

## **RETENTION OF CERTIFIED FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES TEACHERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER SUPPLY AND DEMAND**

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*This study examined the opinions of certified family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers from a large Midwestern State who are not currently teaching. A total of 188 useable surveys were received. Respondents emphasized how choices for their own families affected their choice not to teach. These reasons including moving, care giving for children and other family members, better paying job opportunities, and inability to find a teaching position in the location they chose to live. Other respondents indicated that the extra responsibilities of FCS teachers and the types of students in classes today were deterrents to staying in the classroom. The results of this study indicate that the solution to the teacher shortage in FCS is not simply a matter of supply, but one of retention. More effort needs to be made to keep practicing FCS teachers in the classroom.*

Meeting the need for Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) teachers is of great concern to the profession. It was one of the important outcomes of the Critical Issues Committee Report to the Strategic Planning Committee of AAFCS (Vincenti, Crase, Barnes, Duncan, Eubanks, Jorgensen, Mimbs, & Wooldridge 1998). The teacher shortage in FCS although well documented (Jackman & Rehm, 1994; Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Mimbs, 1995; Morse, 1988) has not provided solutions to increase the supply of teachers. The foci of such studies about supply and demand have been opinion surveys directed at school administrators and practicing teachers. A recent study by Mimbs, Stewart & Heath-Camp, (1998) about career motivations of graduates of FCS teacher education programs recommended further research of a qualitative nature to determine why many recent graduates are not teaching. They also suggested finding a target audience who has a commitment to the FCS profession. Understanding why certified teachers are not teaching may help FCS teacher educators and administrators develop placement and retention strategies.

### **Purposes and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine issues related to retention of certified FCS teachers. The critical issues addressed in this research project were focused around the following three research questions.

1. What are the personal, employment, and educational characteristics of certified FCS teachers who are not teaching?
2. Why are FCS certified teachers choosing not to teach?
3. How can FCS teacher educators, teacher preparation, and state certification personnel facilitate retention and retraining programs?

## Related Literature

Teacher education professionals have begun the challenge of finding solutions to the FCS teacher shortage. Lee (1998) encourages irregular certification for non-traditional preservice teachers. Irregular certification includes more flexible scheduling of classes, credit for life and work experiences, special summer sessions, and collaboration with school systems. Travers (1999) targeted specific groups in a successful specialized recruitment effort. Potential teachers were recruited from alumni who were already degreed in related disciplines, teacher assistants who were already working in schools, and undeclared majors.

Those who choose to be teachers do so for the same reasons that take them out of the classroom; caring about others, wanting to help young people, nurturing, family values, and other altruistic reasons (Mimbs, Stewart, & Heath-Camp, 1998; Serow, 1993, 1994; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992). Lee (1998) noted that non-traditional preservice FCS teachers indicated that balancing many work and family responsibilities was as a barrier to pursuing certification. Non-traditional teachers are mostly female, over 30 years of age, and have multiple responsibilities in their lives. Adding traditional teacher education delivery systems to the mix makes it very difficult for some students to obtain certification.

Other studies have identified the same barriers to becoming and remaining teachers including time, family, work, and financial concerns (Griffin, 1997; Hammer & Rohr, 1992). Providing more financial assistance to FCS preservice teachers would help with recruitment of professionals. Other sources of economic support for teachers include scholarships and other incentives. Sarason (1993) suggested that economic conditions such as low pay and time away from work to seek certification are hindering many that would like to teach from doing so. Nearly one half of the graduates in the study by Mimbs, (1997) indicated scholarships and grants as one way their education was financed. Some of the graduates surveyed in that study were aware of the teacher shortage. One respondent wrote, "I would like to see FACS recognized as a shortage area so we can gain help with school expenses." Another wrote, "I personally feel that more scholarships and funding in FACS would increase students and professional interest." (p. 57).

Preservice FCS teachers in the study by Mimbs, Stewart, and Heath-Camp (1998) overwhelmingly indicated the top two values of "helping other people" and "family" as influential factors for why they chose to pursue teacher certification. In addition, 84% said their interest in FCS subject matter influenced their choice of FCS as their teaching discipline. One person in the study by Mimbs (1997) wrote "The main reason for choosing FCS teaching for me was my love for the curriculum" (p. 55). Yet many certified FCS teachers are not teaching, so more needs to be done not only to recruit more teachers but to retain those who are certified as well.

