

**High School Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Compensation in  
Two Large Central California School Districts<sup>1</sup>**

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1. This study was based on a research project completed by the first author, under the supervision of the second author, in partial completion of the Ed.D. degree in educational leadership at St. Mary's College.

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**ABSTRACT**

California public school districts use a single salary schedule that pays teachers on the basis of their years of experience and education units and degrees. Many school districts limit what they will pay a newly hired teacher to no higher than a seventh year step regardless of experience. There's an increasing need for teachers in the next decade to keep pace with the growing enrollment and teacher retirement, yet large numbers of teachers are leaving the profession. Reasons teachers leave and efforts to address teacher's jobs satisfaction and compensation are discussed. Literature supports that salary is among one of many reasons teachers are leaving the profession. This causal-comparative study compared compensations in two Central California school districts of similar size & socioeconomics status to high school teachers' overall job satisfaction. Specific variables included: salary; benefits packages; and advancement and/or lateral moves. Sixty-one participants (male - 22; female – 39) completed a Job Satisfaction Survey adapted from the Internet ([www.careervision.org](http://www.careervision.org)) to determine participants overall job satisfaction. Data were analyzed using Excel. This non-random study's results supported literature that shows the importance that salary plays in teacher's overall job satisfaction. Implications to school districts include: merit pay, reducing attrition rate, and broadening school-based decision-making.

## **High School Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Compensation in Two Large Central California School Districts**

All California public school districts have a "...single salary schedule which pays individual teachers on the basis of their years of experience and educational units and degrees, has been used by nearly every state and school district for more than fifty years" (Odden, 2000). Most California school districts will pay a new teacher no higher than a seventh year step, regardless of how many years of experience the newly hired teacher brings with them. Many veteran teachers, who have taught for seven years or more, who would like to change districts for professional and/or personal reasons, can't unless they make drastic income cuts.

Since there are many reasons teachers consider changing districts, it would benefit both students and educators if teachers are employed in school districts that best meet educators' personal and professional goals, and financial needs. The purpose of this study is to compare teachers' job satisfaction as it relates to compensation in two Central California public school districts.

### **TEACHERS LEAVING THE PROFESSION**

Two million teachers need to be recruited in the next decade to keep pace with the growing enrollment and aging teacher workforce (Hardy, 1999). While the United States has an increasing need for teachers, large numbers of teachers are leaving the profession (Heller, Clay, & Perkins, 1992). The problem really isn't based on teacher shortage, but with teacher retention (Hardy, 1999). Fifty percent of America's beginning school teachers leave the classroom within their first seven years of experience and never return (Byrne, 1998).

"Educators across the country are alarmed by the large number of teachers who leave the profession due to the daily demands and pressures with which they are confronted" (Anderson,

Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999). Many teachers decide that the rewards of teaching aren't worth the low pay and even lower status. Reasons cited for leaving the profession include: retirement, pregnancy or child rearing, pursuing another career, and personal or health reasons. When dissatisfied teachers were asked what convinced them to leave, factors cited in order of importance were: student discipline problems, poor student motivation, inadequate administrative support, poor salary, and lack of influence over school practices. Salary or benefits were cited as 6.5 percent of the reason teachers leave the profession (Hardy, 1999).

Heller, Clay, & Perkins (1992) used the *Job Satisfaction Survey* as a gauge of teacher satisfaction. Three of the six lowest mean scores involved financial considerations. Teachers are asked to do an impossible task for insufficient pay. The national average salary of teachers is \$37,000 (Byrne, 1998). Although most teachers are attracted to the profession by the intrinsic satisfaction of working with students, research has found that teachers cite low pay as one of the major reasons for leaving (Morice & Murray, 2003). Low salaries also contribute to low morale (Byrne, 1998) which often leads to burnout.

Teachers experiencing burnout usually begin their careers with high ideals and good intentions. They tend to be idealistic, highly motivated, extremely competent teachers who realize that they cannot make the difference they once thought they could (Craig & Baucum, 2002). Burnout is defined as, "...excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by oneself or by the values of society" (Speck, 1993). "The core of burnout is the depletion of an individual's energetic resources, which includes emotional and cognitive fatigue as well as physical fatigue (Anderson, et al., 1999).

