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# The academic quality of public school teachers: an analysis of entry and exit behavior

Michael Podgursky ... Donald Watson

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## Abstract

The authors investigate how the labor market decisions of recent college graduates, new teachers, and employers affect the academic quality of the teaching workforce in public schools. They use a rich longitudinal data set of Missouri college graduates and public school teachers to examine the behavior of college graduates concerning an initial decision to secure certification and teach in a public school, and subsequent decisions as to whether to continue. They find that college graduates with above-average ACT scores tend not to select into teaching, however, the effect is most pronounced for elementary school teachers. At any level of academic achievement, women are far more likely than men to teach, however, the relative aversion of high-ability women to teaching is at least as great as that of men. High-ability men and women who do enter public school teaching are more likely to leave than their less talented counterparts.

Examination of non-teaching earnings for exiting teachers finds little evidence that high-ability teachers are leaving for higher pay. The results also highlight very different mobility patterns by teaching field. For both men and women, the attrition of math and science teachers with high ACT scores is greater than in other teaching fields. Finally, peer group effects may be a factor explaining female exit behavior. Controlling for own ACT, high-ability women who work with low-ability colleagues are more likely to exit.



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## Keywords

Teacher salaries; Educational finance; Educational economics

## JEL classification

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