Teacher retention has long been recognized as a concern for the education system (San Nicolas, & Avilla, 1993; Gonzalez, 1995; Schnorr, 1995; Shen, 1997; Hope, 1999). In a recent study of FCS graduates, nearly one-third were not teaching although certified (Mimbs, Stewart, & Heath-Camp, 1998). A longitudinal study by Marso & Pigge (1996) revealed that only 29% of teachers remained in teaching after seven years. The Teacher Follow-up Survey indicated the attrition rate of 6.6% for teachers in public schools from 1993-94 to 1995-96 (Whitener et al, 1997). A longitudinal study by Cohen et al (1990) showed 46% of traditional teachers were still teaching after 5-6 years, compared to 85% of nontraditional teachers (those who made teaching a second career or who entered teaching later in their life). In examining opinions of the 46% who were teaching after 5 years, only 18% indicated they intended to stay in teaching.

The state of Missouri found that 45% of teachers who received their education degrees in 1994-95 in the state were not teaching four years later. In addition, about one-third of graduates who were certified did not go into the state's classrooms within 4 years of graduation. The average annual number of vacancies in FCS in Missouri for 1994-1999 exceeded the number of newly certified persons in FCS. The age of Missouri's teachers is mostly older. In the fall of 1998, about 50% of all teachers in Missouri were over 45 years of age (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000).

The Teacher Education Council for FCS in Missouri was given the directive from certification personnel to survey certified persons who were not teaching to provide the state with more accurate information on the supply of FCS teachers. It was assumed by some that a real shortage did not exist as certification records show a large number of available certified teachers in the state. It is hoped that information from this study will help in understanding the discrepancies in perception between those preparing teachers and those maintaining the certification records.

## **Method**

### Subjects

The subjects for this study were all certified FCS teachers who were listed as not currently teaching in Missouri. The names and addresses of these persons were obtained from the state certification files. A total of 449 addresses were used for a mail survey to those persons under age 61. Those who were 61 and older were not surveyed because it is expected that they are reaching retirement age and would likely not be planning to return to teaching.

### Survey Procedures

Survey instruments developed by Mimbs, Stewart, & Heath-Camp (1998) and Serow (1994) were adapted for use in this study. The data for this survey was contained in three sections. The first section asked the subjects questions regarding personal, employment, and education demographics. The second section asked subjects to indicate why they were not currently teaching from a list of factors developed by the Teacher Education Council of FCS in the target state. The last section consisted of open-ended questions that asked subjects to elaborate on their reasons for not teaching, and their suggestions for recruitment and retention of FCS teachers. Surveys were coded to identify separately those who hold lifetime certificates in FCS and those with other types of FCS certificates. The other types of certificates were provisional at three different levels, and require re-certification at regular intervals to remain valid. Two mailings of the survey and one reminder postcard were sent. A total of 161 surveys were undeliverable and returned due to invalid addresses, which left 288 deliverable. A total of 188 useable surveys were received for a 65% return rate which included 107 respondents who were not teaching and 81 who were actually teaching. The 107 respondents who were not teaching included 68% (n = 71) with lifetime certificates and 32% (n= 36) with other types of FCS certificates.

## **Data Analysis**

Primary analysis of the demographics and reasons given for not teaching were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency distributions and percentages. The open-ended questions were analyzed using QSR NUD\*IST Vivo (NVIVO) software for qualitative analysis (Richards, 1999). This software examines respondent's text entries for themes or nodes and

similar responses. These were tabulated and recorded based on their frequency of appearance, summarized, and then compared to the list of given factors.

### Findings

Personal demographics indicated that 35% of respondents were over 50 years of age. A total of 82% were married and 51% had children living in the home. Only 7% were non-Caucasian, while 41% live in the central region of the state. It was found that 17%, although listed as not teaching, were indeed teaching FCS. Another 23% were teaching other subjects but not FCS. A total of 67% of respondents said they had previously taught FCS and 56% indicated they would consider teaching again. Satisfaction with current career choice was very high with 53% very satisfied and 34% somewhat satisfied.

