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Supply and demand in teacher education:

Teacher Supply

The national supply of public school teachers in any year is defined, in the aggregate, as the number of eligible individuals available from all sources who are willing to supply their services under prevailing conditions. The supply includes qualified individuals who (a) currently hold teaching positions, (b) seek to enter the profession by applying for open positions, and (c) would apply for positions if suitable openings existed. The main factors determining who is available to teach are considered to be the availability of teaching positions relative to the availability of positions in other occupations, teacher wages relative to wages in competing occupations, and working conditions in teaching relative to conditions in other occupations. Unfortunately, no sources of data are capable of providing adequate information about the total supply of teachers thus defined (Gilford and Tenenbaum, 1990).

What is known with reasonable precision is the annual number of teachers hired from among those available through several sources of supply. That is, the number of individuals continuing in public school teaching from one year to the next is known, as is the number of individuals entering public school teaching annually. The former group is often called continuing teachers, and the latter group is often called entering teachers or new hires. Collectively, continuing and entering teachers constitute the cohort of individuals employed as teachers (in short, the teaching force), a group representing an unknown proportion of the potential total supply of teachers.

Aggregate information about the size of the teaching force is of only modest value for understanding teacher supply. In practice, it is virtually the same as aggregate demand. To be useful in understanding the teaching force, information is needed about various sources of supply of individuals hired as teachers, as well as about the composition and distribution of the teaching force. Information at this level of detail could then be related to comparable information about teacher demand in efforts to understand the degree to which teacher demand is being met by qualified individuals, as well as the sources of teachers that might be manipulated by policy in order to provide a more adequate supply.

In practice, the term supply (as in teacher supply and demand) is typically used imprecisely. Instead of referring to total potential supply, the expression teacher supply is used loosely to refer to the composition of the actual teaching force, to potential sources of entering teachers such as recent graduates of teacher preparation programs, and to teacher supply shortages that occasionally occur in some subject matter fields at various geographic locations. The total potential supply of hireable individuals almost always equals or exceeds the number of available teaching positions. Therefore, in the aggregate, the size of the teaching force is usually determined by the demand for teachers as defined by the number of funded teaching positions, not by supply constraints.

Sources of Supply

As previously mentioned, the teaching force is composed of two large groups—employed teachers continuing from year to year and entering teachers in any year. Both are broad categories drawn from more specific sources. Continuing teachers typically have the option of remaining in the same position from one year to the next. Nonetheless, many practicing teachers choose to apply for teaching positions in other schools, in other subject matter fields, or both. Furthermore, some employed teachers may be reassigned to different teaching assignments within a school or reassigned to a different school within the same LEA. Thus, the flows of practicing teachers within the public education system constitute a major source of teachers hired into, or reassigned to, open teaching positions. Their transfer within the system creates openings in positions they vacate, assuming such positions continue to be funded by the LEA. Due to attrition of teachers from the profession and gradual expansion of the total number of teaching positions, a large number of additional individuals are also hired by the public education system each year (Rollefson, 1992). Such entering teachers are drawn from four sources:

1. A reserve pool of qualified teachers composed of:

- experienced former teachers and
- graduates of teacher preparation programs from prior years (sometimes called delayed entrants);

2. Recent graduates of teacher preparation programs (some of whom are also experienced teachers);

3. College graduates who have not completed a teacher preparation program and who have not previously taught (sometimes referred to as entrants via alternate routes); and

4. Teachers employed in private schools who migrate to teaching positions in public schools.

In view of this complexity in the sources of employed teachers, detailed information about flows of teachers into and within the profession is vital to understanding the relative importance of these sources of teacher supply.

Teacher Demand

The national demand for public school teachers is defined operationally, and in the aggregate, as the total number of teaching positions funded by local education agencies (LEAs), i.e., the number that LEAs are able and willing to employ at a given time. Total demand thus defined is the end result of a number of considerations leading to the establishment of teaching positions. The main factors determining teacher demand in any particular year are the number of students enrolled in public schools, policies pertaining to curriculum and teacher-pupil ratios, prior commitments to employed teachers, LEA funding capacity, and the prices that must be paid for various types and qualities of teachers.

Aggregate demand, however, is of little use in understanding the dynamics of demand for the teaching force or in designing policies to ensure an adequate supply of teachers. For these purposes, total demand must be specified in greater detail, i.e., disaggregated by teaching assignment and geographic distribution of the teaching positions.

More specifically, computations of disaggregated teacher demand should be stratified by subject matter, grade level, preparation for serving the special needs of students (especially handicapped students and those with limited English proficiency, region of the country, and urbanicity of schools within which teaching positions have been established. In addition, demand should be specified by the attributes of teachers desired, especially teacher qualifications (their training, degree level, licensure, and experience) and race/ethnicity. When specified at this level of detail, teacher demand can be compared with information about teacher supply to examine supply-demand relationships.

References :

- Books
- Websites

