

Teaching by Day, Moonlighting by Night: Moonlighting as a Response to Low Teacher Pay

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Abstract This study explored the prevalence of moonlighting amongst teachers in South Dakota and the reasons for moonlighting. Teachers, who are members of the #sdeducators Facebook group, provided data about their salary and shared their perceptions that moonlighting had on their teaching. The data showed that the majority of teachers would stop moonlighting if they received a higher salary. Additionally, teachers felt their teaching was negatively impacted by moonlighting at various jobs. Understanding teacher moonlighting may inform education policies and teacher compensation strategies to attract and retain qualified educators.

Keywords: teachers, moonlighting, salary, education

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1. Introduction

Teachers are one of the most significant influences in our country. However, many teachers are experiencing financial strain because of their chosen profession [1,2,3]. Because of this, many teachers are seeking employment outside of their teaching positions. The practice of teachers taking on additional jobs or employment outside of their primary teaching role is referred to as teacher moonlighting [4]. Moonlighting often involves working part-time, during evenings, weekends, or holidays, in a different profession or as a teacher in a different setting, such as tutoring or teaching online courses [5].

Studying teacher moonlighting is vital for several reasons. First, many teachers may not earn enough from their primary teaching job, leading to financial stress [6,7]. Moonlighting may help them make ends meet, but it may also impact their wellbeing and effectiveness as educators [8]. Additionally, moonlighting can affect a teacher's energy, time, and commitment to their primary teaching role, potentially influencing the quality of education students receive. High levels of moonlighting can contribute to teacher burnout and turnover, which may have negative implications for the education system overall [5]. Finally, moonlighting is more common in schools serving lower-income communities, which can add to educational inequalities [5]. By studying teacher moonlighting, researchers and policymakers can better address the financial, professional, and systemic factors that drive this phenomenon, ultimately working to improve the quality of education and the well-being of teachers [9,10]. The following questions guided this study:

- 1). What is the prevalence of teacher moonlighting in South Dakota?
- 2). What are the reasons for teacher moonlighting in South Dakota?
- 3). What perceived impact does teacher moonlighting have on a teacher's morale?

2. Literature Review

Researchers are increasingly studying teacher moonlighting as education stakeholders strive to comprehend the current challenges in the teaching profession. This literature review explores various aspects of teacher moonlighting, including its forms, motivations, prevalence, impacts on the profession, policy implications, and research gaps.

Forms of Teacher Moonlighting

Teacher moonlighting can take various forms, including tutoring, coaching, part-time jobs, freelance work, or any other job outside the school system. Teachers often provide private tutoring services to students who need extra help in specific subjects. Tutoring is one of the most common forms of moonlighting in education. Teachers may take on coaching roles in extracurricular activities like sports, debate teams, or drama clubs, earning additional income [4]. According to Garcia and Weiss [5], forty-four percent of teachers received additional compensation for activities such as coaching, student activity sponsorship, mentoring other teachers, or teaching evening classes. With the rise of online education, teachers may also engage in online teaching or content development as a form of moonlighting, or they may

create educational materials and sell them online, generating extra income. In comparison, eighteen percent worked jobs outside the school system [5]. These teachers work part-time jobs in fields unrelated to education, such as retail, hospitality, or freelance work like photography, to supplement their income. Finally, it is common for teachers to work during the summer break, taking on roles such as camp counselors, lifeguards, or seasonal retail jobs [4].

Motivation for and Prevalence of Teacher Moonlighting

Motivation for moonlighting can vary, including needing additional income, professional development, or pursuing personal interests and passions. However, according to Smith and Cooper [7], one of every four teachers moonlighted because teachers perceived their salary was too low. The average teacher salary is about seventeen percent lower than America's typical 4-year degree holding professional [9]. Burnette [9] noted that the average teacher salary in the United States was \$60,483 annually. Similarly, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the United States, the average public school teacher salary in 2018-2019 was \$61,730, which often falls short of meeting the living costs of many teachers, especially in high-cost-of-living areas [5,11]. According to the South Dakota Department of Education Data Dashboard, the average baseline salary for teachers in South Dakota in 2018-19 was \$38,838 and has increased to \$41,113 in 2021-2022, documenting that the salary of teachers in SD is far below the national average [12]. The teacher base pay is often lower for teachers who work in high-poverty schools [5]. This difference between income and expenses often requires teachers to seek supplementary income sources to make ends meet [5]. Additionally, rising living costs, including housing, healthcare, and education, can constrict the finances of teachers. These growing costs, combined with teacher salary increases that are not keeping up with the cost of living, have increased financial stress among educators. Many teachers find moonlighting as a means to bridge the financial gap and secure a more stable livelihood [9].

