



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

By Kaitlin Pennington and Alexander Brand  
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# Methodology

## District of Columbia Public Schools teacher exit survey information

- The District of Columbia Public Schools **administers an exit survey** to departing teachers.
- The exit survey asks teachers to select up to three factors to explain **why they left the district**, indicate **where they would work next**, and choose up to **three options for what DCPS could have done to make them stay**.

## Methodology

- Our deck analyzes the survey data collected between **February 2015 and January 2018**.
- We broke down teachers' responses by their latest performance rating, grouping teachers rated as "minimally effective" or "developing" as **low-performing** and "effective" and "highly effective" as **high-performing**.
- DCPS **retains 92 percent\*** of effective and highly effective teachers. This analysis **focuses on the teachers who leave DCPS**.
- To examine **how DCPS and other districts can better retain teachers in the future**, 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.
- **For additional insights on how to retain high-performing teachers**, 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.

# This analysis focuses on high-performing\* teachers' responses to the DCPS teacher exit survey

## Key findings from high-performing teachers' responses

<b>Why they left</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work/life <b>balance</b>;</li><li>2. <b>School leadership</b>; and</li><li>3. To pursue a <b>career change</b></li></ol>
<b>Where they went</b>	One-third of high-performing teachers planned to <b>continue working in a public school district</b> ; almost half planned to work in a school setting in general
<b>What would have retained them</b>	<b>Behavioral support*</b> and <b>encouragement/recognition</b> 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: *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement in DCPS*

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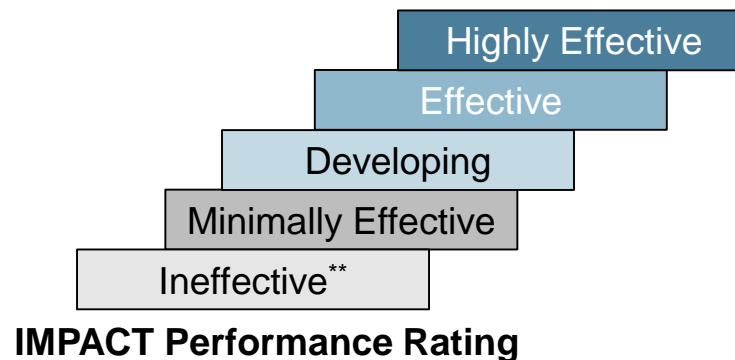
5 Where Teachers Went

6 What Would Have Retained Teachers

7 Additional Insights on High-Performing Teachers

# 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.



\*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

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

<b>Answer Options for “Next Work Environment” (one selection + optional text response)</b>	
Charter school	Public school district
Nonprofit organization	Pursuing additional education
Other	Retiring
Private organization	Undecided
Private school	



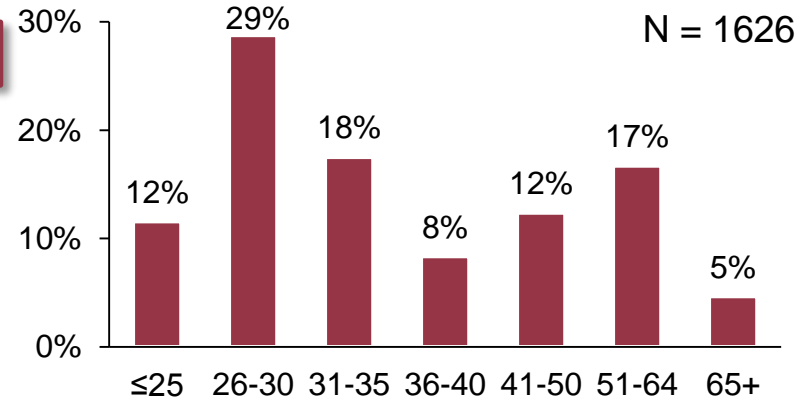
# They also had the option of submitting a text response for retention efforts and next work environment