Surprisingly, Byrne (1998) did not find one clear-cut causal factor for burnout. In the literature he examined, higher salaries were scarcely mentioned. He found that problems with administrators and problems with students were the dominant burnout factors.

### **EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION AND COMPENSATION**

“Despite their desire to leave the teaching profession, about one third of the teachers remain in their teaching positions” (Anderson, et al., 1999). School districts need to give more attention to increasing teacher job satisfaction. The National Commission on Excellence in Education’s 1983 report suggested that districts increase salaries in order to recruit better qualified teachers (Figlio, 2002). Teachers are generally responsive to salaries in making both entry and exit decisions. “Numerous studies describe a positive cross-sectional relationship between teacher qualifications... and teacher salaries” (Figlio, 2002).

Figlio questioned if the positive relationship could be due to factors other than differences in teacher salaries. “The results suggest that if a school district unilaterally raises its salaries relative to others in its county, it will increase the quality level of the experienced teachers it hires” (Figlio, 2002). While Colorado and California legislators enacted legislation encouraging districts to modify new teacher salary schedules, Florida’s legislature required these changes (Odden, 2000).

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

With the number of teachers leaving the profession for a variety of reasons, including low salaries, and the increasing number of new teachers needed, the researcher specifically studied two different school districts regarding teacher job satisfaction and compensation. Compensation

includes salary, benefits package, and opportunities for advancement and/or lateral moves.

Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does salary affect teachers' job satisfaction?
2. Do benefit packages affect teachers' job satisfaction?
3. Does advancement and/or making lateral moves affect teachers' job satisfaction?

The researcher predicts in this causal-comparative study that there will be an increase in teachers' job satisfaction in districts that pay veteran teachers entering anywhere on the pay scale as compared to teacher job satisfaction in districts who do not pay veteran teachers beyond the 7th year pay step.

## **METHOD**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participants were high school teachers from two central California school districts during the 2003-04 school year. The sample sized used, 35 (22 = female; 13 = male) and 26 (17 = female; 9 = male) were considered adequate. Several teachers who volunteered in both districts failed to complete their surveys; hence they were dropped from the study. The final data sample consisted of 61 teachers. The treatment of human subjects was in accordance with the ethical standards of the APA.

Teachers in the sample ranged from one to 30 years experience with an average of eight years. Forty-one teachers (67%) are veteran teachers who have taught seven or more years; 20 teachers (33%) have taught six years or less. Eleven (18%) are special education teachers; 50 (82%) are regular education teachers. All have their bachelor's degree and teaching credential; 26% have a master's degree; 6% have an administrative credential, and 3% indicated yet another type of degree.

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

To obtain the data needed for this study; a Job Satisfaction questionnaire was selected from the Internet ([www.careervision.org](http://www.careervision.org)) and adapted to measure teacher satisfaction. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction on 12 questions using a four-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; and Strongly Agree. Four additional questions provided demographic information. A sample survey was created and tested.

## **DESIGN AND PROCEDURE**

Two different Central Valley School districts of similar size and socioeconomic status were selected based on the researcher's convenience. The first district selected was Modesto City Schools. This district limits teachers to starting at the seventh year on the pay schedule regardless of years of experience. Permission to survey teachers was obtained from the principal of Johansen High School. This non-random population included 35 of the 39 respondents who volunteered to complete the survey via an email request sent to all JHS Teachers.

The second district selected was Turlock Unified School District, a district that pays newly hired teachers according to their years of experience. The researcher contacted Turlock's personnel director to obtain volunteer permission. The high school summer school teachers at Pittman High School were selected. Thirty-one surveys were distributed during the first faculty meeting; 26 were completed.

The data was inputted into Excel. Scores were coded by the researcher. Survey questions were coded using the following criteria: Strongly Disagree – one point; Disagree – two points; Agree – three points; and Strongly Agree – four points. An overall teacher job satisfaction score was given to each respondent by adding up the questions' point values.