That said, finances are not the only reason teachers decide to moonlight. In a study by Brown et al. [4], a lack of job satisfaction was another reason teachers sighted for moonlighting. Some teachers moonlight to gain experience and skills that can benefit their primary teaching roles, such as tutoring to improve their teaching techniques. Moonlighting can also allow teachers to pursue personal interests and passions that may not directly relate to their teaching roles [4]. The economy and personal motivations of teachers often drive its prevalence, making it a complex concept within the field of education.

Impacts of Teacher Moonlighting

Teacher moonlighting has various impacts on educational outcomes, teacher performance, and job satisfaction. The impact of teacher moonlighting on student achievement remains a subject of debate. Some studies, such as the work by Brown et al. [4], suggest that moonlighting can lead to increased teacher fatigue and reduced instructional quality, potentially negatively affecting student outcomes. Other research, like the study by the Texas State Teachers Association [8], indicates that the need for moonlighting may increase teachers

considering leaving the field altogether. Finally, teacher moonlighting may contribute to increased teacher absenteeism, especially if teachers are juggling multiple jobs. Absenteeism can disrupt the continuity of instruction and disrupt students' learning experiences [10].

Despite potential challenges, moonlighting can provide opportunities for skill development. For example, teachers who engage in tutoring or curriculum development outside their regular roles may enhance their teaching skills and innovation, positively impacting their primary teaching positions [13]. Some teachers find that moonlighting in roles related to their interests or passions increases job satisfaction and, in turn, has a positive impact on their motivation, enthusiasm, and professional growth [13]. Teacher moonlighting has multidimensional effects on educational outcomes, teacher performance, and job satisfaction. It can influence student achievement, teacher absenteeism, classroom performance, and teacher burnout. However, it also offers opportunities for skill development and enhanced job satisfaction [13].

Policy and Teacher Moonlighting

Policy plays a crucial role in shaping the impact of teacher moonlighting. Policy to invest more in teacher pay and improve access to paid teacher development opportunities across both high and low-poverty schools may reduce teacher shortages and support teachers and their students [5]. Ethical guidelines and policies can promote transparency, accountability, and equitable opportunities for educators engaging in moonlighting activities. It is essential to balance supporting teacher development and maintaining ethical standards in education. Various policies, ethical dilemmas, and the need to balance teachers' financial needs with their commitment to the profession influence the practice of teacher moonlighting [5,9].

Research Gaps and Implications for Further Research in Teacher Moonlighting

Teacher moonlighting is a topic that should continue to be studied. Research documents a teacher shortage and that many teaching professionals face financial hardships [5]. To make up for the pay gap, many teachers moonlight within or outside of the school system [4,5]. Teacher moonlighting has the potential to have an impact on keeping teachers in the profession. More research is needed to understand the long-term effects of teacher moonlighting related to teacher retention and the teacher shortage. Investigating whether moonlighting leads to long-lasting career changes or burnout would provide insights for education leaders and policymakers [5,10].

Teacher moonlighting also has the potential to impact student achievement. Future research should clarify how moonlighting may affect student outcomes, such as academic performance and attendance. Additionally, investigating the differences in impact based on the type of moonlighting (e.g., tutoring, coaching, part-time jobs) and the students' grade level would be valuable [4,14].

In conclusion, teacher moonlighting is a complex educational phenomenon with several research gaps. Future research should address these gaps and explore the impact on teacher retention, the teacher shortage, and student outcomes. As the education landscape changes, solutions are needed to address the financial challenges driving teacher moonlighting. Filling these research gaps

can provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher moonlighting and its educational implications.

3. Methodology

Participants

The subjects in this study constituted a random sampling of preK-12 South Dakota public and private school teachers. The survey was offered through the #SDEducators private Facebook group page that has 6.9 thousand teachers as its followers. Participants were asked to complete an online survey based on their personal situation. Subjects were given the option to participate in the survey and granted their consent by completing the survey.

This survey was conducted after receiving Institutional Review Board permission to begin the research. Permission was then received from the administrators of the #SDEducators private Facebook group to conduct research by utilizing their Facebook page, a link was posted for a 6-month period with periodic Facebook posts describing the project and providing the survey link. The survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey. A total of 554 teachers responded to the online survey. All answers were automatically recorded in SurveyMonkey. The survey allowed for both qualitative and quantitative data to be entered by participants.

The survey respondents were 91.34% female; 60% were between the ages of 35-54; and 85.2% were married. The respondents were almost equally split between 50.18% with their bachelor's degree as the highest educational degree and 48.91% with their master's degree. Of the respondents, 50% indicated that they primarily taught at the K-5 level, 22.59% at grades 6-8 (middle school), and 27.32% at the high school level.

