

## **Motivations and Deterrents for Entering the Teaching Field in a Rural State**

**Dale Pietrzak**

*University of South Dakota*

**Jeri L. Engelking**

*University of South Dakota*

**Kris M. Reed**

*University of South Dakota*

**Susan Gapp**

*University of South Dakota*

**Sherrie Bosse**

*University of South Dakota*

*This article reports findings from a study of the motivations of college students to choose or not choose a career as a K-12 teacher. Five hundred-seventeen college students majoring in education and non-education programs enrolled in undergraduate courses were surveyed as to their motivations for choosing/not choosing a career in K-12. If they chose teaching as a career, they were also asked what might motivate others to enter the teaching profession or if they chose a non-teaching career, they were asked what things that if changed might increase their interest in becoming a teacher. Those choosing teaching as a career did so most often because of a desire to have an impact on youth; those deciding not to enter teaching said the biggest reason was because of salaries and benefits.*

### ***Introduction***

The demand for teachers is on the rise. Today there are over 3.1 million teachers in public and private elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Education Commission of the States, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics calculates that in a decade about 2.7 million teachers will be needed to fill positions vacated by teacher turnover and retirement. Predictions that an aging teacher population will result in a shortage of qualified teachers is particularly a concern in secondary areas where there are high rates of teachers who are not highly qualified to teach in their assigned content area. The rates are especially high in schools that serve minority and poor communities (Zeichner, 2003). Rural schools already struggle to retain qualified teachers when neighboring states and larger communities offer higher salaries. These concerns leave teacher education faculty, school administrators, and state officials pondering the question; where are the teacher candidates?

A study from the United Kingdom fueled by similar concerns of a teacher shortage surveyed students about their career decision. Their study found that those going into teaching were more apt to be motivated by factors such as job satisfaction and the desire to share their knowledge while reasons not to teach included salary, job status, and negative school experiences (Gorard, Huat See, Smith, & White, 2007). Secondary reasons behind choosing teaching as a career have been attributed to socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, parents' occupations, and close relationships with friends, for family members who were teachers themselves (Huat See, 2004, Cherednichenko, 2006).

The South Dakota Department of Education and the Board of Regents continue to struggle with the issue of teacher shortage. They feel there has been little South Dakota specific information, and remain concerned about the role salaries play in teacher recruitment. Some have viewed salaries as less important in student's decisions to enroll in teacher education programs while others felt it was a major issue that deterred students from pursuing a teaching career. Questions about the role of work environment were also discussed as a deterrent to students looking seriously at the teaching profession. After several meetings with representatives from public Schools of Education, Board of Regents, Department of Education, Superintendents and Teachers organizations these and other issues were discussed related to South Dakota teacher recruitment and retention. The questions raised here were used to supplement the material summarized in Sadker and Sadker (2008).

Sadker and Sadker (2008) surveyed teachers regarding aspects of the profession that they would like to see changed. Four out of 10 teachers were dissatisfied with salary while one in five teachers complained about the poor working conditions, heavy workloads, and extra responsibilities. The current study sought to reveal the deterrents and motivations for choosing teaching as a field of study.

### ***Objectives***

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Obtain a better understanding of the elements playing a role in decisions of those to not enter education as a profession.
2. Obtain a better understanding of the elements playing a role in decisions of those who did enter education as a profession.

3. Gain and better understand the numbers of people entering or not entering education as a profession who desire to stay in South Dakota.
4. Locate potential elements to attract more people into the profession of education, especially into shortage areas.

### ***Instrumentation***

Two parallel instruments were utilized in this study, one for those indicating entrance into the profession of education and one for those indicating the choice not to enter the profession of education. The use of two instruments was necessitated as there were two different groups from whom information was being requested. One group had decided to become involved with K-12 education in some way while the other group had decided not to do so at this point.

