

Understanding the Nature of the Teacher Shortage in Mississippi

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ABSTRACT

Our goal was to understand the nature of the teacher shortage in Mississippi in order to provide policy makers with the knowledge necessary to develop effective solutions. Previous research has focused on the nature of the problem and questioned if there was really a national teacher shortage. Some argue that rather than a national teacher shortage, there is a teacher distribution problem. We were guided by the question: What predicts which districts are critical teacher shortages? Because the nature of the question was predictive and binary, we created a logistic regression model. Data for 151 school districts was analyzed. Forty-seven were identified as critical teacher shortage districts. Eight predictor variables were entered into the model: (a) average expenditure per pupil, (b) % revenue generated locally, (c) % students black, (d) % administrative expense, (e) QDI (district accountability score), (f) average teacher salary, (g) congressional district, and (h) Delta or not Delta. Only race, geography, and local funding were included in the final model. Our findings indicate that districts with a high percentage of black students, districts located in the Yazoo-Mississippi River Delta Region, and districts that generate less money locally for education are more likely to have a teacher shortage. The factors that most influence the shortage extend outside the world of education and education policy. They include people's perceptions and ideas about race, the economics of place and what makes a place a valuable place to live, and the economic health of places. All of these problems are place-based and the solutions must be found in the places. Some of them can be addressed by education policy, but others must be addressed by the larger society. Of those that can be

addressed within the field of education are attempts to produce teachers who come from the places experiencing teacher shortage and who are committed to staying and becoming productive members of the community.