



## Opinion Article

# A Study of Teacher Turnover in International Schools was conducted to know the Choices

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## INTRODUCTION

A teacher's decision to leave a school can be viewed as a very personal choice, as indeed it is. However personal that choice may be, it does have an impact on the school the teacher has chosen to leave. Viewed in isolation, the departure of one teacher from a school may be considered to have a minimal impact. Nonetheless, when substantial numbers of teachers leave a school, the cumulative impact on the school grows to be debilitating. While the numbers vary depending on the source, studies indicate that in the United States in recent years; somewhere between 16% to 20% of all teachers choose to leave the school in which they are teaching that year. It is little wonder that teacher retention has been identified as a national crisis in the United States.

This study explored expatriate teacher turnover in international schools. Two hundred and eighty-one international teachers completed a questionnaire identifying which variables influenced their decision to leave at the end of their first contract. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, this study revealed that three causal factors were viewed as influential by the respondents; administrative leadership, compensation and personal circumstances. Qualitative data revealed that proprietary schools also suffer from the perception of operational decisions being driven by a profit incentive.

## DIPLOMA PROGRAMME (DP)

Diploma Programme (DP) is designed for students in grades eleven and twelve. For a school to offer any of the

three IB programmes, it must apply for authorization and be granted permission by the IBO. Thus, the IBO serves a regulatory function for international schools that choose to offer their programmes, but it only addresses variables that directly relate to the consistency and quality of the programme delivery. As of October 2007, the IBO works with 2132 schools in 125 countries serving 571,000 students ("International Baccalaureate Organization website", 2007). Even less structured are two sister organizations, the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) and the Council of International Schools (CIS). While these two organizations offer accreditation services, it is not necessary to be accredited to join either of them. Regional associations of international schools also exist, such as the East Asia Regional Council of Overseas Schools (EARCOS). Such organizations generally exist in order to facilitate professional development, recognizing that it is much more cost effective to join economic forces in organizing workshops and conferences. While the above mentioned organizations seem to suggest that member schools share a high degree of similarity that is decidedly not the case (Hayden and Thompson, 1998). For example, in the combined E/CIS community of schools, the majority of its membership is comprised of schools with students from 25 or more nationalities, but there are schools with student populations of up to 100% host country nationals. Additionally, some member schools are not for profit institutions, while some are proprietary. As such, the governance models range from externally managed to board governed, with multiple differences in board composition and mandate.

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This independent quality of international schools means that collecting comprehensive and accurate data on issues such as teacher turnover has proven very difficult. The ECIS and CIS organizations have for some years cooperated in the administration of an annual survey of their member schools, which offers useful data on a number of fronts. However, while the data these surveys offer regarding teachers leaving schools paint a rudimentary picture of the degree of turnover, they do not offer specific enough information to insightfully analyze the phenomenon of teacher turnover in international schools. Nonetheless, in the survey conducted for the 2005-2006 school year, among the 270 schools who responded to this portion of the questionnaire there were 3193 teachers who left from the total population of 22098. That represents a turnover rate of 14.4%, a figure which places at least these international schools close to the troublesome percentages cited for U.S. schools.

In addition to the financial drain on schools, high teacher

turnover is a drain on the social capital of the school. When teachers leave a school, they remove themselves from the complex and intricate social fabric of that institution. All the experience and expertise acquired while in that school leaves with the person, and the hole that is left may or may not be filled with someone of equal experience and expertise. In fact, studies show that in many cases he or she is not. Additionally, the cohesion, coherence and continuity associated with successful organizations is seriously impacted. "High rates of teacher turnover are of concern not only because they may be an outcome indicating underlying problems in how well schools function, but also because they can be disruptive, in and of themselves, for the quality of school community and performance". While it is difficult to determine whether problematic schools are caused by or provoke teacher turnover, it is clear that high teacher turnover takes a serious toll on the human side of a school's operations.