open to fraud.*

TALLAHASSEE - Democrats grilled a Department of Education official Tuesday and once again said a school-choice scholarship program allowed too much room for fraud.

Many of the arguments that played out during the K-20 Innovate Subcommittee meeting mirrored the last session, when Democrats argued that the McKay Scholarships lacked accountability.

"With all due respect to [the Department of Education] ... it does not appear that they have the tools they need to ensure the McKay Scholarship really only goes to good actors," said Rep. Marty Kiar, D-Parkland.

A bill sponsored last year by state Sen. Stephen Wise, R-Jacksonville, expanded the McKay program, which offers taxpayer-funded scholarships to disabled students to attend private schools. As a result of the expansion, 883 additional students joined the program this year.

Though critics trotted out the same arguments as last session, their positions were bolstered by a June investigation by the Miami New Times that found provider schools were collecting money for kids who did not attend those schools, some had staffers with criminal records, and some did not have physical locations.

In the article, Wise said the findings concerned him.

"I need to talk to my staff director. We need to have some hearings and do whatever we can to make changes," said Wise, the chairman of the Senate preK-12 Committee.

Michael Kooi, who was updating the panel on the changes to the program, said that many schools in the report were no longer in the program.

"The process and requirements we have in place allowed us to take action," said Kooi, executive director of Florida's Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice.

Supporters of the expanded programs said rooting out fraud is important, but too much government interference will act to deter good schools from entering the program.

"I have a McKay school in my district. ... If we went in and tried to tell them how to discipline their students, they probably would not want to be a McKay partner anymore," said Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach. "We don't want to poison the soup."

Kooi agreed.

"Immediately you will reduce the number of schools available to kids," he said.

Democrats also expressed concern that the state does not have to do site visits when a school applies for the program.

Kooi said the DOE is only allowed 10 visits each year, and that even if the department were allowed to do more walk-throughs, "I don't know that doing visits to all private schools is something we want to do."

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## **A better way to learn**

Florida News-Press

By: Chris Umpierre

October 5, 2011

<http://www.news-press.com/article/20111005/NEWS0104/111004050/A-better-way-learn>

### *Best city districts innovate*

Sending high-performing teachers to the district's 20 struggling schools is getting results for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools.

Principals are allowed to bring in their own teams and get \$10,000 bonuses for their troubles.

That strategic staffing plan and other improvements helped the district win the 2011 Broad Foundation honor as the nation's best urban school district. Broad rhymes with "road."

Four years ago, only 54 percent of the schools in the 137,000-student district improved. Last year, 90 percent of the district's 135,638 schools improved.

The other 2011 finalists included the Miami-Dade and Broward County public school districts. They share, with a Texas district, \$1 million from Broad in scholarships for students.

Despite having high poverty, reflected by free and reduced lunch rates, the four finalists are making progress in closing the achievement gap between white and minority students.

"We believe in putting our most effective teachers where we need them the most, and that all kids deserve access to them," said Peter Gorman, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's former superintendent, in a Broad Foundation release.

Miami-Dade, the nation's fourth largest school district with 347,133 students, has outperformed students in many major U.S. cities on key assessments. Miami, for instance, scored well in the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress Trial Urban District Report in science, mathematics and reading.

A focus on guiding middle school students to advanced-level classes, summer reading camps and tutoring students who need special help in reading are some of the programs that are making a

difference in Miami-Dade, spokesman John Schuster said. And the work is being done at all levels:

elementary, middle and high school.

Broward County, which has 257,000 students, has teamed up with local businesses to produce results.

Zimmerman Advertising in Fort Lauderdale, for instance, created a \$50,000 state-of-the-art television production facility at Fort Lauderdale's Piper High School.

"The kids in this (TV production) class are not super scholars, but this technology has made them thirsty to learn," said Piper High teacher Jovan Conde, whose school is designated Title 1. Title 1 is the nation's oldest and largest federally funded program, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Annually, it provides more than \$7 billion to school systems across the country for students at risk of

failure and living at or near poverty. Piper High senior Barrington Morris, who will be attending the University of Minnesota next year, is just

one student excited about the new technology.

"It makes it fun," he said.

Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools, which won the 2010 Broad Prize, have two technology schools that help match students' skills to the demand of local businesses. Unlike Lee and Collier counties, Gwinnett allows juniors and seniors to attend one of its technology schools for half a day and then go back to their home schools to learn the core subjects.

