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# Science Teachers' Turnover, Dissatisfaction High, Survey Finds

By David J. Hoff

Science teachers of just about every experience level aren't satisfied with their jobs and are thinking about leaving the profession, a national survey suggests.

Almost 40 percent of those questioned said they are considering leaving their jobs for another career or to retire, and they listed job dissatisfaction as the main reason, according to the National Science Teachers Association's poll of 1,370 of its members.

"The scary part is ... these are the people who are actively involved in science education," Gerald F. Wheeler, NSTA's execu-

tive director, said in an interview. "I would not have predicted that at least one-third of all cohorts are thinking about leaving the profession."

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that the nation's schools will need to find 2.2 million new teachers in the next decade to replace those who are nearing retirement and to handle increases in enrollment.

Schools will need to recruit 200,000 science and math teachers over the next 10 years for middle schools and high schools, the department says.

As in other surveys, the NSTA poll suggests that schools will not be able to count on new re-

cruits as a long-term solution to the problem.

Thirty-two percent of teachers with one to three years' experience and 37 percent of those with four to six years in the classroom, are thinking about leaving the survey found.

The teachers mostly likely to list "dissatisfaction with job" as prompting their desire to leave said they weren't being paid enough and lacked the support of their principals.

The findings are similar to those in a variety of other teacher surveys. For example, an analysis of federal data found that 19 percent of 1992 college graduates who had started teaching by the 1993-94 school

year had left the classroom by 1996-97. (*See Quality Counts 2000, Education Week, Jan. 13, 2000.*)

## Help at Entry Level

Such numbers, Mr. Wheeler said, reveal that schools need to find ways to introduce teachers slowly into the profession, and to offer mentors, light teaching loads, and plenty of professional development to keep them interested and engaged in the field.

The problem may hit schools from the other end of the pipeline as well. About 40 percent of the NSTA members surveyed said they had 20 or more years of experience.

Of those, 44 percent reported that they were considering leaving their jobs. The most likely reason is to retire.

The NSTA findings buttress calls for better working conditions and salaries so that teachers will want to stay in their jobs for the rest of their careers, according to a spokeswoman for the National Education Association. "It wastes precious time and resources to constantly be starting from scratch," Melinda Anderson of the 2.2 million-member union said.

**FOLLOW-UP:** "NSTA Survey: Science Teacher Credentials, Assignments, and Job Satisfaction" is available online at [www.nsta.org](http://www.nsta.org).

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