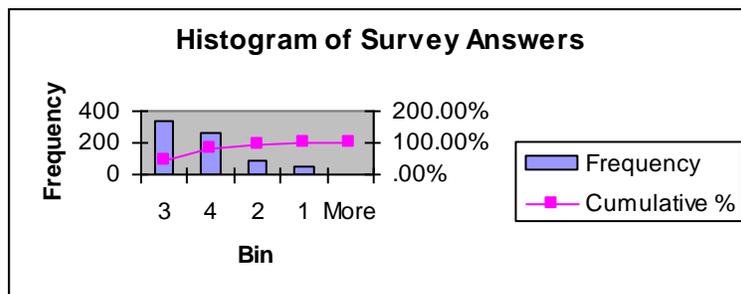
This was a non-random sample, so the statistical technique used to assess group variance of survey scores was Chi square. Both groups overall job satisfaction scores were combined and arranged in order of point values. Then the Median was calculated. To calculate Chi square scores were divided into  $\leq$  the Median and  $>$  than the Median. This analysis allowed a comparison between mean scores for each of the three independent variables and the dependent variable, teacher job satisfaction. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Odds ratios were completed to determine the magnitude of statistical significance.

### RESULTS

To get an overview of data, summary statistics were completed on each question for both groups. Then the researcher combined each group's answers and completed additional descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics for overall job satisfaction and for the 12 items measured by the Job Satisfaction Survey are shown in Table 1.

A histogram was used to calculate individual and cumulative frequencies for cell range of data and data bins. This generates data for the number of occurrences of a value in the data set (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Histogram of Survey Answers.



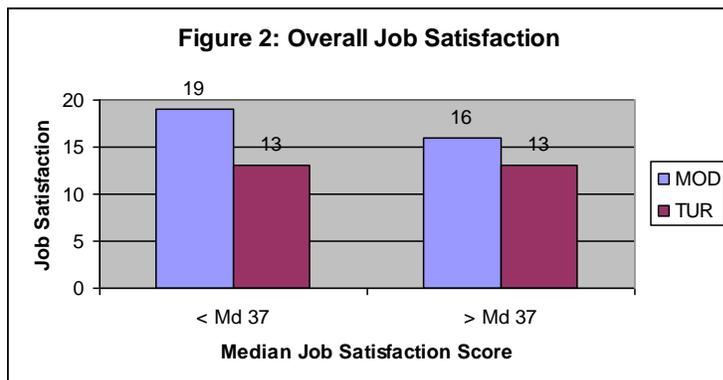


To get a better understanding of the areas where teachers were most satisfied or unsatisfied, the researcher combined answers from both districts for each question. Then the number of fours, representing strongly agree, were counted for each question indicating high job satisfaction. The number of ones for each question, representing strongly disagree, were counted, indicating low job satisfaction. Table 2 shows these results.

**Table 2. Reported Areas of Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction**

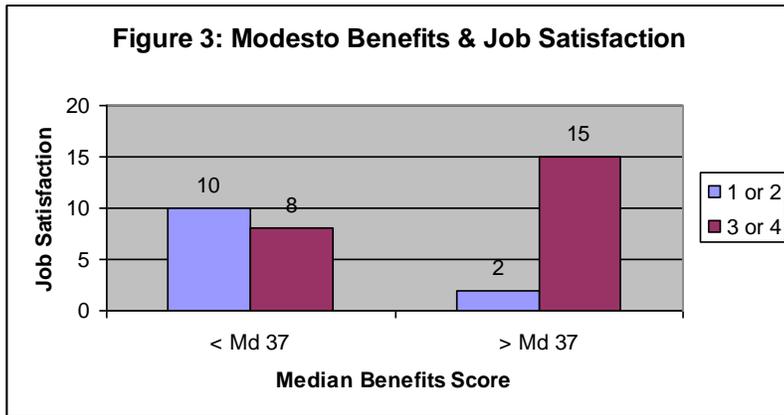
<b>Areas of High Job Satisfaction</b>	<b>Frequency of Score 4: Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
My job requires a good mix of my skills.	40	66%
I feel good about how my work can benefit others.	35	57%
I enjoy my coworkers.	35	57%
I like the level of responsibility I am given in my work.	28	46%
<b>Areas of Low Job Satisfaction</b>	<b>Frequency of Score 1: Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
My school district offers a good benefits package.	9	14%
I am satisfied with how often I handle paperwork.	8	13%
I am happy with the amount of freedom I have to decide how I approach my work.	4	7%