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

# The exit survey also collected demographic data including age, experience, and school type

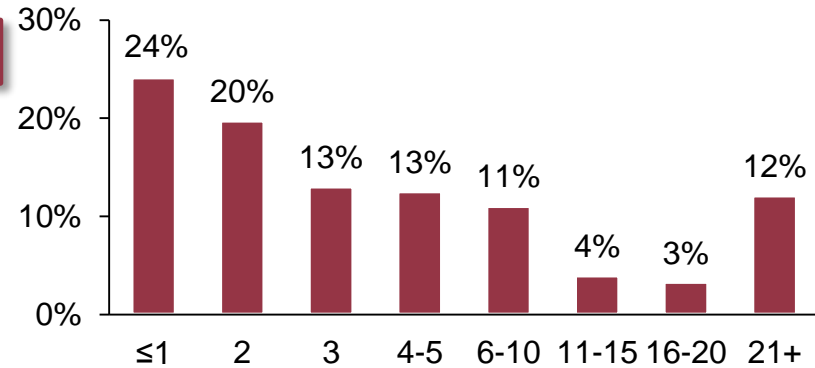
About **60%** of departing teachers were **35 years old or younger**.

Age



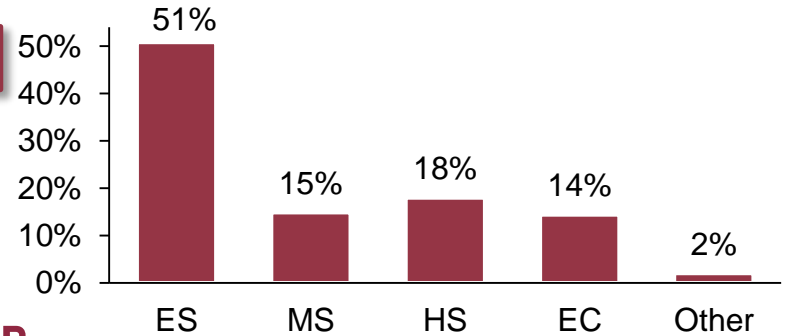
About **70%** of departing teachers **had been with DCPS for 5 years or less**.

Time at DCPS (in years)



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

School Type



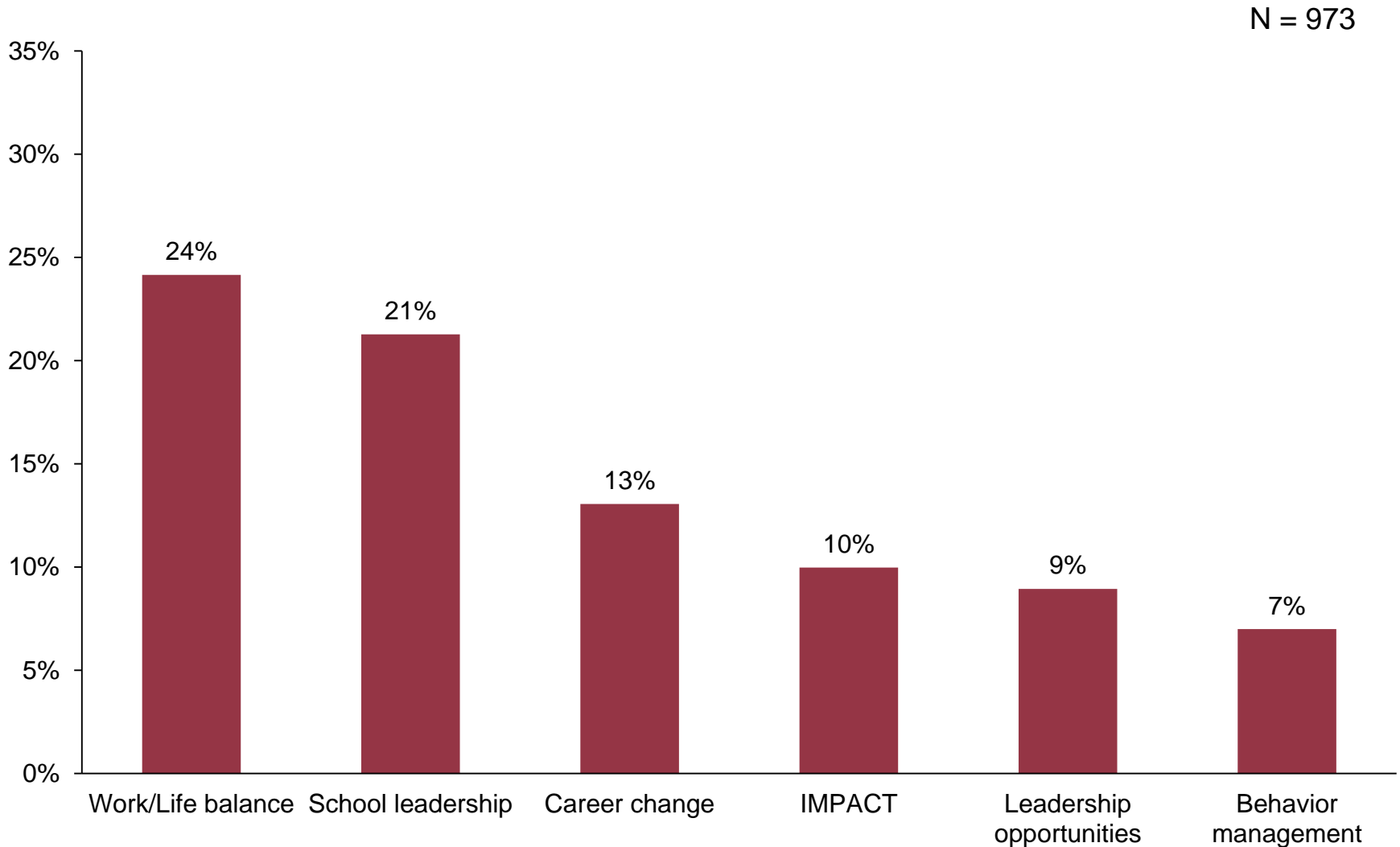
Note: About 47% of current DCPS teachers are 35 years old or younger; About 59% of current DCPS teachers have been with DCPS for 5 years or less; About 52% of current DCPS teachers teach at an elementary school.

