

# Teaching Experience and Teacher Effectiveness

BY TARA KINI AND ANNE PODOLSKY

Do teachers continue to improve in their effectiveness as they gain experience in the teaching profession? Our report *Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness? A Review of the Research* aims to answer that question by critically reviewing recent literature that analyzes the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in K-12 public schools.

A renewed look at this research is warranted due to advances in research methods and data systems that have allowed researchers to more accurately answer this question. Specifically, by including teacher-fixed effects in their analyses, researchers have been able to compare a teacher with multiple years of experience with that same teacher when he or she had fewer years of experience. In contrast, older studies often used less precise methods, such as comparing distinct cohorts of teachers with different experience levels during a single school year.

Based on our review of 30 studies published within the last 15 years that analyze the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in the United States, we find that:

1. Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. Gains in teacher effectiveness associated with experience are steepest in teachers' initial years, but continue to be significant as teachers reach the second, and often third, decades of their careers.

2. As teachers gain experience, their students not only learn more, as measured by standardized tests, they are also more likely to do better on other measures of success, such as school attendance.
3. Teachers' effectiveness increases at a greater rate when they teach in a supportive and collegial working environment, and when they accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject, or district.



4. More-experienced teachers support greater student learning for their colleagues and their school, as well as for their own students.

Of course, there is variation in teacher effectiveness at every stage of the teaching career, so not every inexperienced teacher is less effective, and not every experienced teacher is more effective.

Nonetheless, policymakers generally craft policy for the norm, and therefore, it is important to recognize that, on average, the most effective 20-year teachers are significantly more effective than the most effective first-year teachers—and these positive effects reach beyond the experienced teacher's individual classroom to benefit the school as a whole.

Our research does not indicate that the passage of time will make all teachers better or make all less competent teachers effective. However, it does indicate that, for most teachers, experience increases effectiveness. The benefits

of teaching experience will be best realized when teachers are carefully selected and well prepared at the point of entry into the teaching workforce, as well as intensively mentored and rigorously evaluated prior to receiving tenure.

Policymakers' first task is to develop policies to attract high-quality individuals into the teaching profession. From there, given what the research says about the benefits of teaching experience,

policies aimed at reducing teacher turnover and accelerating teachers' professional learning should be pursued.

This research suggests that administrators and policymakers might seek to:

1. Increase stability in teacher job assignments so that teachers can refine their instruction at a given grade level and subject, as research shows that teachers who have repeated experience teaching the same grade level or subject area improve more rapidly than those whose experience is in multiple grade levels or subject areas.
2. Create conditions for strong collegial relationships among school staff and a positive and professional working environment, as these contexts are associated with the greatest gains in teacher effectiveness.
3. Strengthen policies to promote the equitable distribution of more-experienced teachers and to discourage the concentration of novice teachers in high-need schools, so that students are not subjected to a revolving door of novice teachers, who are on average less effective than their more-experienced peers.

Other strategies for developing the teaching workforce and reducing turnover have been well documented elsewhere, such as providing clinically based preparation and high-quality mentoring for beginners as well as career advancement opportunities for expert, experienced teachers.

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