"The most important thing students are going to need in the future is to be able to work on teams and communicate well through digital devices," said Jody Reeves, Gwinnett's director of technical education.

"That's not going away."

Dale Johnson, Collier County's supervisor of career and technical education, hopes to put a greater focus on technology in the future.

Gwinnett, whose students scored an average of 1532 out of a possible 2400 points on the SAT last year, compared to Lee County's 1466, also has a leg up on Southwest Florida in recruiting teachers.

Georgia has implemented a pay system for math and science teachers that requires districts to pay them as if they were teachers with six years of experience. Georgia teachers make about \$4,600 more than Florida teachers, who bring in \$46,708 annually.

Other high-performing states such as Massachusetts have programs in place to identify students at risk of dropping out. Counselors then work with those students.

Massachusetts registered the highest average ACT score in the U.S. last year. The state scored 24.2 out of a possible 36. The national average is 21.1.

In Florida, St. Johns County School District routinely finishes atop the state in student achievement. St. Johns, which has 29,334 students, has earned an A grade from the state eight consecutive years. The district had the highest FCAT point total out of the state's 67 counties last year.

“The combination of high standards, outstanding principals and teachers, programs that meet the interests of students and a "student first" attitude promoted by all levels of leadership have created (this) environment,” St. Johns spokeswoman Danielle Cook said.

Cook pointed to the district’s 15 career academies, which include the Stellar Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Emerging Technology.

“All of our programs are designed to meet or exceed state, national and even international standards,” she said, “so that our students are prepared to move on to the next chapter of their lives, whether that be to go directly into the workforce, attend college or some combination of each.”

Additional Facts

About this series

Sunday

Many students going into college can’t read well or do math. What can be done?

Monday

The system needs drastic improvements to ready the workforce of the future.

Tuesday

Employers are not happy with applicants, but educators roll out improved programs that could help. Today

Despite the challenges, many schools are innovating. Also, voices of high schoolers.

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## **Seminole teachers say new evaluation system flawed**

Orlando Sentinel

By: Dave Weber

October 4, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-seminole-teacher-evaluations-20111004.0.7614895.story>

SANFORD — As Seminole County public school teachers negotiate their contract this school year, they are uneasy over a new state-mandated evaluation system that could, for example, cost a first-grade teacher her job because third graders did poorly in reading.

Starting next spring, up to half of a Florida teacher's annual evaluation will be based on student learning gains measured by tests.

But only about a third of Seminole teachers teach classes currently measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test or other state exams. The testing does not even begin until third grade and covers only a few subjects.

While additional tests are in the works, the plan for the next several years may be to use school average scores in FCAT reading, math or both to judge teachers whose students are not tested. That means half of a teacher's evaluation could be based on someone else's work.

"I fear teachers will just be arbitrarily terminated based on those scores," said Dan Smith, a Lake Brantley High School teacher.

Negotiators for Seminole's teachers and the School Board on Tuesday wrestled with details of the new evaluation system, but did not come to terms. School districts across the state face a similar challenge.

Teachers are especially concerned because if layoffs come for next school year, they will be let go based on evaluation points.

"It used to be based on the least seniority," said Tony Gentile, chief negotiator for the Seminole Education Association. "Now it is the least test scores."

Layoffs are a distinct possibility in Seminole, too, because the district anticipates a \$22 million shortfall in funding for next

school year and is considering what to cut to cover the shortage.

Teachers are holding out that a legal challenge by the state teacher union will head off implementation of the new evaluation system.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **New evaluations run off Tennessee teachers**

The Tennessean

By: Julie Hubbard

October 5, 2011

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20111005/NEWS04/310050126/New-evaluations-run-off-Tennessee-teachers>

*Veteran educators criticize mandates* Sherrie Martin, former teacher of the year at a Metro school, is questioning whether she really belongs in the classroom after scoring low on the state's new teacher evaluation.

In Sumner County, Summer Naylor left her third-graders behind last month, resigning after eight years teaching. Too many mandates and evaluations made her job no longer fun.

New evaluations pushed Robert "Bud" Raikes — the Smyrna High School principal who has a stadium named after him — into retiring early.

"For the first time in 17 years I don't like getting up and going to my job," Martin said. "There are so many teachers frustrated, and several have already resigned."