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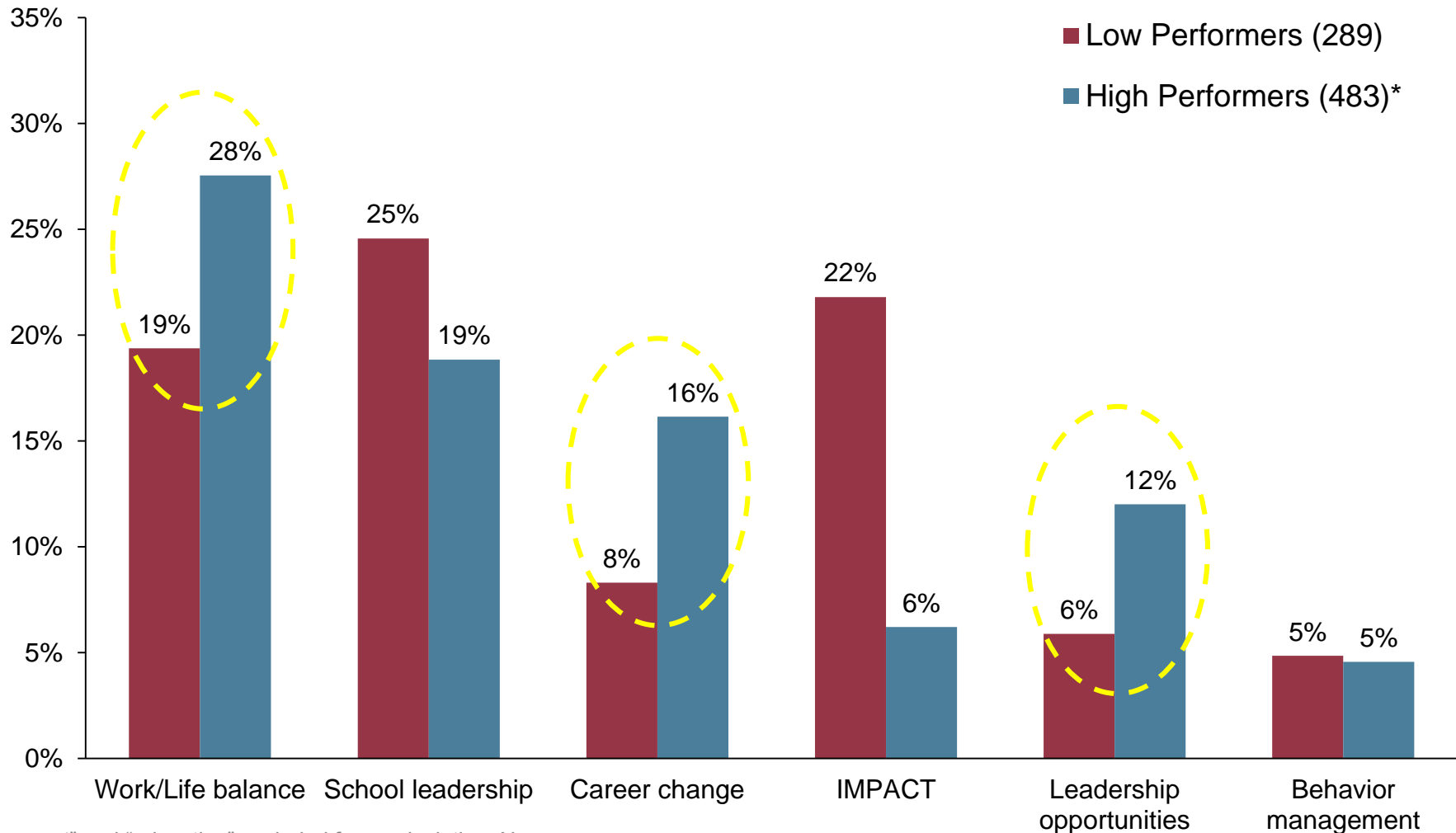
# The top 3 factors why teachers left DCPS were work/life balance, school leadership, or a career change