The request for information from the two groups also allowed an examination of the reasons people had selected to go into education as a comparison to decisions to focus on another career. Further, while the differences in phrasing of the two instruments did not allow for a direct test of means quantitatively, a qualitative review of the data did allow differences from one another regarding attitudes toward K-12 education.

Each instrument consisted of four parts:

Part 1 – consisted of 14 items (one of which was an “other” category) addressing motivations for a person’s choice to enter education largely drawn from Sadker & Sadker (2003). *The questions were phrased for those entering education as to the importance for them in their decision to become a teacher and for those not entering education as to the importance for them in deciding not to become a teacher.*

Part 2 – was an open-ended question requesting motivation or reasons to either teach or not to teach. For those entering education: *“List the 3 most important reasons for your decision to teach.”* And for those not entering education: *“List the 3 most important reasons for your decision not to teach.”*

Part 3 – was an open-ended question requesting information on what would increase the interest in entering teaching as a profession. For those entering education: *“List 3 things you feel would attract more people into teaching.”* And for those not entering education: *“List 3 things that if they were changed might increase your interest in becoming a teacher.”*

Part 4 – a section asking for demographic information including major, education level, GPA, gender and a question on their desire to stay in SD.

### ***Participants***

Undergraduate sections of Math, English, Chemistry, Speech, Student Teaching, Special Education and one Honors section were surveyed. Permission was received from the administration of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education to conduct this survey as well as from the departments and individual instructors involved. Students were not compensated in any way for filling out the survey during class, were asked not to fill out the survey if they had already done so in another class, and were given the choice to opt out if they did not want to fill it out. The survey was handed out to 517 total students in sections of the above course over a six-week period which yielded a return of 371 filled out surveys or a 71.8% return rate. The students were given approximately 5 minutes to fill out the one-page survey and return it to the survey administrator at the beginning of the class period.

Of the 371 total responses, 121 respondents indicated an intended K-12 teaching (education) focus as their goal while 250 of the respondents indicated they intended a non-teaching (non-education) focus as their goal. As the two instruments used in the survey were parallel, the data for the two groups (education focus/non-education focus) were examined separately for each group.

### ***Non-Education Participant Responses***

Of the 250 respondents to the Non-Education survey, 248 were used in the data analysis as two of the respondents filled out the wrong side of the survey and were excluded from the analysis but counted in the response rate. Two-thirds of the respondents to the Non-Education survey were female. Of the 248 respondents, (166) or 66.9% were female, (81) or 32.7% were male and one student did not respond to the gender question.

The education level of the Non-Education respondents included representatives from all four grade levels; Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior, one graduate student taking an undergraduate course as an elective, and two students not responding to that question. Freshman students (146) or 58.9% made up the largest portion of the respondents, followed by sophomore students (61) or 24.6%, junior students (32) or 12.9% senior students (6) or 2.4%.

Sixteen majors were represented by students in the non-education group with nine respondents answering that their major was undeclared at this time and two students not responding to that question. Science was indicated as the chosen major by the most respondents (73) or 29.4% followed by Social Science with (40) or 16.1%, Business with (39) or 15.7%, Nursing with (21) or 8.5% and Communication Disorders with (19) or 7.7%. The major programs of the non-education respondents in the study can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Non-Education Participant's Majors

Major	Freq.	%
Science	73	29.4
Social Sciences	40	16.1
Business	39	15.7
Nursing	21	8.5
Communication Disorders	19	7.7
Dental Hygiene	9	3.6
Undeclared	9	3.6
Art	8	3.2
English	7	2.8
Mathematics	5	2.0
Mass Communications	5	2.0
Theatre	4	1.6
Music	3	1.2
Missing	2	0.8
Therapeutic Recreation	1	0.4
Recreation	1	0.4
Medical	1	0.4
Horticulture	1	0.4
Total	248	100.0

The Non-Education respondents desire to stay in the state of South Dakota indicated that 119 or 48.0% were undecided/maybe they would stay in South Dakota followed by 75 or 30.2% indicating they would not stay in South Dakota, 52 or 21.0 % indicating that they wanted to stay in South Dakota and two students did not answer the question.