There were 21% who indicated they would retire from their current occupation in the next 3-5 years and another 14% within 6-10 years. Teaching FCS was the first career choice of 75% of respondents. A total of 52% indicated they taught after being full-time homemakers and/or parents and 45% also indicated they interrupted teaching to be a full-time homemaker and/or parent.

Reasons most often indicated for not currently teaching FCS were: “I am employed in another occupation”, “The pay is too low in the teaching profession”, “I have not been able to secure a teaching job in the geographical area in which I want to live”, “There are too many extra responsibilities for FCS teachers”, and “I am a full-time homemaker and/or parent” (See Table 1).

Those who indicated they were not teaching FCS at the secondary level were working in a wide variety of occupations. Several were teaching adult education. Others were teaching elementary grades, special education, English, science and other subjects. Still others were nutritionists, librarians, medical office workers, seamstresses, curriculum writers, or were working as counselors as well as several other occupations.

Those with a lifetime certificate (68% of respondents) more often made their career choice while in secondary school and are currently working in other occupations than those with other certificates. They indicated they were not able to find a teaching job in the area they wanted to live, the pay was too low for teachers, and there were too many extra responsibilities for family and consumer sciences teachers. Those with other FCS certifications (32% of respondents) were mostly younger and more of them made their career choice while in college than lifetime certificate holders.

Table 1  
*Reasons for Currently Not Teaching (n=107: Comparison of Lifetime Certificate Holders n=71 and Other FCS Certificates n=36)*

Reasons Indicated for Currently Not Teaching	Lifetime Certificate Holders	Other FCSE Certification
I am employed in another occupation.	41	33
Other	17	10
I have not been able to secure a teaching job in the geographical area in which I want to live.	16	5
The pay is too low in the teaching profession.	13	12
I am a full-time homemaker and/or parent.	12	9

There are too many extra responsibilities for family and consumer sciences teachers.	11	9
I have allowed my certification to lapse. I have allowed my certification to lapse.	*	9
I do not feel I have the skills to teach today's youth.	8	4
I am self-employed.	8	3
I am attending graduate school.	5	7
I choose not to work outside the home for gainful employment.	5	3
I did not find teaching rewarding. I did not find teaching rewarding. I did not find teaching rewarding.	4	2
I have not been able to secure the type of position that I am most interested in teaching.	3	5
I do not feel prepared to teach.	3	4
I do volunteer work.	3	4

Responses to two of four open-ended questions asked on the survey are reported here with a summary of responses.

1. Have you previously taught FCS? If yes, why did you make the decision to leave?

Other occupations, and parenting or care for children were the most common themes generated from the open-ended comments of participants. Moves for husband, family, or to take a job, unavailability of teaching jobs in desired locations and graduate school or retraining followed as the next most frequent themes. Family issues, extra responsibilities, and problem student behavior were common in the comments of respondents. One respondent described it this way:

I feel many teachers 'burn out' because they take the job home with them, so they don't have the recuperative time needed to be able to meet the demands of teaching in today's public schools. I feel that the public wants the teachers to do more and more but are not willing to pay them for the extra demand placed on them or give them more time to perform these duties.

The frustration and stress of teaching, lack of administrative support, and elimination of positions were also cited as reasons for leaving teaching (See Table 2). For many persons, it was a combination of factors and a timing of events, which caused the continued absence from the classroom. Two examples follow:

I left to take a library position. My husband died and I left that job to take over two businesses. Two years ago I closed one business and went back to school to get elementary certification" and "I moved out of state...did not have certification...then decided to become a full-time homemaker.

Table 2

*Summary of open-ended responses to “Why did you make the decision to leave FCS Teaching?”*

Common Themes	Number of Responses
Caring for children / pregnancy	25
Other occupation	23
Move for family or job	17
Graduate school or retraining	14
Unavailability of teaching job in desired location	13
Problem student behavior	13
Extra responsibilities, too much time	10
Pay too low for teachers	10
Family issues	8
Retired or currently still teaching	8
Lack of administrative support for FCS	7
FCS position reduced or eliminated	7
Frustration and stress of teaching	7
Lack of preparation for teaching	2

Note. Some respondents made multiple comments and they were each coded separately.