“Relocation” (27%) and “retirement” (13%) excluded from calculation; Other factors (16%) not displayed

# High performers were more likely to leave due to work/life balance, a career change, or to pursue leadership opportunities

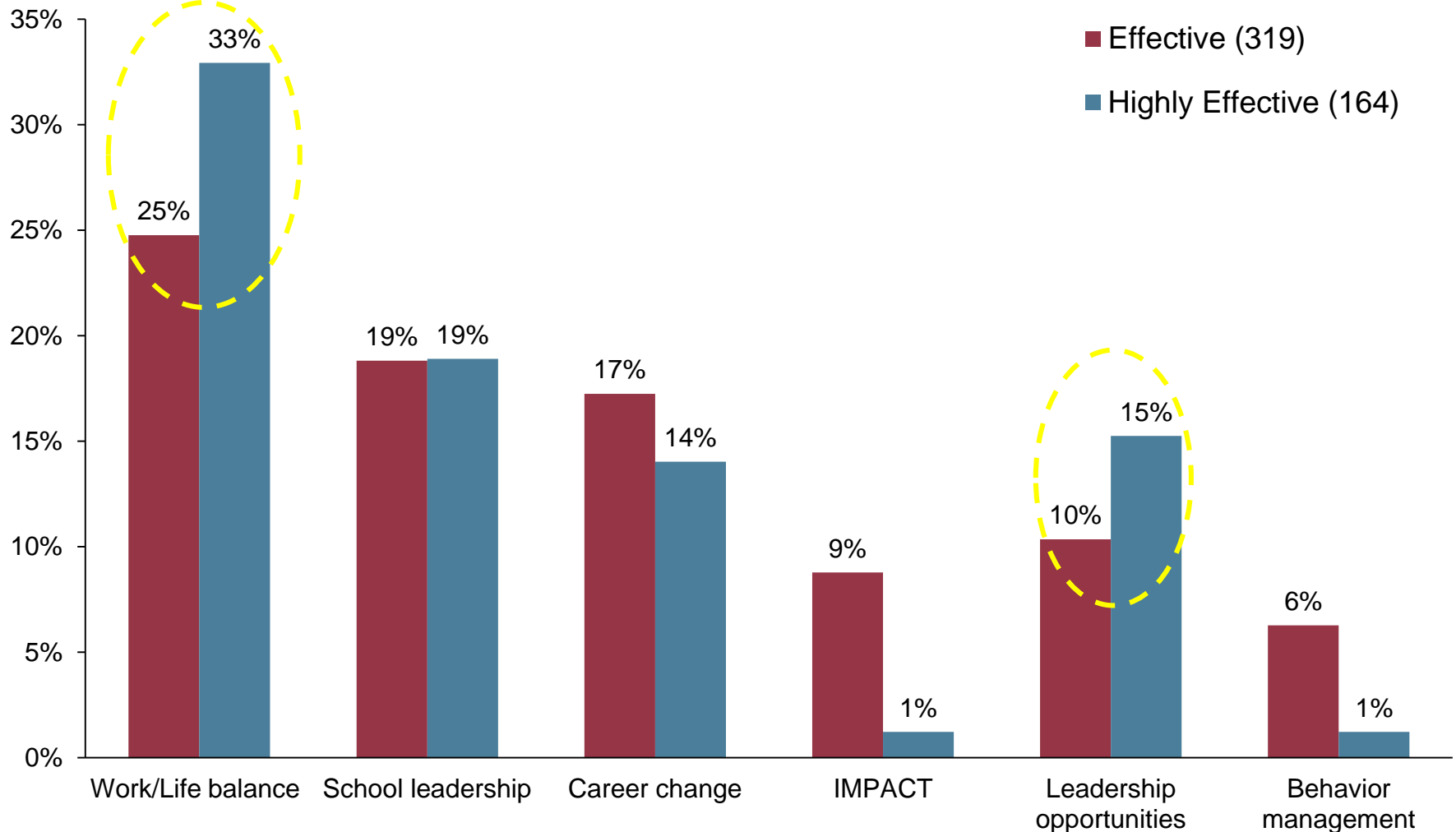
## Top factor in leaving



"Retirement" and "relocation" excluded from calculation; N = 772; \* High Performer = Teacher rated Effective or