To determine if there was a difference between the two school districts' overall teachers' job satisfaction, Chi square was calculated. There was no statistical significance in overall job satisfaction.  $X^2(1) = 0.74, p = 0.11, n.s.$  See Figure 2.

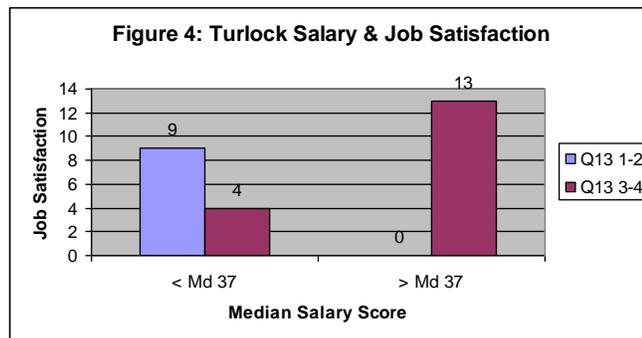


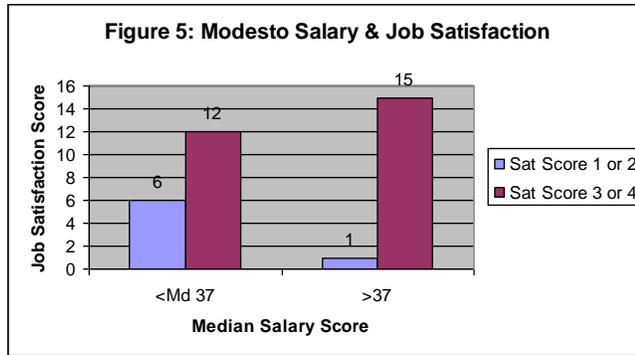
Next, Chi square was calculated on the three independent variables (salary, benefits package, and advancement) in relation to the dependent variable, overall teachers' job satisfaction. The Chi square test indicated that advancement and/or lateral moves was not significantly significant; Turlock,  $X^2(1) = 0.39, p = 0.75, n.s.$ ; Modesto,  $X^2(1) = 0.23, p = 1.41, n.s.$

When the researcher calculated the Chi square regarding a good benefits package to overall job satisfaction, there was a difference in the two school districts' responses. For Turlock, there was no statistical significance;  $X^2(1) = 0.07, p = 3.38, n.s.$ ; however, there was statistical significance for Modesto;  $X^2(1) = 0.01, p = 7.44$ ; odds ratio 0.007 (see Figure 3).



The final dependent variable calculation was completed on salary compared to the overall teacher's job satisfaction. Both school districts showed statistical significance; Turlock  $X^2(1) = 0.000207, p = 13.76$ ; odds ratio 1.0 (see Figure 4); and Modesto  $X^2(1) = 0.05, p = 3-80$ ; odds ratio 1.00 (see Figure 5).





### DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate the importance that salary plays in teachers' overall job satisfaction. The conclusions support the hypothesis that salary affects overall job satisfaction. This study showed that teachers' highest area of satisfaction was that their job requires a good mix of their skills. When the numbers of scores of one were calculated, the researcher found that teachers were most dissatisfied with their district's benefits package. When Chi square was calculated for benefits, only the Modesto district showed statistical significance. Advancement and/or lateral moves had no affect on overall teacher satisfaction.

Based on literature, it is not surprising that salary played a role in job satisfaction; however, it was the Turlock district that pays teachers at any place on the salary schedule that was more unsatisfied with salary. On the other hand, it was not surprising that Modesto was unsatisfied with benefits. All district contributions are added on top of the salaries. The district does this because it makes retirement salaries higher.

