Retaining High Performers: Insights from DC Public Schools’ Teacher Exit Survey

By Kaitlin Pennington and Alexander Brand
May 2018
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Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District of Columbia Public Schools teacher exit survey information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The District of Columbia Public Schools <strong>administers an exit survey</strong> to departing teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The exit survey asks teachers to select up to three factors to explain <strong>why they left the district</strong>, indicate <strong>where they would work next</strong>, and choose up to <strong>three options for what DCPS could have done to make them stay</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Our deck analyzes the survey data collected between <strong>February 2015 and January 2018</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We broke down teachers’ responses by their latest performance rating, grouping teachers rated as “minimally effective” or “developing” as <strong>low-performing</strong> and “effective” and “highly effective” as <strong>high-performing</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• DCPS <strong>retains 92 percent</strong> of effective and highly effective teachers. This analysis <strong>focuses on the teachers who leave DCPS</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To examine <strong>how DCPS and other districts can better retain teachers in the future</strong>, we excluded teachers who left for personal reasons (relocation or retirement) (40%) and those who said there was nothing DCPS could have done (45%) from our analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>For additional insights on how to retain high-performing teachers</strong>, we took a closer look at the four most common factors in leaving, what high-performing teachers said they wanted, where they worked next, and whether their answers varied across age, ethnicity, school level taught, or years of experience at DCPS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*DCPS Fast Fact 2017-2018*
This analysis focuses on high-performing* teachers’ responses to the DCPS teacher exit survey.

### Key findings from high-performing teachers’ responses

| Why they left | 1. Work/life balance;  
|               | 2. School leadership; and  
|               | 3. To pursue a career change |
|               |  
| Where they went | One-third of high-performing teachers planned to continue working in a public school district; almost half planned to work in a school setting in general |
| What would have retained them | Behavioral support* and encouragement/recognition from school leadership |

Survey results indicate several considerations for urban districts on how to retain high-performing teachers.

*“High-performing” includes “Effective” and “Highly Effective” teachers as defined by DCPS’ IMPACT system; “Behavioral support” refers to student discipline and other social/emotional supports for students.
DCPS is unique from other urban public school districts in several ways

- In 2007, the city council dissolved the elected school board and put the school system under mayoral control.

- In 2009, DCPS launched a new comprehensive teacher evaluation system – IMPACT – that differentiates teacher performance between five levels.
  - Teacher performance ratings are based on student achievement data and multiple classroom observations throughout the school year.

- Alongside its evaluation system, DCPS instituted a pay-for-performance compensation model (IMPACTplus) that includes:
  - Annual bonuses for teachers rated as highly effective (up to $20,000).
  - Base salary increases for teachers with a history of high performance working in high-poverty schools.

- Independent studies by researchers Thomas Dee and James Wyckoff show that DCPS replaced teachers who left the district with teachers who increased student achievement.*

*Source: Teachers Turnover, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement in DCPS
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The data in this analysis were collected between Feb 2015 and Jan 2018 and are broken down by IMPACT ratings

- From February 2015 to January 2018, DC Public Schools surveyed 1,626 departing teachers and 189 other staff members who left the district.
  - This analysis focuses only on teachers and excludes staff members surveyed.
- Among other items, the survey asked teachers and staff about the following:
  - Factors in leaving
  - Next work environment
  - DCPS retention efforts

- IMPACT, DCPS’ teacher evaluation system, assigns teachers a performance rating, ranging from ineffective to highly effective. This analysis disaggregates teachers’ responses by their IMPACT rating* to determine how best to retain high-performing teachers in the future.

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*In this survey, IMPACT ratings were self-reported and not checked by HR; 312 teachers didn’t receive an IMPACT rating; **In general, teachers rated “Ineffective” did not fill out the survey. Still, two teachers self-reported being rated “Ineffective”; their results are included in the “Minimally Effective” group.
Survey respondents could select up to three options for why they left and what would have retained them.

**Answer Options for “Factors in Leaving”**
*(rank up to three selections)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in Leaving</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigned content area or grade level</td>
<td>Opportunities for growth/leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive job opportunity</td>
<td>Parent and community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior management</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career change</td>
<td>Relocation outside of D.C. area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>Retiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation/benefits</td>
<td>School leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and/or textbooks</td>
<td>School safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General dissatisfaction with the role</td>
<td>Supplies and/or technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPACT</td>
<td>Support from Central Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate supervision</td>
<td>Support from principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job opportunity at a different school/district</td>
<td>Work/life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunity for growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Answer Options for “Next Work Environment”**
*(one selection + optional text response)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next Work Environment</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charter school</td>
<td>Public school district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit organization</td>
<td>Pursuing additional education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Retiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private organization</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They also had the option of submitting a text response for retention efforts and next work environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options for “DCPS Retention Efforts”</th>
<th>(rank up to three selections + optional text response)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional classroom resources</td>
<td>Increased support from instructional superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional professional development opportunities within my field</td>
<td>Increased support from principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance transferring to another DCPS school</td>
<td>Instructional support from school leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral support from school leadership</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better defined job expectations and career ladder</td>
<td>Mentoring from an experienced colleague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better relationships with my supervisor</td>
<td>More growth/leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better work/life balance</td>
<td>More operational support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement/recognition from school leadership</td>
<td>More schedule flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher annual salary</td>
<td>Priority enrollment for your child(ren) in DCPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved benefits</td>
<td>Stronger management/supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved professional development</td>
<td>There was nothing my school or district could do to change my decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased compensation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased support from district leadership</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The exit survey also collected demographic data including age, experience, and school type.