## 2. What suggestions do you have for recruitment and retention of FCS teachers?

Improving the image of FCS profession and programs was a recurring theme for increasing retention and recruitment of FCS teachers. A total of 31 persons indicated a need for this. One person wrote, “Home economics is no longer a high profile class like it was when I was in high school. Students do not see home economics as a consumer-based class”.

Closely connected to a need to improve the image of FCS was the need for more support from administrators, counselors, school boards, and others for the important subjects taught in FCS. Additionally respondents commented that FCS classrooms have become a dumping ground for special needs students. One respondent wrote, “My classes became a dumping ground for behavior problems. I felt like a probation officer, not a teacher” and another declared “Lack of support from administration. I disagree with a no retention, no detention, no suspension policy”.

Getting needed support for student behavior problems and conditions in today’s schools as well as a concern that new teachers are prepared for these conditions was often mentioned. One person’s comment, which reflects the opinion of many others follows, “They need more intense classroom management techniques to better deal with the problems before they arrive”. Reducing extra responsibilities for new teachers and particularly for FCS teachers was also a common theme described by respondents as a way to retain teachers (See Table 3).

Table 3

*Summary of Responses to “What suggestions do you have for recruitment and retention of family and consumer sciences teachers?”*

Common Themes	Number of Responses
Improve the image of FCS profession or programs	31
Improve support from administration, counselors, school boards	23
Update or change FCS curriculum	22
Increase teacher salaries	21
Job availability including part-time	16
Provide more preservice and continuing education opportunities	16
Get help with student behavior problems	15
Reduce extra responsibilities for FCS teachers	11
Less club sponsorship for new teachers	3

Note. Some respondents made multiple comments and they were each coded separately.

## Discussion

The findings of this study are similar to those of other studies with regard to gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, and parenthood of FCS teachers (Mimbs, Stewart, & Heath-Camp, 1998). Aging of the teaching force will continue to affect teacher supply in FCS. Of the 449 persons listed, 161 were not reachable because of invalid address data. However, with only 99 respondents indicating they might consider returning to teaching FCS, the demand for teacher will be hard to meet. Additionally, 35% of respondents are over age 50 and 35% indicate retirement within 10 years. This will limit the likelihood of them changing careers back to teaching FCS. In addition, 53% had a high satisfaction with their current occupation (namely-not teaching FCS), which would make it more unlikely they would return to the classroom. It might also be assumed that those who did not respond to the survey at all (n=100) were not interested in teaching FCS. This state officially reported 77 open positions for the 2000-01 academic year with many more unreported. With only approximately 10-15 new graduates from the state's FCS teacher preparation institutions expected per year, the teacher supply dilemma will continue as one of high concern.

Making administrators aware of the shortage is important, however, even more important is the retention of certified teachers for the classroom. In a recent newsletter article, Mimbs, (2000) asked school administrators to consider certified teachers who are not teaching as a lost resource, and shared respondents concerns such as extra responsibilities, increase of special needs students, and lack of support from administrators. Getting the message out to administrators about how they can assist teachers, and provide mentoring and support can make change happen and increase retention of certified teachers of FCS.

It is hoped that a comprehensive effort at local and state levels to address FCS teacher supply needs, through cooperation with local and state colleges and universities and state certification boards, will have a direct impact on the recruitment and retention of FCS teachers. This would include an increased effort to create workable articulation agreements between high schools and community colleges with colleges and universities, to facilitate recruitment of transfer students (Collins, Kellett, Miller, & Fahm, 1993). More coordination across state lines

would also increase availability of teachers, if state-licensing barriers did not exist. New regulations in Missouri allow for educators who have certificates from other states to be eligible for initial teaching license in Missouri, as well as any persons holding a PhD degree without training in teacher education. Special assignment certificates are also being issued to allow districts to use non-educators for up to 5% of their teaching staff (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000). A trend in 5th-year or graduate level teacher preparation programs, although not quicker than traditional programs, may provide access to certification for those nontraditional persons who would like to teach (Mimbs & Stout, 1997).