***Results of Part 1 – Motivations Not to Pursue a Career in K-12 Education***

A summary of the literature found in Sadker and Sadker (2003) was supplemented with some additional items to examine in a directed fashion, issues that may have importance in the making of a decision about a career in education. When those who had decided to go into something other than K-12 education were asked the importance of these factors, the top three issues of importance to them were Salary/Benefits, K-12 student attitudes, and career mobility. Clearly, salary and benefits were rated as most important with 54.4% of the participants indicating it was “of great importance.” This was almost double the next highest factor rated as “of great importance,” which was the “attitudes of K-12 students and discipline issues I would be teaching” with 28.2% of the responses.

The three perceived reasons of great or somewhat importance to respondents in their decision not to pursue a career in K-12 education were: 1) The salary, schedule and benefit package of a teacher, with 202 responses or 81%, 2) The attitudes of K-12 students and discipline issues I would be teaching, with 173 responses or 70%, and 3) The ability to move from one place to another if I wanted to do so, with 159 or 64%.

The three reasons perceived by the respondents to be least important in the decision not to pursue a career in K-12 education were 1) The prestige of teaching, with 123 responses or 49%, 2) Working with other teachers and/or administration in a school, with 125 responses or 51%, and 3) I just generally dislike the idea of teaching, also with 125 responses or 51%. The perceived motivations of Non-Education respondents can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Non-Education Participant’s Motivations

Statement	NI	SI	GI	M	SD	R
1. I just generally dislike the idea of teaching (n=247)	49.4	36.8	13.8	1.6	0.72	6
2. Working with other teachers and/or administrators in a school. (n=247)	49.4	37.2	13.4	1.6	0.71	6
3. My desire to work with children or adolescents. (n=247)	42.9	29.6	27.5	1.8	0.83	4
4. My desire to “think” on my feet. (n=248)	43.5	33.5	23.0	1.8	0.79	4
5. My desire to have an impact on the future youth. (n=248)	41.5	34.7	23.8	1.8	0.79	4
6. The salary, schedule and benefit package of a teacher (n=248)	18.6	27.0	54.4	2.4	0.78	1
7. The work schedule and work load of a K-12 teacher. (n=248)	41.9	35.5	22.6	1.8	0.78	4

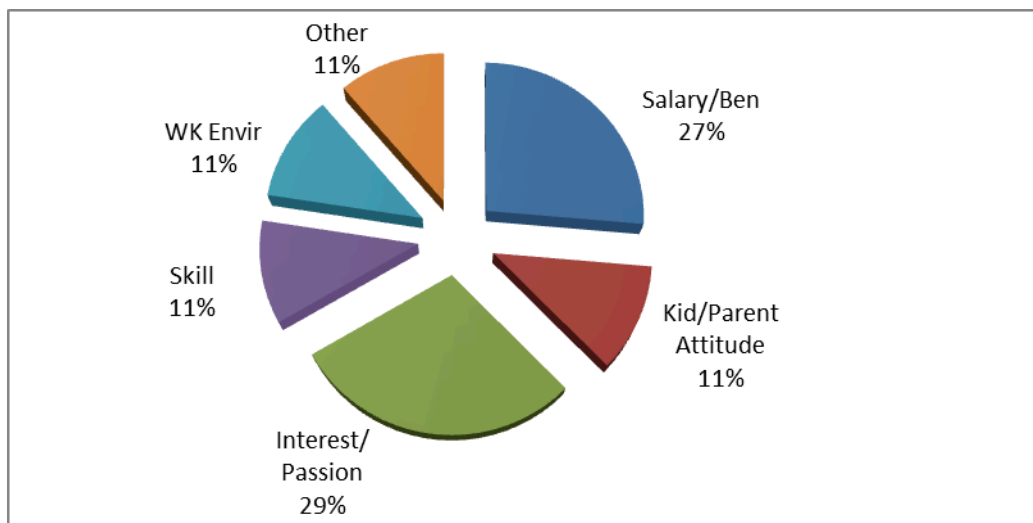
8. The prestige of teaching. (n=248)	50.0	40.3	9.3	1.6	0.66	6
9. The extra-curricular expectation for a K-12 teacher. (n=248)	47.6	39.5	12.9	1.7	0.70	5
10. The attitudes of K-12 students and discipline issues I would be teaching. (n=248)	30.2	41.5	28.2	2.0	0.77	2
11. The parental support I would have as a K-12 teacher. (n=248)	41.1	40.7	18.1	1.8	0.74	4
12. The ability to move from one place to another if I wanted to do so. (n=248)	35.9	41.5	22.6	1.9	0.75	3
13. The testing, regulations and requirements to become a teacher. (n=244)	48.8	36.5	14.6	1.7	0.72	5