Highly Effective; Low Performer = Teacher rated Developing or Minimally Effective

# Similarly, highly effective teachers left more often due to work/life balance or for leadership opportunities than effective ones

## Top factor in leaving



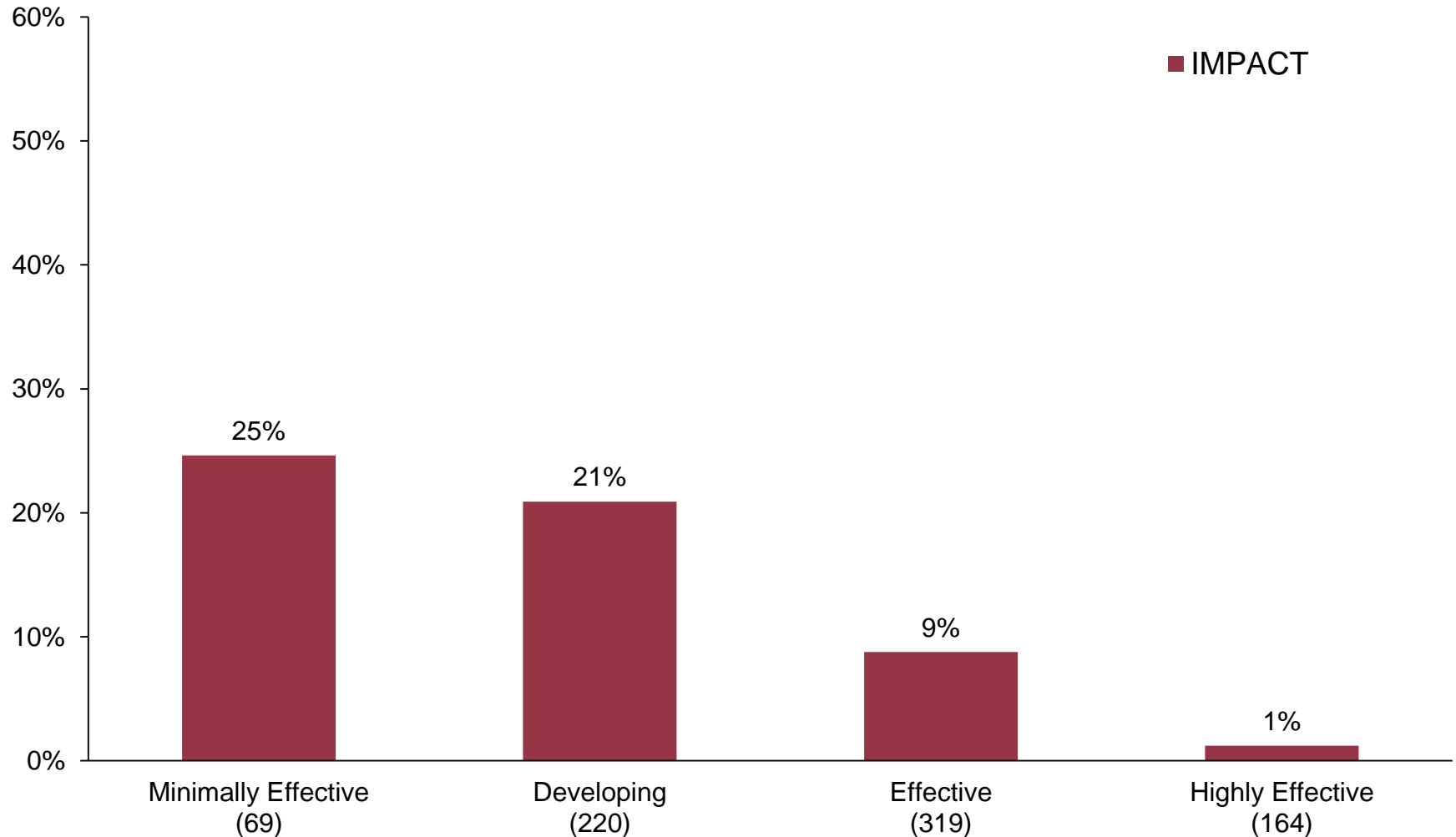
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# For most teachers, IMPACT wasn't the primary factor for leaving DCPS

