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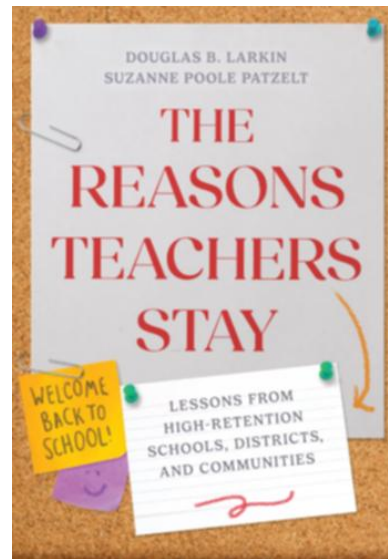
Larkin, D. B., & Patzelt, S. P. (2026). *The reasons teachers stay: Lessons from high-retention schools, districts, and communities*. Harvard Education Press.

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Douglas B. Larkin and **Suzanne Poole Patzelt**'s latest effort is built on the premise that focusing on why teachers stay is a valuable alternative to another question that receives attention in the research literature: why teachers leave (e.g. Pressley et al., 2026; Steiner et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2026). This idea intrigued me as a teacher who once served in a school where teachers stayed. I had my ideas about what attracted me to that district and why my colleagues and I stayed. I was curious about what insights the authors of this book might add to my understanding of my own experience.



The Reasons Teachers Stay grew out of a National Science Foundation grant-funded project, Induction and Mentoring Programs for the Retention of Science Teachers (IMPREST; <https://www.montclair.edu/teaching-and-learning/induction-and-mentoring-programs-for-the-retention-of-science-teachers-imprest/>), that operated from 2017 to 2023 in four states in the Northeast, Upper Midwest and Southeast United States. These four states were selected because they are populous and demographically diverse, encompass rural, suburban, and urban school districts, and reflect a broad range of teacher preparation and retention policy contexts. Although the project initially focused on secondary science teachers, over time its scope widened to encompass district-wide teacher retention efforts.

In the first two chapters, the authors describe and define teacher retention and acknowledge that teacher retention is a difficult term to define because of a variety of contextual factors associated with it. In the next four chapters they summarize four case studies from the larger 13-school study. Following the case

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studies, they summarize emergent themes in the data across the larger study. In the concluding chapter, they offer recommendations aimed at teachers, administrators, and policymakers to encourage teacher retention. The book also includes appendices that outline the research methods used in the IMPREST project and offer relevant insights into the national teacher policy context (viz., Title II of the Higher Education Act, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top), and into states' context as it relates to teacher retention across states and teacher salaries.

In the first chapter, the authors cite Richard Ingersol (2001) who coined the terms *leavers*, beginning teachers who leave the teaching profession at the end of their first year, *movers*, teachers who remain in teaching but move to another school at the end of their first year, and *stayers*, those who remain in teaching and stay in the same school for their second year. The authors point out that these terms serve a purpose for looking at what happens to a teacher at the end of the first year but fall short in the long-term because of complicated career trajectories. To address this shortcoming, they introduce the person-position framework for teacher retention research. This framework distinguishes among active employed teachers, reserve teachers yet to be employed, and attrited teachers who are no longer willing to be employed as a teacher. For each of these employment statuses, they assign various actions. For example, active teachers could be retained in position, retained with reassignment, transferred, have a break in service, or advance to school leadership or higher or informal education. Except for those retained in position, the effect on the position for this array of career trajectories could be considered teacher turnover or attrition. Teachers considered to be retained in profession can be those retained in a position and by the same employer, those who move to new districts, teachers in the reserve pool who hold out the possibility of returning to teaching, and those who are advancing their careers beyond their work as P-12 teachers.

In the second chapter, Larkin and Patzelt explore the knowledge base about teacher retention and attrition. They discuss various correlates associated with teacher attrition. Among them are (1) personal correlates, such as those related to age, gender, race, ethnicity; (2) school and district organization correlates, such as grade level assignments, locale classification (e.g., rural, urban, etc.), (3) student demographics, (4) available resources, (5) salary, (6) school size and facilities, (7) school type (e.g., traditional, charter, vocational, etc.), and (8) the presence and nature of professional development opportunities, including those for new teachers. Other less tangible conditions include the severity of discipline problems in school, perceptions of administrative strength, the extent to which teachers collaborate, and demographic congruence among teachers, students, and administrators. Teachers would be less likely to leave schools when the working environment is favorable. The authors conclude that simply understanding why teachers leave does not lead *ipso facto* to an understanding of why they stay. In the rest of this chapter, the authors review the literature on retention in general and factors related to the retention of teachers of color and teachers in high-needs schools.