About **60%** of departing teachers were **35 years old or younger**.

About **70%** of departing teachers **had been with DCPS for 5 years or less**.

About **half** of departing teachers **taught at an elementary school**.

Note: About 47% of current DCPS teachers are 35 years old or younger; About 59% of current DCPS teachers have been with DCPS for 5 years or less; About 52% of current DCPS teachers teach at an elementary school.
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The top 3 factors why teachers left DCPS were work/life balance, school leadership, or a career change.
High performers were more likely to leave due to work/life balance, a career change, or to pursue leadership opportunities.
Similarly, highly effective teachers left more often due to work/life balance or for leadership opportunities than effective ones.

Top factor in leaving:

- Work/Life balance: 33% (Highly Effective), 25% (Effective)
- School leadership: 19% (Highly Effective), 19% (Effective)
- Career change: 17% (Highly Effective), 14% (Effective)
- IMPACT: 9% (Highly Effective), 1% (Effective)
- Leadership opportunities: 15% (Highly Effective), 10% (Effective)
- Behavior management: 6% (Highly Effective), 1% (Effective)

“Retirement” and “relocation” excluded from calculation; N = 483
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For most teachers, IMPACT wasn’t the primary factor for leaving DCPS

1. Factor in leaving

- Minimally Effective: 25% (69)
- Developing: 21% (220)
- Effective: 9% (319)
- Highly Effective: 1% (164)

Retiring and relocating teachers not included in calculation; N = 772
Many more teachers named IMPACT as a top 3 factor in their decision to leave.

1., 2., or 3. Factor in leaving

- Minimally Effective (69): 52%
- Developing (220): 54%
- Effective (319): 29%
- Highly Effective (164): 13%

Retiring and relocating teachers not included in calculation; N = 772
However, for high-performing teachers, school leadership was a more significant factor than IMPACT.

1., 2., or 3. Factor in leaving

- Minimally Effective (69):
  - School Leadership: 46%
  - IMPACT: 52%

- Developing (220):
  - School Leadership: 42%
  - IMPACT: 54%

- Effective (319):
  - School Leadership: 32%
  - IMPACT: 29%

- Highly Effective (164):
  - School Leadership: 37%
  - IMPACT: 13%

Retiring and relocating teachers not included in calculation; N = 772
And work/life balance was an even more critical factor than school leadership.

1., 2., or 3. Factor in leaving

- **Minimally Effective (69)**: 23%
- **Developing (220)**: 33%
- **Effective (319)**: 38%
- **Highly Effective (164)**: 43%

Retiring and relocating teachers not included in calculation; N = 772
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One-third of teachers planned to continue working in a public school district; almost half planned to work in a school setting.

**Next work environment**

- Public school district: 34%
- Undecided: 28%
- Charter school: 8%
- Pursuing additional education: 8%
- Private school: 4%
- Nonprofit organization: 4%
- Private organization: 3%
- Other: 10%

"Retired" (9%) excluded from calculation

N = 1062
Teachers’ IMPACT score largely did not affect where they planned to work after leaving DCPS

Next work environment

"Retired" excluded from calculation; N = 851
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Teachers most often reported behavioral support, recognition, and instructional support from leaders as top retention efforts.

Top retention effort

- Behavioral support from SL: 23%
- Recognition from SL: 17%
- Instructional support from SL: 8%
- Help transferring to another DCPS school: 8%
- More schedule flexibility: 8%
- More leadership opportunities: 7%
- Increased compensation: 6%

“Nothing school/district could do” (45%) excluded from calculation; SL = School Leadership; Recognition = “Encouragement/recognition”; Other efforts (23%) not displayed

N = 897
Compared to low performers, high-performing teachers wanted more schedule flexibility and leadership opportunities.

Top retention effort

- Behavioral support from SL: 25% (Low), 19% (High)
- Recognition from SL: 16% (Low), 18% (High)
- Instructional support from SL: 12% (Low), 8% (High)
- Help transferring to another DCPS school: 11% (Low), 7% (High)
- More schedule flexibility: 5% (Low), 10% (High)
- More leadership opportunities: 4% (Low), 10% (High)
- Increased compensation: 4% (Low), 7% (High)

“Nothing school/district could do” excluded from calculation; N = 713; "High Performer = Effective or highly effective teacher; Low Performer = Developing or minimally effective teacher"
Effective teachers wanted behavioral support the most, but highly effective ones stressed greater schedule flexibility more.