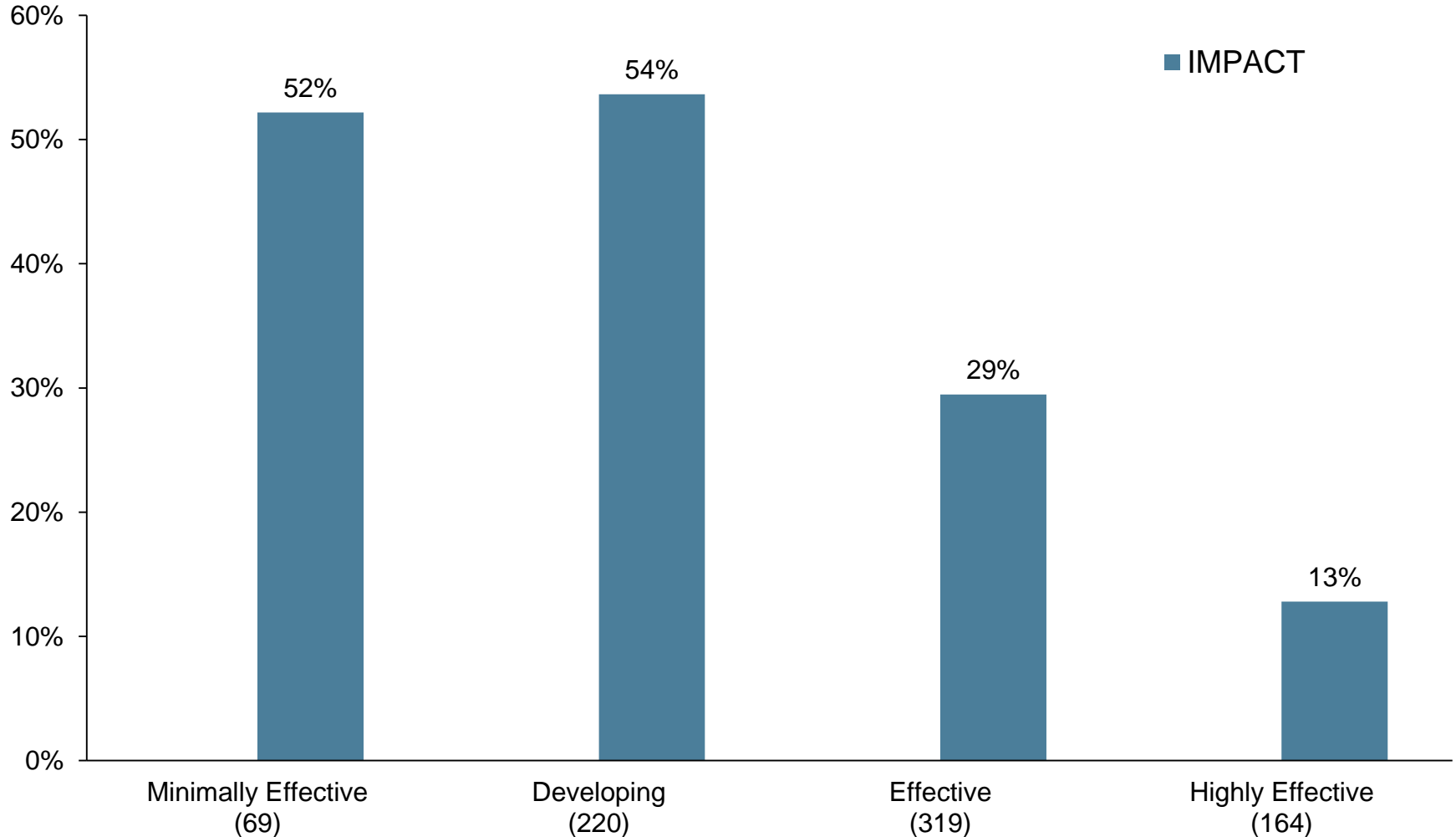
## 1. Factor in leaving





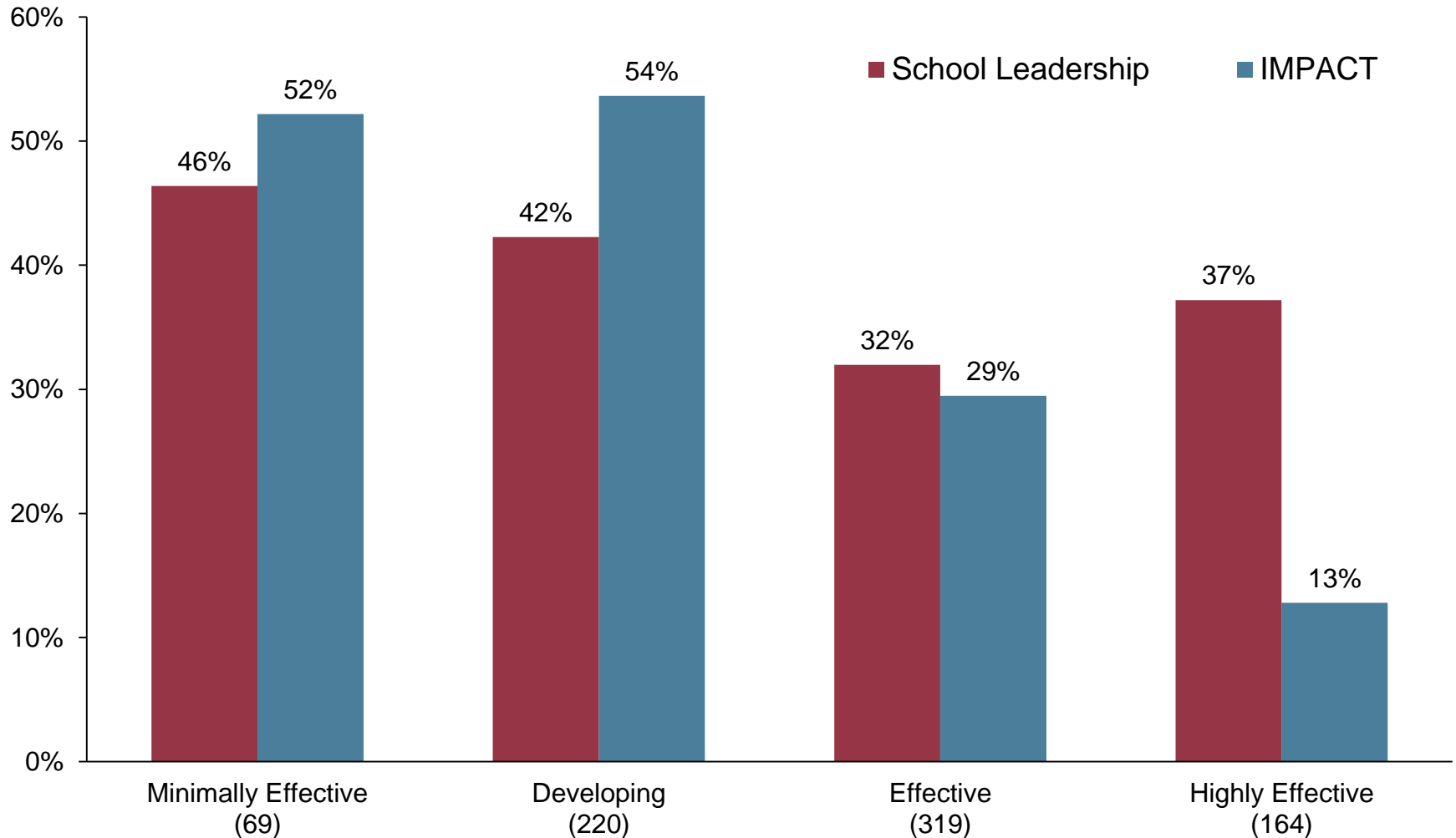
# Many more teachers named IMPACT as a top 3 factor in their decision to leave