In the third chapter the authors discuss their research framework, which was initially informed by Tom Lee's work (2011, 2014) reconfiguring existing paradigms about employee turnover. In his study, Lee asked whether it might be more interesting to consider why people stay instead of why they leave. The authors offer a theory of job embeddedness as an alternative to an explanation of attrition and retention based on notions of job satisfaction. They differentiate from Lee's theory by introducing the concept of teacher embeddedness that acknowledges the roles colleagues, community, resources, administrators, the school organization, and teachers themselves play in their individual decisions to stay:

The critical aspects of job embeddedness are (1) the extent to which people have links to other people or activities, (2) the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects in their life spaces, and (3) the ease with which links can be broken—what they would give up if they left, especially if they had to physically move to other cities or homes. (p. 42)

The next four chapters summarize four case studies, each representative of a school district in one of four states of the larger study: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and North Carolina. Across all the sites they visited, the most frequently mentioned reason the teachers interviewed said that led them to stay was their relationships with their colleagues. The following are the ten themes that emerged from the interviews, from most to least frequently mentioned:

1. Supportive relationships with colleagues
2. School- and district-level systems and culture of support
3. Compensation
4. Teacher autonomy
5. Specialness of place
6. Availability of resources for teaching
7. Opportunity and agency for professional growth
8. District- and school-level race consciousness
9. Affordances related to school size
10. Personal satisfaction and the rewards of being a teacher (p. 119)

The authors elaborate on these themes with illustrative examples from the interview data. For example, in one school, competitive salary, caring colleagues, a culturally protected environment for teachers of color, professional autonomy, and opportunities for professional growth were what caused teachers to stay. In another, teachers reported on how community and collaboration among them both in and out of school, coupled with teacher autonomy, creativity, and support, including financial support, made them stay. Third, teachers stayed because they could teach how they wanted, had strong relationships and support from each other, were rooted in the community, and derived uniquely personal rewards from their teaching assignments. Finally, teachers stayed because of the kinship they shared as educators in an area with a significant indigenous population.

With respect to teachers of color and teachers in high-needs schools, the researchers made some interesting discoveries. In districts with exemplary retention rates for teachers of color, the researchers noted an absence of what they called an “impenetrable wall of whiteness” or “smog of cultural racism” (p. 99). Instead of barriers to hiring and equity, they saw outreach and support for the professional growth of teachers of color. Across the study, teachers in both high-needs and non-high-needs schools valued collaborative colleagues, supportive school and district environments, adequate compensation, and autonomy.

In the final chapter, the authors take stock of lessons learned and offer actionable recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and teachers themselves to promote teacher retention. The authors also caution against misguided retention efforts, such as those that inappropriately address demographic mismatch by race, language, or culture between teachers and students; or to support segregation. Among their recommendations are to (1) rethink mentoring and induction, (2) encourage teacher autonomy, agency, and protection; (3) provide supports that ensure success for teachers of color; (4) cultivate “homegrown” teachers; (5) structure teacher education programs so that prospective teachers have real-life experiences through apprenticeship and through student teaching experiences that affirm cooperating teachers as the knowledgeable professionals they are; and (6) maintain reliable data systems that not only protect teachers’ privacy but also encourage future research on teacher retention.

Larkin and Patzelt have made an invaluable contribution to the literature on teacher retention. Although at face value it might appear that their conclusions about why teachers stay overlap with conclusions about why teachers leave, they have introduced a different frame of reference for approaching this subject. What distinguishes their approach is the acknowledgment of the school as an interconnected ecosystem built on relationships of trust, low isolation among teachers, and a supportive leadership culture, within which information and expertise are shared and cultivated. Such was my experience in that school where I taught World Languages many years ago, and such were the reasons I stayed. Within such a culture, teachers thrive, are invested in each other, and are where they want to be. This book appears at an opportune moment, when those responsible for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all are rethinking what that means in terms of policymaking and structuring institutional, organizational, and instructional arrangements to support this important goal.

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About the Reviewer

Elsie Szecsy is an emerita research professional at Arizona State University, where her research interests were on intersections among teaching, learning, and leadership, with institutional, organizational, and instructional arrangements in linguistically and culturally diverse education settings. She was involved in several documentation research projects in metro New York and metro Phoenix, Arizona, that aimed to improve Latino representation among high school and college graduates and among faculty and administrators in K-12 and higher education. Her research interests have since expanded to include humanities-based approaches to discover racial and other injustices in schools and other educational settings. Dr. Szecsy holds an Ed.D. in Educational Administration from Teachers College, Columbia University.



About the Authors



Douglas B. Larkin is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Montclair State University in New Jersey. His main research concerns the preparation of science teachers for culturally diverse classrooms, and issues of equity and justice in teacher preparation. He worked as a high school physics and chemistry teacher for ten years—most recently in Trenton, NJ—and served as a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching physics and mathematics in Kenya and Papua New Guinea. Dr. Larkin's current research agenda is shaped by a

desire to strengthen the structures that support equitable and effective secondary science education in a variety of contexts. His research and expertise follow four thematic strands: (1) Equity and justice-centered high school science teaching, (2) Science teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention, (3) School science departments as sites for science education reform, and (4) Antiracist teacher preparation. Dr. Larkin received the Ph.D. in Teacher Education in 2010 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Suzanne Poole Patzelt is an assistant professor in the Department of Alternative Programs and University Partnerships at Touro University. She completed her Ph.D. at Montclair State University in Teacher Education and Teacher Development. Her research centers around Research Experiences for Teachers (RETs), science teachers' conceptions of the nature of science, science teacher identities, and sustainable and equitable approaches for recruiting and retaining science teachers. She worked on the NSF-funded IMPREST grant



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