

Reconceiving the Role of Immersive Professional Development Experiences on K-12 STEM Teacher Retention in the Classroom

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The impact of immersive teacher leadership professional development (PD) on K-12 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teacher retention in the classroom is not well understood. While some argue that these kinds of experiences drive STEM teachers out of the classroom, research suggests that teacher job satisfaction plays a much larger role in their decision to stay in the classroom and leadership opportunities can contribute to that satisfaction. In order to understand the relationship between immersive leadership PD and retention we performed a phenomenological analysis of interviews from 26 alumni of the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship (AEF). The AEF fellowship is a Congress-mandated program that recruits high quality K-12 STEM educators to participate in education policy initiatives in Washington, D.C. for a minimum of one year. We used *a priori* and *post hoc* coding techniques to analyze transcripts of interviews in light of whether or not alumni of the AEF program returned to teach in a K-12 classroom. Preliminary findings suggest that STEM teacher retention after the AEF program was strongly associated with pre-fellowship intentions, such that teachers who were seeking opportunities beyond the classroom were more likely to leave the classroom. Nevertheless, all interviewees remained in K-12 STEM education in some capacity either as educators, pre-service teachers, faculty, or other forms of leadership. Regardless of post-fellowship directions participants voiced a preference for a hybrid role that combines both teaching and leadership opportunities. Implications of this research suggest local districts seeking to increase STEM teacher retention should reconsider teacher professional pathways that involve leadership activities outside of the classroom. Such solutions may include professional development for principals and administrators that equip them to better leverage the growing expertise of their STEM teachers.