

## TEACHER EXPERIENCE: What Does the Research Say?

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### Experience makes a difference—especially at the beginning of a teacher’s career.

- On average, **teachers with some experience are more effective than brand new teachers.**<sup>1</sup>
- **Teachers improve the most early in their careers.** One study found that “close to half of the teacher achievement returns to experience arise during the first few years of teaching.”<sup>2</sup>
- The shift from no experience to some experience makes the biggest difference. One study found that “**the bulk of the experience effects occur during the first year,**”<sup>3</sup> while another noted that “the effect of moving from being completely inexperienced to having a full year of experience” matters most.<sup>4</sup>

### However, most teachers reach their peak after about five years in the classroom.

- Teachers gradually reach a plateau after 3-5 years on the job.<sup>5</sup> As one study put it, “**there is little evidence that improvement continues after the first three years.**”<sup>6</sup> Another found that, on average, teachers with 20 years of experience are not much more effective than those with 5 years of experience.<sup>7</sup>
- Some studies suggest that **effectiveness actually declines toward the end of a teacher’s career.** For example, the most experienced high school math teachers may be less effective than their less experienced colleagues<sup>8</sup> and even their inexperienced colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

### Teacher performance varies at all levels of experience.

- Individual teachers tend to improve with experience, but **not all teachers begin their careers with the same skills or rise to the same level.**<sup>10</sup> The fact that a fifth-year teacher is more effective than she was in her first year doesn’t mean she’s more effective than all first-year teachers.
- In fact, research shows that **some less-experienced teachers are more effective than teachers with more experience.**<sup>11</sup> One study found that when layoffs are based on seniority alone, about 80% of the novice teachers who get pink slips are more effective than their lowest-performing colleagues who remain.<sup>12</sup>
- There is limited evidence, but not consensus, that **returns to experience vary based on how a teacher is assigned over the years**—by subject, and by how long they teach the same grade.<sup>13</sup>

## THE BOTTOM LINE

### Experience helps, but it doesn’t tell the full story—and it doesn’t guarantee excellence.

As one study of more than a half-million students concluded, “**experience is not significantly related to achievement following the initial years in the profession.**”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2006). “What Does Certification Tell Us About Teacher Effectiveness?” NBER Working Paper 12155.

<sup>2</sup> Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007). “How and Why Do Teacher Credentials Matter for Student Achievement?” CALDER Working Paper 2.

<sup>3</sup> Harris and Sass (2007). “Teacher Training, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement.” CALDER Working Paper 3.

<sup>4</sup> Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, and Wyckoff (2008). “The Narrowing Gap in Teacher Qualifications and its Implications for Student Achievement.” NBER Working Paper 14021.

<sup>5</sup> Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006). “Teacher-student matching and the assessment of teacher effectiveness.” National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>6</sup> Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005). “Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement.” *Econometrica*, 73(2), 417-458.

<sup>7</sup> Ladd, Helen F. (2008). “Value-Added Modeling of Teacher Credentials: Policy Implications.”

<sup>8</sup> Ladd (2008).

<sup>9</sup> Harris and Sass (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Xu, Hannaway, and Taylor (2009). “Making a Difference? The Effects of Teach for America in High School.” CALDER Working Paper 17. National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research.

<sup>11</sup> Sass, Hannaway, Xu, and Figlio (2010). “Value Added of Teachers in High-Poverty and Lower-Poverty Schools.” CALDER Working Paper 52.

<sup>12</sup> Goldhaber and Theobald (2010). “Assessing the Determinants and Implications of Teacher Layoffs.” Center for Education Data & Research, University of Washington-Bothell.

<sup>13</sup> Ost, Ben (2009). “How do Teachers Improve? The Relative Importance of Specific and General Human Capital.” Cornell University.

<sup>14</sup> Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005). “Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement.” *Econometrica*.