

More U.S. Teachers New On the Job
Greg Toppo, USA Today
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As children settle in to the classroom this month, they may notice: There are a lot of green, inexperienced teachers out there.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania analyzed the most recent federal surveys and found that, in a bid to replace both retiring teachers and those who quit, schools are hiring large numbers of new teachers.

"There's this constant replenishment of beginners going on," said Penn researcher Richard Ingersoll. Increasingly, he said, teachers "are not sticking around," and up to half of those entering the profession leave within five years.

High attrition rates, combined with rising hiring rates, have created a more than threefold increase in the number of inexperienced teachers: In the 1987-88 school year, about 65,000 first-year teachers taught our kids; by 2007-08, the latest year for which federal data are available, the number had grown to more than 200,000.

Ingersoll said an update of the data, due early next year from the U.S. Education Department, will probably show the trend continuing.

While the profession is graying as Baby Boomer teachers approach retirement, Ingersoll found that it's also "greening" as schools replace those who leave: Teachers with only one year of experience make up the largest single group of educators.

"We call these folks the New Majority," said Heather Peske of Teach Plus, a Boston-based non-profit group that works to improve teacher quality in six cities. Teach Plus' research suggests that teachers with 10 years of experience or less comprise 52% of the teaching force.

"From what we're seeing, we're more likely to see schools with many new teachers instead of one or two -- and that's a big difference," said Susan Fuhrman, president of Columbia University's Teachers College.

Ingersoll said schools wouldn't have to work so hard recruiting new teachers if they focused on keeping the ones they have. The Obama administration wants to recruit 10,000 math and science teachers a year, but Ingersoll points out that schools lose 25,000 teachers annually to retirement and attrition.

"We actually produce enough," he said. "But the turnover of math and science teachers is what drives the problem."