

A Profile of North Carolina Secondary Family and Consumer Sciences Teachers

Cheryl L. Lee
Appalachian State University

Secondary family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers were surveyed to obtain demographic information, employment plans, and job satisfaction related to their teaching positions. Results indicated that typical respondents were middle-aged educators who taught FCS specialty courses on the block schedule. The majority of respondents were extremely satisfied with their teaching positions, as well as the perceived effectiveness of their FCS programs. Many were planning to retire within the next ten years.

The need for increasing numbers of family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers has been well documented over the past several years (AAFCS, 1999; Lee, 1998; Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Rehm & Jackman, 1995; Werhan, 2013; Werhan & Way, 2006). According to Miller and Meszaros (1996), North Carolina was noted as being one of the top four states in need of large numbers of FCS teachers. In addition, a study (Moore & Lee, 2003) which focused on the number of FCS education majors in the southeastern states continued to show that the supply would be extremely short of the demand.

The most recent national profile of secondary teachers of all subjects indicated that the majority of teachers were between the ages of 30 and 50; approximately 10% were over 55 (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Several studies have reported public school teachers' low rates of satisfactions with their jobs (Dvorak & Phillips, 2001; Heiten, 2012; Landers, Alter, & Servilio, 2008).

The most recent studies which gathered information on secondary FCS teachers have generally differed from the national findings in two ways: (1) the average age of FCS teachers is generally older, thereby making a higher percentage of them eligible for retirement; and (2) FCS teachers are generally more satisfied with their teaching positions (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Bull & Cummings, 2002; Bull, Urez, & Yoakum, 2000; Mimbs, 2000; Mimbs, 2002; Tripp, 2006). These studies were completed in different parts of the United States, including Connecticut, California, and Tennessee.

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, student enrollment in secondary FCS classes continues to grow. During the 2011-2012 school year, 127,187 middle and high school students completed FCS classes in North Carolina (T. LeGrand, personal communication, October, 2012), while in the 2013-2014 school year, there have been 134,682 FCS enrollments at the middle and high school level in North Carolina (S. Williams, personal communication, January, 2014). However, locating qualified teachers to teach these students has become more difficult. At least 10-15% of secondary family and consumer sciences teaching positions in North Carolina come open each year. In addition, of the approximate 1500 secondary FCS teachers in North Carolina, 42% have 30 or more years of teaching experience and are eligible for retirement (J. Meeks, personal communication, December, 2010).

Given the continuing shortage of FCS teachers in North Carolina, there was a need to document and better understand this scarcity of FCS teachers, as well as to obtain data regarding present family and consumer sciences teachers, including demographic information, employment

plans, and job satisfaction. The purpose of this research study was to compile a profile of North Carolina's secondary family and consumer sciences teachers in order to provide helpful recruitment and retention information for FCS teacher educators, secondary administrators, and Department of Public Instruction FCS consultants.

Procedures

An electronic survey was developed to obtain demographic information, employment plans, and job satisfaction of North Carolina's secondary FCS teachers. The survey was reviewed by the FCS state consultant and approved for sending to FCS secondary teachers. A cover message and the survey were sent electronically to 480 FCS teachers in Districts 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 which were essentially in the western half of the state. Follow-up messages were sent via email to thank those who had returned their surveys and remind others to submit. Three hundred thirteen surveys, or 65.2%, were returned. The survey collected information on personal and teaching characteristics, school information, and teachers' perceptions and plans. Two open-ended questions at the end of the survey asked teachers to identify their biggest challenges and biggest rewards as FCS teachers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings

In this study, 97% of the respondents were female. Approximately 85% were White, while 12% were African American; one respondent was Hispanic. Most respondents were 41-60 years of age (62%), 30% were 40 and younger, and 6% were over 60 years of age. Respondents' teaching experience was distributed as follows: 40% had taught 1-10 years; 28% had taught 11-20 years; 22% had taught 21-30 years; and 9% had taught over 31 years.

In terms of licensure, 57% had graduated from traditional teacher education programs; 38% were lateral entry; and 6% were provisionally certified. Eighty-two percent taught at high schools, while 18% were at middle schools. About half were in rural schools, and a quarter each were in urban and suburban settings. The majority (74%) taught FCS specialty courses (such as apparel, foods, housing, etc.) on the block schedule (80%).

Concerning overall job satisfaction, 84% of the respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their positions and responsibilities. In particular, most of these teachers were very satisfied or satisfied with the FCS subjects they taught (94%), number of class preparations (76%), and administrative support for their programs (73%). Almost half of the respondents (46%) were not satisfied with their class sizes, reporting in open-ended responses that smaller class sizes would increase their job satisfaction. In addition, the majority of teachers were either not satisfied or only somewhat satisfied with their students' classroom motivation (65%) and behavior (67%).