Just two months into using <http://www.tennessean.com/article/20110407/NEWS04/110050002>>new teacher evaluations that the state rapidly put into place to land Race to the Top federal funds, educators say the process overwhelms even the best teachers and turns their focus away from students. While the state continues to tweak the system, some fear losing good teachers could be an unintended consequence.

"It's really an undue burden on teachers and not sustainable the way it's going right now," Tennessee Education Association President Gera Summerford said.

Murfreesboro City School board members fired off a <http://www.tennessean.com/assets/pdf/DN180129105.PDF>>letter to the state last week, saying the evaluations have changed its teachers' focus away from helping students to getting their lesson plans perfected for their evaluations.

"Those teachers are focused on themselves, worried that if they don't check everything off the evaluation rubric, they will fail their principals, fail themselves, and most importantly, fail the children," the letter said.

"The faces and needs of boys and girls are being lost in the fog of an untenable process."

State leaders, including House Speaker Beth Harwell, R-Nashville, say the new evaluations aren't perfect and will likely need revision but ultimately will lead to classroom improvements.

"I think we are going to be able to stay the course and if we hear concerns and they are legitimate to work things out," Harwell said.

"Ultimately, it's going to be a way for good teachers to be recognized, reward them and pay them well for staying in the classroom."

#### *Change is national*

Changing the way teachers are evaluated is part of a national reform intended to prevent bad teachers from sliding through year after year.

Tennessee is among the first of states to roll one out but, like New York and Florida, is finding it to be a complex effort, said Jack Jennings, founder of the Center on Education Policy, a Washington-based public education advocacy group.

Race to the Top winning states, which promised the changes quickly, are asking for delays to develop their new evaluation systems, Jennings said.

As part of Tennessee's \$500 million federal Race to the Top grant to make massive public school improvements, the state promised to <http://www.tennessean.com/article/20110615/NEWS/110050001>>evaluate teachers more strictly each year. Half of each teacher's score comes from at least six classroom observations, while 35 percent comes from how well that teacher's students perform on achievement tests and 15 percent from other factors.

Tennessee based its teacher evaluations on a model being used in South Carolina. Evaluators, mostly school principals, had four days of training on how to observe teachers in the classroom and rate them on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 considered exemplary.

Evaluators use a three-page checklist to review teachers' lesson plans.

"One teacher in our building had lesson plans 26 pages long. There were teachers sitting there until 10 p.m. at night," said Naylor, 33. She resigned last month after the stress of low pay, training for reforms and then the new evaluation model kicked in, and it was too much.

Martin, a tenured teacher who says she never had a negative evaluation, was dinged with a 2 when her lesson plan needed more detail, she said.

"I'm very offended by a 2, and the feelings are similar across the district," said Martin, who was teacher of the year at Hattie Cotton Elementary last year and is now at Lockeland Elementary Design Center.

As a principal, Raikes was driven away by the time commitment to get the evaluations done, in large part the main focus of principals' jobs now.

Metro's J.T. Moore Principal Jill Pittman says she does up to five observations a day, some 50 minutes long, and it has been a lot of pressure on her teachers.

Martin Luther King Jr. Magnet Principal Schunn Turner hasn't awarded any overall 5's, few 4's and mostly 3's, which the state says is a "strong teacher" — although teachers don't see it that way.

To gain tenure, teachers need five years of experience and two consecutive years of scoring 4-5. If tenured teachers score 1-2 two years in a row, they can lose their tenure.

"I think we have to adjust to the scoring scale ... and it's caused me to change how I structure each day," Turner said.

Principals are doing multiple observations a week, watching for standards that many teachers say are too hard to meet.

"They feel like evaluators are pressured to get them done and overlooking things or making (scores) up," said retired Overton Principal Bill Gemmill. He now works for Williamson County-based Professional Educators of Tennessee, which takes at least 20 calls a week from teachers asking how to appeal an evaluation score.

### *Unfairness alleged*

Teachers are signaling they don't want students who cause discipline problems or those with disabilities in their classrooms if those scores are tied to their performance.

Other complaints are that evaluations may be done by district office coordinators that some teachers feel aren't qualified, raters are not in the classroom long enough to judge the teachers fairly, and the state's online system to upload the evaluations isn't ready yet.

Adjusting the amount of observations and providing more training are what the TEA and some educators say they hope will happen moving forward.

"We look forward to working this summer and over time to ensure that we implement the most effective evaluation tool possible," Tennessee Department of Education spokeswoman Kelli Gauthier said.