NI=Of No Importance, SI=Somewhat Important, GI=Of Great Importance, M = Mean, SD=Std. Dev., R=Rank

**Content Analysis of Open-Ended Questions for Non-Education Participants**

Content analysis of the open-ended questions #15 and #16 was broken down into 6 categories: 1) Salary and Benefits, 2) Kids/Parent Attitudes, 3) Interest Area/Content Interest/Passion/Inspired, 4) Skill Development, 5) Work Environment, and 6) Other. Question #15 – List the 3 most important reasons for your decision not to teach, yielded 656 responses from 243 of the respondents. For all responses, the category of Interest/Passion had the largest overall response rate with 190 responses or 29%. Salary and Benefits was the next category with 177 responses or 27%. Chart 1 displays the overall response rate for all six content categories.

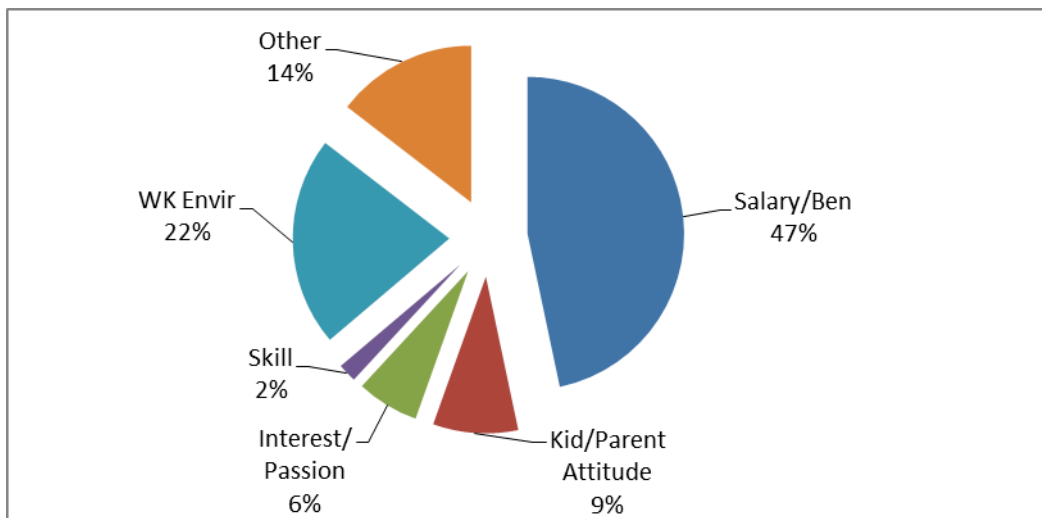
Chart 1: Non-Education Participants 3 Most Important Reasons for Decision not to Teach



Analysis of just the first responses to Question #15 indicated that the category of Salary and Benefits with 104 first responses out of 243 or 43% was the most important reason for a decision not to pursue K-12 education as a career, followed by Interest/Passion for the job with 78 of the first responses or 32%. The same top two as the overall responses, but reversed.