Economic forces of supply and demand do not work in the area of public elementary and secondary education. Control of entry and control of funds is held by the states. State boards of education control criteria for licensing teachers and often wage scales. Some improvement is being made to address the control of states on training and retraining of teachers (Ancarrow, 1991). It is important when preparing new FCS teachers to encourage them to be aware of the possibility of career interruption due to balancing work and family responsibilities and positive steps they can take to better facilitate reentry into teaching. Stewart (1991) suggested that teacher educators and others teach preservice teachers and inservice teachers how to balance work and family roles so they may become role models for the youth they serve.

Maintaining professional involvement is critical. Several persons indicated they were not aware there was a teacher shortage or of the availability of jobs in their state. One person wrote, "I was delighted...shocked to receive your survey. I feel like I have been under a rock. I did not realize the shortage of teachers...I would love to get back into my field".

Many others indicated they would be willing to teach if they could work part-time and still meet their other family needs. Others simply felt the time commitment and extra responsibilities for teaching FCS did not compare to other occupational opportunities and financial rewards. The following comment from one respondent sums it up: "It took every moment of my life. I had six preps and my salary was low. I am now working (outside of teaching) half of the time I spent on teaching for 2 times the salary".

There was mixed reaction by the respondent when asked about the purposes of FCS. For instance, some persons wanted a return to 'cooking and sewing' and more support for those classroom activities. Others felt change had not happened despite the name change and new curriculum. Stereotypes are well established and continue. Simerly (1993) and Ley (1993) explained that the image of FCS cannot be changed without a consistent expression of a clear message of who and what we are. Each has his/her own opportunity to share who and what they are as professionals in FCS and the message is often incongruent (Ley, 1993) as represented by the comments of the respondents below:

I did not go into teaching because people spent a lot of time trying to give home economics a new name, instead of making it clear to long time teachers and administrators that there are very important parts of the program that are being neglected, I recently went back to teaching for a year and found FCS had not moved forward at all in the 20+ years I had been away.

Many respondents suggested a need for more experiences in the classroom prior to teaching. This included suggestions that universities provide more in-classroom experiences for preservice teachers and continuing education for practicing teachers. Beginning FCS teachers identified classroom control as the most important competency for surviving the first years of teaching (Nichols & Mundt, 1996). In the Cohen et al (1990) study, more and earlier classroom experiences were needed to aid in teacher retention. Providing new FCS teachers with strong

mentor teachers would assist them. It has long been recognized that induction of new teachers should include a mentoring component and that this can enhance teacher retention. However, finding qualified mentor teachers in vocational areas like FCS is difficult for small rural schools where there is only one teacher in that discipline (Camp, & Heath, 1988).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

It is vital that qualified FCS professionals be available for the classroom. This study determined that there are many reasons why persons holding certificates are not teaching, was helpful in confirming the need for FCS teachers in Missouri, and demonstrated the seriousness of the shortage. The results of this study indicate that those who prepare teachers cannot control some of the concerns and suggestions for increasing the supply or bringing these non-teaching persons back to the classroom. The need for higher salaries, more part-time positions, mentor teachers, more support in the classroom from administrators and others, and the conditions of schools today cannot be easily changed without cooperation from schools, administrators, state legislators, and others.

The more direct implications of this study for teacher educators include seeking more in-classroom experiences for pre-service teachers, and more in-service workshops and opportunities for practicing teachers for their professional development. Developing ways to teach new pre-service teachers to prepare for career interruption but keep current to ease transition back to teaching is important. To facilitate the balancing of work and family roles, programs might investigate alternative scheduling, streamlining of teacher education programs, and recruitment of second career persons into teaching.

Long term planning for solving the teacher shortage in FCS may involve a combination of new strategies. Further research should include a testing of models, and examination of effective retention, induction, and mentoring programs. The message to us is to recognize the need for updating the image portrayed by some practicing teachers, as well as provision for further professional development opportunities for updating practicing and returning teachers. A continued effort must be made to provide a clear consistent message to all stakeholders of the value of FCS programs to the youth and families they serve. This will enhance opportunities for significant change.

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