Instrument

The survey used a variation of the Teacher Moonlighting and Morale Survey conducted by researchers from Sam Houston State University in 2013 with public school teachers in Texas [4]. The survey included 31 items that were a combination of single choice, multiple choice, Likert scale, and short-answer questions.

Variables

Relevant variables include time constraints of teachers and internet availability in order to complete the survey within established time limits. An additional variable was the utilization of a private Facebook group to distribute the survey link and then relying on link sharing to reach those teachers outside the Facebook group.

Procedure

South Dakota teachers who are current members of the #SDEducators private Facebook group voluntarily participated in an online survey during the open window. Completed survey results were stored in a password-protected SurveyMonkey site and downloaded as a .pdf on the researcher's password-protected laptop.

4. Results

According to the National Center for Education Statistics

(NCES), the average age of teachers in South Dakota is 42.1 and 77.9% are female. The survey respondents were similar to the average age but had a higher-than-average rate of female respondents (see Figure 1).

Q2 What is your gender?

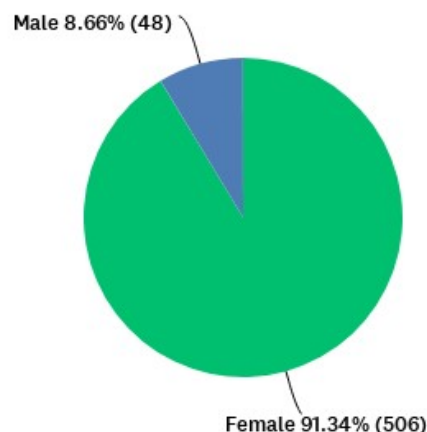


Figure 1. Percentage of Participants Based on Gender

NCES shows an average of 53.4% of teachers in South Dakota hold a masters level which is similar to the survey results (see Figure 2).

Q5 What is your highest educational degree?

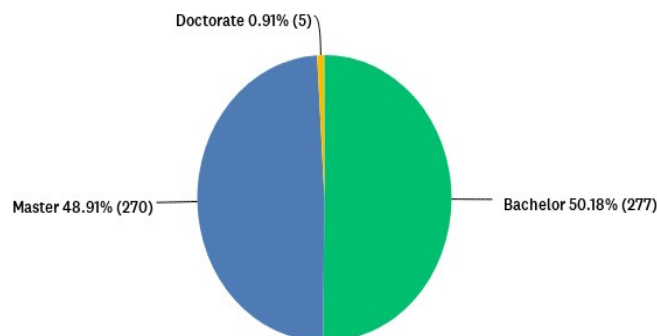


Figure 2. Participant Self-Reported Highest Education Degree

Data from the Department of Education and National Education Association, indicate South Dakota is competitive with its starting average teacher salary of \$41,170. That puts the state 28th overall in the nation. But where that edge tapers off is with veteran teachers, with neighboring states paying more on average. South Dakota's overall average teacher salary is around \$50,592; 49th overall in the nation and only beating out Mississippi and West Virginia. The average teacher salary of the respondents was \$49,785. The average teaching experience of the survey respondents was 18.2 years of teaching.

Teachers indicated that they spent a significant amount of time outside of the school day (non-compensated/non-scheduled hours) completing school-

related work (see Figure 3).

Additionally, there was a greater prevalence of moonlighting jobs during the summer versus the regular school year (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Teachers indicated the primary reason for taking a moonlighting job was that they "Needed the extra money" (see Figure 6).

The majority of teachers indicated that the quality of their teaching would improve if they did not have a second job during the regular school year (see Figure 7).

Additionally, a majority of teachers indicated that if their teaching salary were high enough they would give up their moonlighting job (Figure 8).

The average amount of extra money respondents earned through moonlighting in the summer was \$4,120, while the average amount made during the school year was \$5,573. On average the respondents indicated that they would need to earn an additional \$10,445 per year to leave their moonlighting job.

Q15 How many HOURS PER WEEK are spent outside of class on school related work?

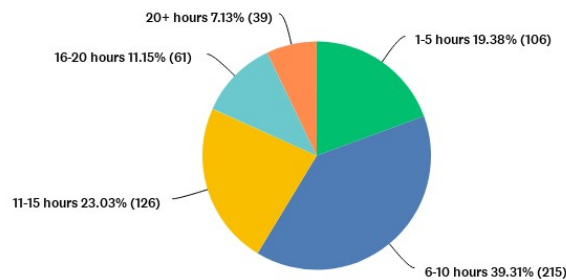


Figure 3. Participant Self-Reported Hours Spent on School Work Outside of the School Day

Q20 Do you have a second job during the summer?