Content analysis of Question #16 – List 3 things that if they were changed might increase your interest in becoming a teacher with 216 respondents and 467 responses. For all responses, the category of Salary and Benefits had the largest overall response rate with 219 or 47%. Work Environment was the next category with 103 responses or 22%. Chart 2 displays the total response rate of non-education participants to Question #16 for all six content categories.

Chart 2: Non-Education Participants 3 Things if Changed Would Increase Interest in Teaching



Analysis of first responses to Question #16 indicated that the category of Salary and Benefits with 171 first responses out of 216 or 79% was the most important reason as to what would increase their personal interest to pursuing K-12 education as a career, followed by Work Environment issues with 15 of the first responses or 7%. This was identical to the overall responses.

### ***Summary of Non-Education Responses***

The results from this part of the survey suggest that the role of student attitudes and discipline, and salary and benefits appear to be the most important in making decisions not to



enter education as a profession. These factors appear to substantially outweigh other factors in the decision.

The results of the content analysis suggest that a substantial portion of these participants are simply interested in something else, not necessarily disliking the idea of teaching. For those who may be willing to consider education as an option, salary and benefits was most critical. A secondary element of work setting issues seemed to play a role as well.

It is interesting to note that the frequency rate for item #8 addressing career prestige was rated by 50% of the participants as being of “no importance.” This suggests that the reputation of the field itself was not an overtly limiting factor in their decision.

### ***Education Participant Responses***

Of the 121 respondents to the Education survey, all were used in the data analysis and counted in the response rate. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents to the Education survey were female. Of the 121 respondents, (77) or 63.6% were female and (44) or 36.4% were male.

The education level of the Education respondents included representatives from all four grade levels; freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, one graduate student (Master’s plus Certification program) taking an undergraduate course, and four students not responding to that question. Junior students (35) or 28.9% made up the largest portion of the respondents, followed by sophomore and senior students both with (29) or 24.0% each and freshman students (23) or 19.0%.

Nine majors were represented by students in the education group, with three students not responding to that question. Elementary and Special education were indicated as the chosen major by the most respondents (46) or 38.0% followed by English with (25) or 20.7%, Social Sciences with (11) or 9.1% and Math with (10) or 8.3%. The major programs of all the education respondents in the study can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Education Participant’s Major

<u>Majors</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>%</u>
Elementary or Special Education	46	38.0
English	25	20.7
Social Sciences	11	9.1

Math	10	8.3
Music	8	6.6
Physical Education	7	5.8
Art	6	4.9
Spanish	3	2.5
Missing	3	2.5
Science	2	1.6
Total	121	100.0

The Education respondents desire to stay in the state of South Dakota indicated that 56 or 46.3% were undecided/maybe they would stay in South Dakota followed by 34 or 28.1% indicating they would not stay in South Dakota, 30 or 24.8 % indicating that they wanted to stay in South Dakota and one student not answering the question.

**Results of Part 1 – Motivations to Pursue a Career in K-12 Education**

The three perceived reasons of great or somewhat importance to respondents in their decision to pursue a career in K-12 education were 1) My desire to have an impact on future youth, with 119 responses or 98.4%, 2) I generally like the idea of teaching, with 117 responses or 96.7%, and 3) My desire to work with children or adolescents, with 116 or 95.9%.