Top retention effort

- Behavioral support from SL: Effective (24%) vs. Highly Effective (11%)
- Recognition from SL: Effective (19%) vs. Highly Effective (18%)
- Instructional support from SL: Effective (7%) vs. Highly Effective (8%)
- Help transferring to another DCPS school: Effective (7%) vs. Highly Effective (6%)
- More schedule flexibility: Effective (8%) vs. Highly Effective (14%)
- More leadership opportunities: Effective (9%) vs. Highly Effective (11%)
- Increased compensation: Effective (6%) vs. Highly Effective (9%)

“Nothing school/district could do” excluded from calculation; N = 457
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Teacher retention strategies should be targeted toward the needs of effective and highly effective teachers.

High-Performing Teacher

Effective

Highly Effective

Work/Life Balance

School Leadership

Career Change

Leadership Opportunity

This section takes a closer look at the top four factors why high-performing teachers left the district.
High-performing teachers who left due to work/life balance wanted more schedule flexibility and behavioral support.

Top retention effort, effective & highly effective teachers, top factor in leaving: work/life balance

- There was nothing my school/district could do: 45%
- More schedule flexibility: 20%
- Behavioral support from SL: 10%
- Other: 26%

N = 133
To high performers, “schedule flexibility” mostly meant part-time and leave options to spend time with family

About half the text responses from high-performing teachers who wanted “more schedule flexibility” referred to more part-time and leave options to spend time with family. (N*=18)

“I would have really appreciated a longer-term leave option or the ability to work in a more flexible position for a year while my child is young”

“I was really hoping to have a job with more flexibility or a part-time position so I could spend more time with my family while my kids are young”

“After the birth of my daughter this school year, […] DCPS would not allow me to be away for more than the 16 weeks”

Teachers in their early thirties / with 6-10 years experience at DCPS were the largest group of high performers who wanted schedule flexibility. (N*=36)

* Not counting retiring/relocating teachers
High performers who left due to school leadership would have liked more recognition and behavioral/instructional support.

Top retention effort, effective & highly effective teachers, top factor in leaving: school leadership

- Recognition from SL: 33%
- Behavioral support from SL: 21%
- Instructional support from SL: 15%
- Assistance transferring to another DCPS school: 10%
- There was nothing my school/district could do: 9%
- Other: 12%

N = 91
Most high performers who switched careers said there was nothing the school or district could have done to retain them.

Top retention effort, effective & highly effective teachers, top factor in leaving: career change

- There was nothing my school/district could do: 55%
- Recognition from SL: 10%
- More leadership opportunities: 8%
- More schedule flexibility: 6%
- Increased compensation: 5%
- Other: 15%

N = 78
High-performing teachers who left to pursue a leadership opportunity were three times as likely to go to a charter school.

Next work environment, effective & highly effective teachers

- **All high performers (805)**
- **Left for a leadership opportunity (58)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>All High Performers</th>
<th>Left for Leadership Opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public school district</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11% + 10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter school</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing additional education</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4% + 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit organization</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4% + 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>0% + 3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private organization</td>
<td>0% + 0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Retiring teachers excluded from calculation; N = 805
High-performing teachers of color named more leadership opportunities as the top effort that would have retained them.

Top retention effort, effective & highly effective teachers

- Behavioral support from SL: 23% White Teachers (168), 16% Teachers of Color (137)
- Recognition from SL: 18% White Teachers (168), 15% Teachers of Color (137)
- More schedule flexibility: 14% White Teachers (168), 9% Teachers of Color (137)
- Instructional support from SL: 10% White Teachers (168), 6% Teachers of Color (137)
- More leadership opportunities: 19% White Teachers (168), 8% Teachers of Color (137)
- Help transferring to another DCPS school: 10% White Teachers (168), 5% Teachers of Color (137)
- Increased compensation: 7% White Teachers (168), 4% Teachers of Color (137)

“Nothing school/district could do” excluded from calculation, retiring & relocating teachers excluded; N = 305
DCPS’ survey results indicate considerations for urban school districts on how to retain high-performing teachers

Considerations for Urban School Districts

1. Give experienced teachers more options for **extended leave and part-time employment**.

2. Address how school leaders **show encouragement and recognition** to high-performing teachers, but don’t forget **behavioral and instructional support** – all three are important.

3. **Evolve to retain high-performing teachers** – pay attention to what they want and where they go when they leave to learn about specific district changes or incentives that would retain them.

4. Don’t focus on retaining **potential career changers** – most say there was nothing the school district could have done to keep them.

5. Market **opportunities for leadership toward teachers of color** and address **issues of bias** when hiring for leadership positions.
DCPS and other urban school districts should consider collecting more data in teacher exit surveys

Other data that districts could collect in teacher exit surveys to better understand how to retain high-performing teachers include:

• **Teacher preparation** data – Where did the teacher train to become a teacher?

• Total **years of teaching experience** – How many total years of experience did the teacher have? Not only in the district, but outside of the district, too (if applicable).

• Data on **gender** – Do teachers’ experiences differ based on gender?

• Teacher **compensation** data – How much was the teacher earning when they left?

• Expand on the issue of **relocation** – Did the teacher relocate because of personal or professional reasons? If personal, was it due to a spouse or partner needing to relocate?

• Better **understand the teacher’s next role** – If they stay in a district or charter school, are they still in an instructional role? If the teacher is leaving the teaching profession, what role are they taking on?
About the Authors

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