Teachers were asked how effective they felt their FCS programs were in serving their students. Regardless of subject area, the majority of teachers reported their FCS programs as being very effective or effective in providing students with helpful career information (89%); helping students develop effective interpersonal (82%), communication (80%), problem-solving (79%), leadership (77%), and job readiness (88%) skills; and helping students develop healthy lifestyles (79%).

In terms of career plans, 90% of these teachers planned to remain in their current positions the following school year, and 50% planned to assume additional responsibilities (expand FCCLA involvement [29%]; pursue an advanced degree [26%]; increase involvement in professional organizations [25%]). Twenty-seven percent planned to retire in 1-5 years, while

18% planned to retire in 6-10 years. About 7% planned to retire at the end of the current school year.

Two open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey. When asked to list their biggest challenge, teachers most commonly responded that it was their students' lack of motivation and poor behavior in class. Other common challenges were: lack of money for class supplies, larger than desired class sizes, limited time for preparation of lessons, and lack of recognition for teachers. When asked to share their biggest rewards as a FCS teacher, teachers most often responded, the "light bulb" moments – when students learned a concept, achieved a skill, etc. Other rewards listed frequently were: making a difference in students' lives, teaching valuable life skills, getting students excited about learning, and helping students prepare for their future careers.

Discussion and Implications

About one-fifth (21%) of North Carolina's FCS teachers (N = ~1500) participated in this study. Similar to previous studies (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Mimbs, 2002; Tripp, 2006), most respondents in this study were white, middle-aged females, supporting the fact that numerous FCS teachers in North Carolina are or will soon be eligible for retirement. Regarding teaching licensure, over half had received their teaching certification through traditional FCS teacher education programs; however, over one-third had obtained licensure through alternative programs, an increasingly common means of obtaining FCS teaching certification. Like those in earlier studies (Mimbs, 2002; Tripp, 2006), most respondents taught specialty courses at the high school level.

Consistent with other findings (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Godbey & Mimbs, 2011; Mimbs, 2000, 2002; Tripp, 2006), the majority of these respondents indicated they were very satisfied with their current teaching positions and work responsibilities. In particular, teachers were satisfied with the FCS subjects they taught. Since the majority were teaching specialized courses, they were possibly teaching in the FCS areas they most enjoyed and/or were most competent, which would certainly contribute to high job satisfaction. When asked what would increase their job satisfaction, teachers' most common response was smaller class sizes. Perhaps the larger than desired class sizes contributed to students' classroom behavior problems, which also reportedly lessened teachers' satisfaction with their jobs. Still, teachers felt their programs were very effective in helping students develop valuable life skills, gather helpful career information, and embrace healthy lifestyles, and this positive perception of their programs likely contributed to their job satisfaction.

Of these respondents, almost half indicated they planned to retire in the next 10 years; this is consistent with other research (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Mimbs, 2002). These numbers suggest that the current shortage of FCS teachers in North Carolina will continue, and while this may be welcome information to FCS education majors and upcoming graduates, it will be less well received by school administrators who continue to struggle to find qualified FCS teachers for open positions.

The information in this study is helpful to both FCS students and professionals. While the results are specific to North Carolina, they are consistent with other findings and therefore likely applicable to other regional programs. Students and others planning to become FCS teachers will note both the high job satisfaction expressed by these respondents, as well as the continued demand for FCS teachers. Higher education faculty can document for administrators the continuing need for graduates of FCS education programs, as well as characterize for their

students typical FCS teaching positions. Local secondary administrators and teachers, Department of Public Instruction staff, and other FCS professionals can utilize this information as they seek to improve the recruitment and retention of secondary FCS teachers. However, while the results of this study are helpful, further research related to family and consumer sciences teachers is needed to obtain data on a larger scale and from other parts of the country. Is the current profile of FCS teachers in North Carolina reflective of FCS teachers in other states? Are FCS teachers in other parts of the country also satisfied with their teaching positions and the quality of their programs? Will there be a substantial number of FCS teacher retirements across the country as there appears there will be in North Carolina in the near future?

Producing highly competent FCS teachers is essential to the survival of the profession. Comprehensive recruitment efforts at local, state, and national levels will be enhanced by the information gained in this study: the number of teaching positions due in part to an increasing number of retirements, as well as the high satisfaction levels of FCS teachers.

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About the Author

Cheryl L. Lee is a professor of Family and Consumer Sciences at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.

Citation

Lee, C. L. (2013). A profile of North Carolina secondary family and consumer sciences teachers. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 31(2), 25-29. Available at <http://www.natefacs.org/Pages/v31no2/v31no2Lee.pdf>.