"Ultimately, the evaluation model in use will be a key driver in improving student achievement for all Tennessee children."

### Additional Facts

#### Rating teachers

The state's checklist for evaluating teachers has 19 components, from writing lesson plans to reaching students who think differently. Here are some requirements for earning top scores.

#### Lesson plans

- » Measurable and explicit goals aligned to state content standards
- » Evidence that the plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge and interests of all learners
- » Evidence that the plan provides regular opportunities to accommodate individual needs

#### Managing student behavior

- » Students are consistently well-behaved and on task
- » Teacher establishes clear rules for learning and behavior
- » Uses several techniques such as social approval, contingent activities and consequences to maintain behavior

#### Teaching

- » The lesson has a beginning, middle, end and time for reflection
- » Pacing is brisk and provides many opportunities for individual students who progress at different learning rates
- » Routines for distributing materials are seamless and no instructional time is lost during translations

Source: Tennessee Department of Education

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## **New Jersey: igh Tech High gets No. 1 ranking**

Asbury Park Press

By: Nina Rizzo

October 4, 2011

<http://www.app.com/article/20111005/NJNEWS/310050011/High-Tech-High-gets-No-1-ranking>

MIDDLETOWN — High Technology High School, part of the Monmouth County Vocational School District, has been ranked the No. 1 high school in the nation for math and science education by a national magazine.

U.S. News & World Report released its first Best High Schools for Math and Science survey Sept. 26. The magazine compared 208 schools drawn from the 598 gold, silver and bronze medalist schools in the magazine's Best High Schools in America survey, which was published in December 2009.

One of five career academies in the county vocational school district, High Tech High School has a pre-engineering curriculum that focuses on mathematics, science, technology and the humanities. The school, located on the Brookdale Community College campus in the Lincroft section of the township, has a cozy population of 285 students.

Tim McCorkell, superintendent of the vocational school district, credited the High Tech staff and students for their hard work. He noted two other county vocational schools made the list, "so in a larger sense it is an honor for all the school districts in Monmouth County who do such a terrific job preparing these students before they come to us."

The magazine ranked the Academy of Allied Health and Science in Neptune at No. 66 and Marine Academy of Science and Technology at Sandy Hook at No. 147.

Educators said the focus on a "career theme" makes the schools academically strong, and ultimately, turns out students who score high on the standardized tests that are used for such rankings.

"I think the mixture of high level academics woven into a career theme (engineering, medical science, or marine science) serves to unify the curriculum and motivate students to learn at higher levels," he explained. "Students are able to apply what they have learned in real-world settings, making the knowledge more relevant."

The rankings were based on the level of student participation and success in Advanced Placement (AP) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathmatics) courses and the subsequent tests administered by the College Board. The survey used data from 2008 graduates.

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## **IBM grant to re-shape curricula, re-train staff at five technology high schools**

Chicago Sun Times

By: Fran Speilman

October 5, 2011 01:22PM

<http://www.suntimes.com/news/education/8036637-418/ibm-grant-to-re-shape-cuirrula-re-train-staff-at-five-technology-high-schools.html?print=true>

Five Chicago Public high schools — spread across the city — will have their curricula re-shaped and teachers re-trained to focus on math, science and technology "jobs of tomorrow," thanks to a \$400,000 "challenge grant" from IBM.

The new high schools will be modeled after an IBM-shaped and bankrolled high school in Brooklyn that allows its students to attend grades 9 through 14 and graduate with an associate's degree in computer sciences.

The new Chicago schools will not include two extra years of high school that end in an associate's degree. But, Mayor Rahm Emanuel said he has other plans for students in, what he called Grades 13 and 14.

"The first goal is the high schools. But, I have ... put a lot of thought into the future of community colleges. So, stay tuned. It's not something that's lost," the mayor said.

Emanuel said he's particularly pleased about IBM's decision to become "true partners" on five technology high schools in

Chicago, five times as many as the company helped open in New York.

“That’s what I love about this. They’re not just writing a check, cutting a ribbon and saying, ‘Call you later.’ IBM is dedicating staff, starting next Friday,” the mayor said.

“They will literally be going to schools, analyzing ‘em. ... They are putting skin in the game — real skin in the game. They’re not just writing a check, then doing a press release. It is back-up with staff and training, making sure that the right principal, the right teachers are there with the full education, and they understand the material to ensure that the resources they’re putting in are backed up with the best training.”

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