The three reasons perceived by the respondents to be least important in the decision to pursue a career in K-12 education were 1) The salary, schedule and benefit package of a teacher, with 83 responses or 68.6%, 2) The testing, regulations and requirements to become a teacher, with 88 responses or 72.7%, and 3) The work schedule and work load of a K-12 teacher, with 99 responses or 81.8%. The perceived motivations of Education respondents can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Education Participant’s Motivations

Statement	NI	SI	GI	M	SD	R
1. I just generally dislike the idea of teaching (n=121)	3.3	23.1	73.6	2.7	0.53	2
2. Working with other teachers and/or administrators in a school. (n=121)	11.6	47.9	40.5	2.3	0.66	4
3. My desire to work with children or adolescents. (n=121)	4.1	22.3	73.6	2.7	0.55	2
4. My desire to “think” on my feet. (n=121)	7.4	59.5	33.1	2.3	0.58	4
5. My desire to have an impact on the future youth. (n=121)	1.7	12.4	86.0	2.8	0.41	1

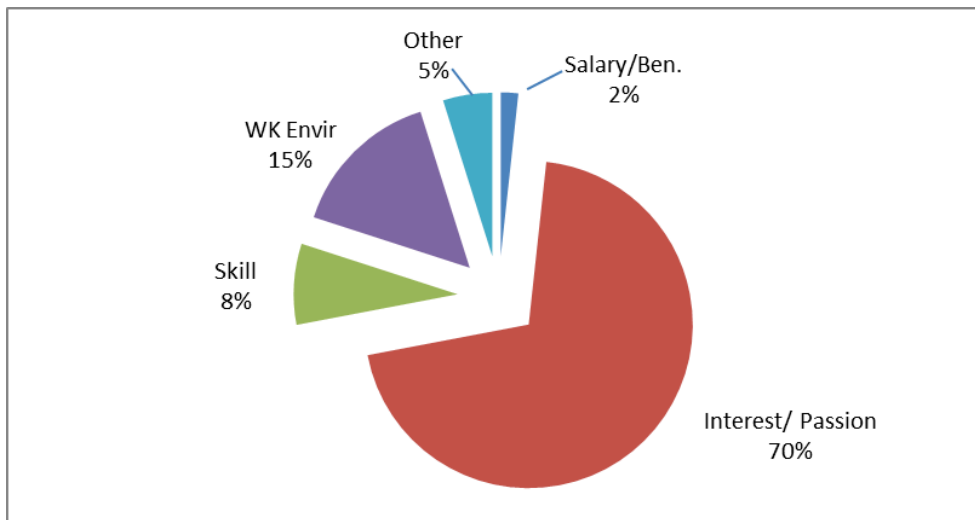
6. The salary, schedule and benefit package of a teacher (n=121)	31.4	52.1	16.5	1.9	0.68	8
7. The work schedule and work load of a K-12 teacher. (n=121)	18.2	53.7	28.1	2.1	0.68	6
8. The prestige of teaching. (n=120)	17.5	47.5	35.0	2.2	0.71	5
9. The extra-curricular expectation for a K-12 teacher. (n=121)	19.0	47.9	33.1	2.1	0.71	6
10. The attitudes of K-12 students and discipline issues I would be teaching. (n=120)	10.8	42.5	46.7	2.4	0.67	3
11. The parental support I would have as a K-12 teacher. (n=121)	14.9	48.8	36.4	2.2	0.69	5
12. The ability to move from one place to another if I wanted to do so. (n=121)	22.3	37.2	40.5	2.2	0.77	5
13. The testing, regulations and requirements to become a teacher. (n=120)	26.7	43.3	30.0	2.0	0.76	7

NI=Of No Importance, SI=Somewhat Important, GI=Of Great Importance, M = Mean, SD=Std. Dev., R=Rank

### Content Analysis of Open-Ended Questions for Education Participants

Content analysis of the open-ended questions #15 and #16 was broken down into 6 categories: 1) Salary and Benefits, 2) Kids/Parent Attitudes, 3) Interest Area/Content Interest/Passion/Inspired, 4) Skill Development, 5) Work Environment, and 6) Other. Question #15 – List the 3 most important reasons for your decision to teach, yielded 350 responses from all 121 of the respondents. For all responses, the category of Interest/Passion had the largest overall response rate with 246 responses or 70%. Work Environment was the next category with 53 responses or 15%. Chart 3 displays the overall response rate for education participants for all six content categories.