Salary and job satisfaction are supported in the literature. Heller, et al. (1992) found that teachers were most dissatisfied with the financial aspect of teaching. "Schools can succeed in luring high-quality teachers away from other districts by unilaterally raising salaries" (Figlio, 2002). The results support the research found by Figlio (2002). There is a "...positive, statistically

significant relation between changes in a school district's teacher salaries and its likelihood of recruiting higher-qualified teachers..."

Furthermore, "Researchers found that burnout is related to intention to leave and to actual job leaving. As performers of service work that involves heavy interaction with people, teachers are particularly vulnerable to burnout symptoms" (Rosenblatt, 2001). When the tendency to quit was studied, Rosenblatt reported, "...salaries and working conditions have been found to be the most important determinants of quit decisions for teachers."

Salary isn't the only aspect that contributes to job satisfaction. Pastor and Erlandson (1982) concluded that, "Achievement, recognition, and responsibility were factors which contributed to teacher satisfaction." Additionally, "Teachers' major source of satisfaction comes from intrinsic or psychic rewards."

The research has two external validity limitations: population and ecological. Because the research is non-random data, the results can not be applied to any other population. Also, the Turlock population was summer school teachers who come from various schools and districts as opposed to teachers on one comprehensive school site. Since the researchers is a teacher in the Modesto district, there's the experiment effect due to researcher's bias.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

This study's outcomes have implications for school districts regarding teachers' job satisfaction. Clearly, more thought and study needs to occur regarding financial compensation that increases teachers' overall job satisfaction. Merit pay is one area that needs further exploration. Morice and Murray (2003) found that teachers "...valued salary bonuses for meeting performance improvement targets." They concluded that "...monetary incentives do affect recruitment,

retention, and attendance.” With the implementation of point values worth approximately \$150.00 per point, “Annual teacher salary increases have averaged approximately 5%.”

Reducing the attrition rate is another key area studied by Hardy (1999). “The era of the 30- to 35-year career teacher is gone. We’re going to see a profession in which if a teacher stays five to seven years, that’s a senior teacher. And that’s not good for America.” Not only should districts provide opportunities to attend conferences and learn new teaching strategies; teachers should be paid a stipend.

Another strategy for improving teachers’ satisfaction was reported by Byrne (1998). “...the most effective step to reduce their burnout and to increase the effectiveness of their school would be the broadening of school-based decision-making powers in all areas of school life.” School districts need to consider what decisions can be made at the site level and empower teachers to help make decisions.

The researcher encourages all schools districts to experiment with various kinds of teacher compensation discussed above. The research can best be summarized with a quote from Morice and Murray (2003) about good teachers.

The fact that teachers enter their profession for the intrinsic satisfaction of working with students does not rule out the possibility that they will be motivated by extrinsic factors as well. In fact, opportunities to increase salary through performance-coupled with goal setting, collaboration, and participative management—may well enhance the intrinsic motivation that good teachers bring to their profession.

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## GLOSSARY

**job burnout** “A feeling of being unable to endure the job any more, accompanied by a strong sense of dread each morning when it’s time to go to work...a psychological state of emotional exhaustion, often accompanied by extreme cynicism, that is especially prevalent among individuals in the helping profession” (Craig & Baucum, 2002, p. 562-563). Another definition of burnout is, “Excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectations imposed by oneself or by the values of society” (Speck, 1993).

**job satisfaction score** The score for each respondent when survey questions five through sixteen were calculated using the following criteria: strongly disagree – 1 point; disagree – 2 points; agree – 3 points; strongly agree – 4 points.

**salary schedule** A chart of pay for certificated employees in a school district that lists the actual pay based on years of experience; degrees; and number of additional college units completed

**salary schedule step** Listed vertically are the actual years of teaching experience. Listed horizontally in columns, the degree and number of units completed in addition to teach degree listed. For example, BA + 12 or With Master’s, BA + 24.

**veteran teachers** Credentialed teachers who have taught seven or more years