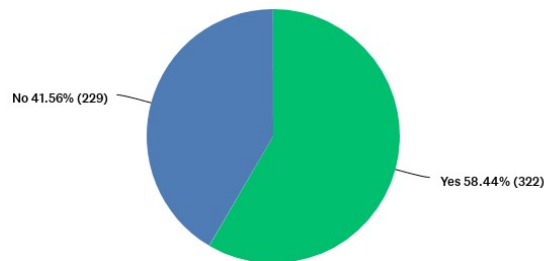


Figure 4. Participant Self-Reported Summer Job Rate

Q22 Do you have an EXTRA (Moonlighting) job during the REGULAR SCHOOL YEAR to supplement your teaching salary?

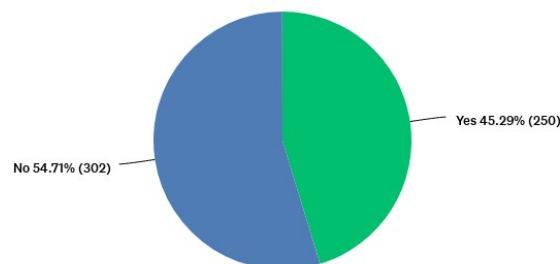


Figure 5. Participant Self-Reported During School Year Job Rate

Q31 If you have a second job - why do you keep your second job? Please check all that apply.

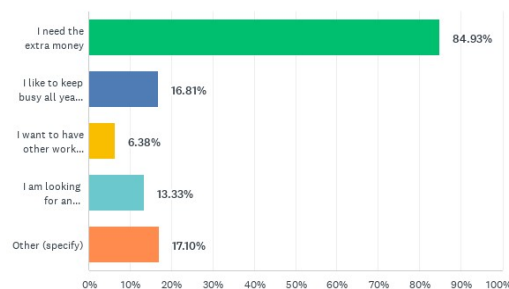


Figure 6. Participant Self-Reported Rationale for Maintaining 2nd Job

Q25 Do you feel that the quality of your teaching would improve if you did NOT have a second job during the regular school year?

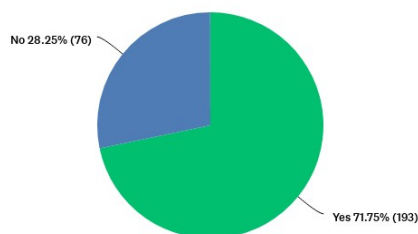


Figure 7. Participant Self-Reported Impact of Second Job on Teaching

Q26 Would you QUIT the second job if your teaching salary would enable you to give up moonlighting during the school year?

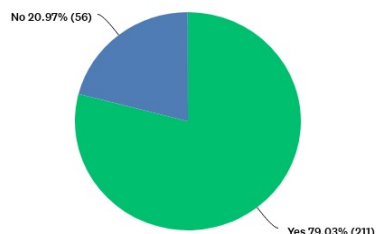


Figure 8. Participant Self-Reported Impact of Teaching Salary on Second Job Continuation

5. Discussion

Implications

Following the COVID pandemic education throughout the United States is at a crossroads. Teacher shortages present a problem nationwide, as evidenced by teacher vacancies and a precipitous enrollment decline in traditional teacher-preparation programs. Between the 2008-09 and 2018-19 academic years, the number of people completing a teacher-education program dropped by nearly a third, according to a report by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [15]. Additionally, 44 percent of new teachers leave within five years [16].

States are revising teacher certification standards to add more teachers. Alternative teacher certification programs are growing in popularity as a way to fill the future teaching shortage. When considering education and

experience, teacher wages lag that of civilian professionals, just as they have done in every studied year since 1996. In 2021, the wage gap between the two groups was the largest Economic Policy Institute analysts have ever seen: 23.5 percent [17].

6. Conclusions

There are several significant items of data that became apparent through this research and the review of data.

1. Low teacher salaries are a significant reason for moonlighting.
2. Teachers are feeling underappreciated and under-supported.
3. Teachers have contemplated leaving the teaching profession in the past 5 years.
4. Teachers feel they do not have adequate time to

prepare and teach.

5. Teachers would quit their moonlighting job if their teaching salary could make up the difference.

6. On average teachers spend between 6-15 hours per week on school-based work during out-of-school non-paid hours.

Recommendations

A key component of this research was to compile data for future research. By comparing South Dakota data with current data from Texas and other states, data could be analyzed for consistency. This could include the determination of trends between states and on a nationwide basis. More research could be conducted to compare data from teachers who complete the survey that were part of traditional certification versus alternative methods of certifications. Conducting this survey in additional states would be key for data comparison. While in the initial stages of research, this study could have significant implications for teachers in South Dakota and eventually to a larger area. Further research could compare data across the United States regarding moonlighting and the reasons for it.

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Statement of Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests.

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