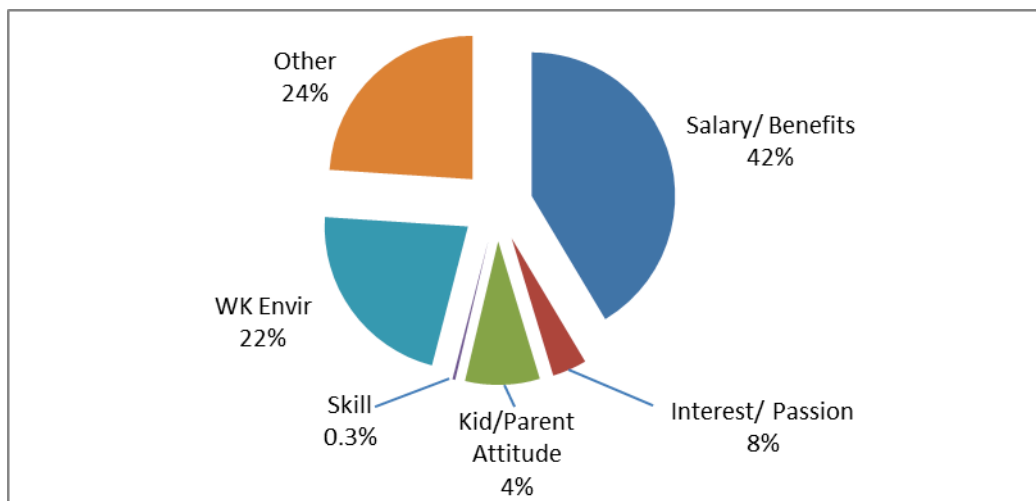
Chart 3: Education Participants 3 Most Important Reasons for Decision to Teach



Analysis of first responses to Question #15 made by education participants indicated that the category of Interest/Passion with 103 first responses out of 121 or 85% was the most important reason for a decision to pursue K-12 education as a career, followed by Work Environment with 10 of the first responses or 8%. This was identical to the categories in the overall responses.

Content analysis of Question #16 – List 3 things that you feel would attract more people to teaching drew 120 respondents with 309 responses. For all responses, the category of Salary and Benefits had the largest overall response rate with 130 responses or 42%. The Other category drew 74 responses or 24% while Work Environment was the next defined category with 68 responses or 22%. Chart 4 displays the overall response rate of education participants to Question #16 for all six content categories.

Chart 4: Education Participants Responses to 3 Things if Changed Would Attract More People to Teaching



Analysis of first responses to Question #16 for education respondents indicated that the category of Salary and Benefits with 98 first responses out of 120 or 82% was the most important reason as to what might attract more people to pursue K-12 education as a career, followed by Work Environment issues with 8 of the first responses or 7%. This paralleled the overall responses for the largest group with the other category coming in second and work environment third.

### ***Summary of Education Responses***

The results from this part of the survey suggest that most pursue education because of a passion and desire, viewing the lower pay status as almost a part of the service to the profession. There is a “mission” element involved. While as with any element, this is not true for all respondents, it was the most dominant theme. Some of the sub-groups such as Science and Art had greater variation in the importance of this factor.

The results of the content analysis suggest, however, when asked about what they believed might pull others into the profession, they felt that increases in salary and benefits might be the most critical factor.

### ***Group Differences***

In order to check to see if there were significant differences between various groups in the study, say regarding those who were undecided about staying in South Dakota compared to those who desired to leave South Dakota for example, a series of MANOVA's were run. There were no significant differences found for the items in the motivation portion of the survey. This suggested that any differences in item level responses between the various groups were likely to be due only to sampling error. There were some statistical differences found within groups such as between the freshman and sophomore levels on several items or between Art and Science, but the practical significance of these differences appears minimal at most.

### ***Objectives Reviewed***

Objective One Revisited - Obtain a better understanding of the elements playing a role in decisions of those to not enter education as a profession. The results from this part of the survey suggested that the role of student attitudes and discipline, and salary and benefits appear to be the most important in making decisions not to enter education as a profession. These factors appear to substantially outweigh other factors in the decision. Salary and benefits were also the major factors that appeared to be suggested by respondents as a means to increase their interest in pursuing a career in K-12 education. A secondary element of work setting seemed to play a role as well.

Objective Two Revisited - Obtain a better understanding of the elements playing a role in decisions of those who did enter education as a profession. It appears that most enter education

because of a passion and desire to impact youth and the future. These respondents seemed to view the lower salary almost as a part of the service to the profession. However, those in the sciences saw more variability in this aspect. It is of note that this group believed that even though they entered the profession of education for reasons beyond salary, that this was the main element needed to entice others to consider teaching.

Objective Three Revisited - Gain and better understand the numbers of people entering or not entering education as a profession who desire to stay in South Dakota. These data suggested that about 21% of the non-education to 25% of the education students desire to stay in South Dakota. While about 28% of the education students to about 30% of the non-education students desire to leave the state after graduation. This leaves about 46% of the education students and 48% of the non-education students being undecided about their desire to stay or leave. This suggests that slightly less than 50% are perhaps able to be influenced to stay in the state. For this group, the incentives or enticements that are offered may be most important to the decision that they make.

Objective Four Revisited - Locate potential elements to attract more people into the profession of education, especially into shortage areas. These data suggested that most respondents believed that in spite of the major motive for students entering education currently being inspiration/passion coupled with idealism, that this would not entice more people to enter then profession of teaching. The major theme here was that any increase would most likely be prompted by increases in salary and benefits packages. A secondary element related to increased professional prestige was also suggested, although it played a lesser role.

### ***Potential Considerations***

As K-12 salary is beyond the realm of influences for most in higher education, it is not likely to prove beneficial to focus too much energy in this area. But, it should be recognized that this area may significantly impact education as a profession. It may be within the scope of higher education to begin to reshape the views of K-12 education professionals. More focused efforts to place a positive face on the profession, and the motives of those entering the profession may help shift community focus to the profession of teaching.

In addition, these data suggested that perhaps marketing the education profession more as “community service,” “a calling” or “a mission” might be beneficial. An emphasis on “giving

back” much like the Peace Corps could prove somewhat effective. The idea behind the mission emphasis would be to foster any latent feelings/interests in this area that have not been tapped.

It may also be worth noting that if, in fact, salary/benefits were increased to more “enticing” levels, this could have an unintended consequence on education as a profession. If a substantial portion of the profession begins to enter for the “pay” as opposed to the “mission” as we see now, this could create some professional tension. It may have a less positive effect on other related aspects of the profession as well.

### References

- Cherednichenko, G.A. (2006). The personal plans of secondary school seniors. *Russian Education and Society, 48(9)*, 60-69.
- Education Commission of the States. (2001, Nov.). *Policy issue: Community colleges' role in teacher preparation*. U.S. Department of Education; Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED471152)
- Gorard, S., Huat See, B., Smith, E., & White, P. (2007, July-August). What can we do to strengthen the teacher workforce? *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 26(4)*, 419-437.
- Huat See, B. (2004). Determinants of teaching as a career in the UK. *Evaluation and Research in Education, 18(4)*, 213-242.
- National Center for Education Statistics (1997). *The Condition of Education*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Policy Issue: Community Colleges' Role in Teacher Preparation (2001, Nov.). Education Commission of the States.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (2003). *Teachers schools and society* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Zeichner, K. M. (2003). The adequacies and inadequacies of three current strategies to recruit, prepare, and retain the best teachers for all students. *Teachers College Record, 105(3)*, 490-519.