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



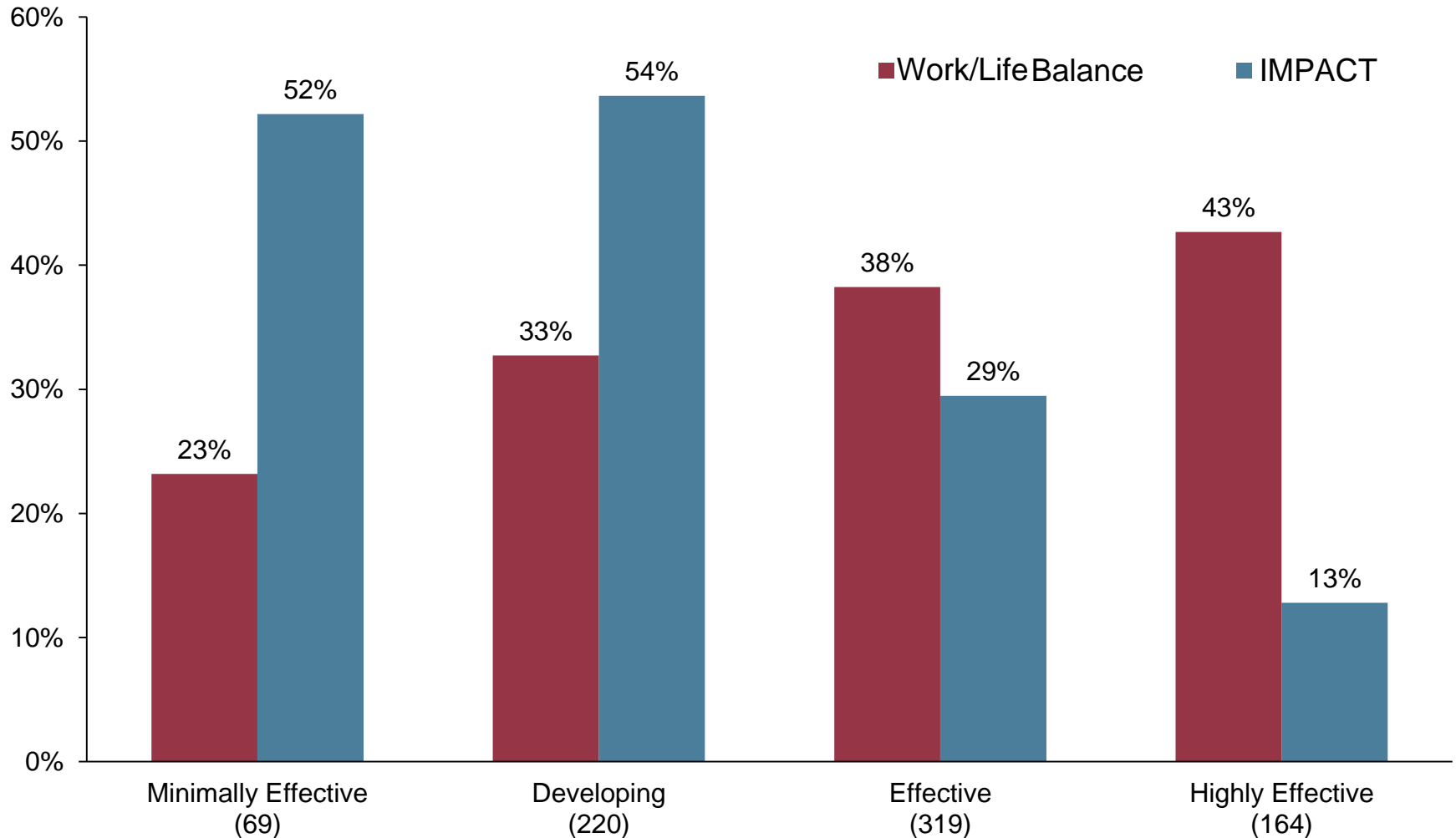
# However, for high-performing teachers, school leadership was a more significant factor than IMPACT

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



# And work/life balance was an even more critical factor than school leadership

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



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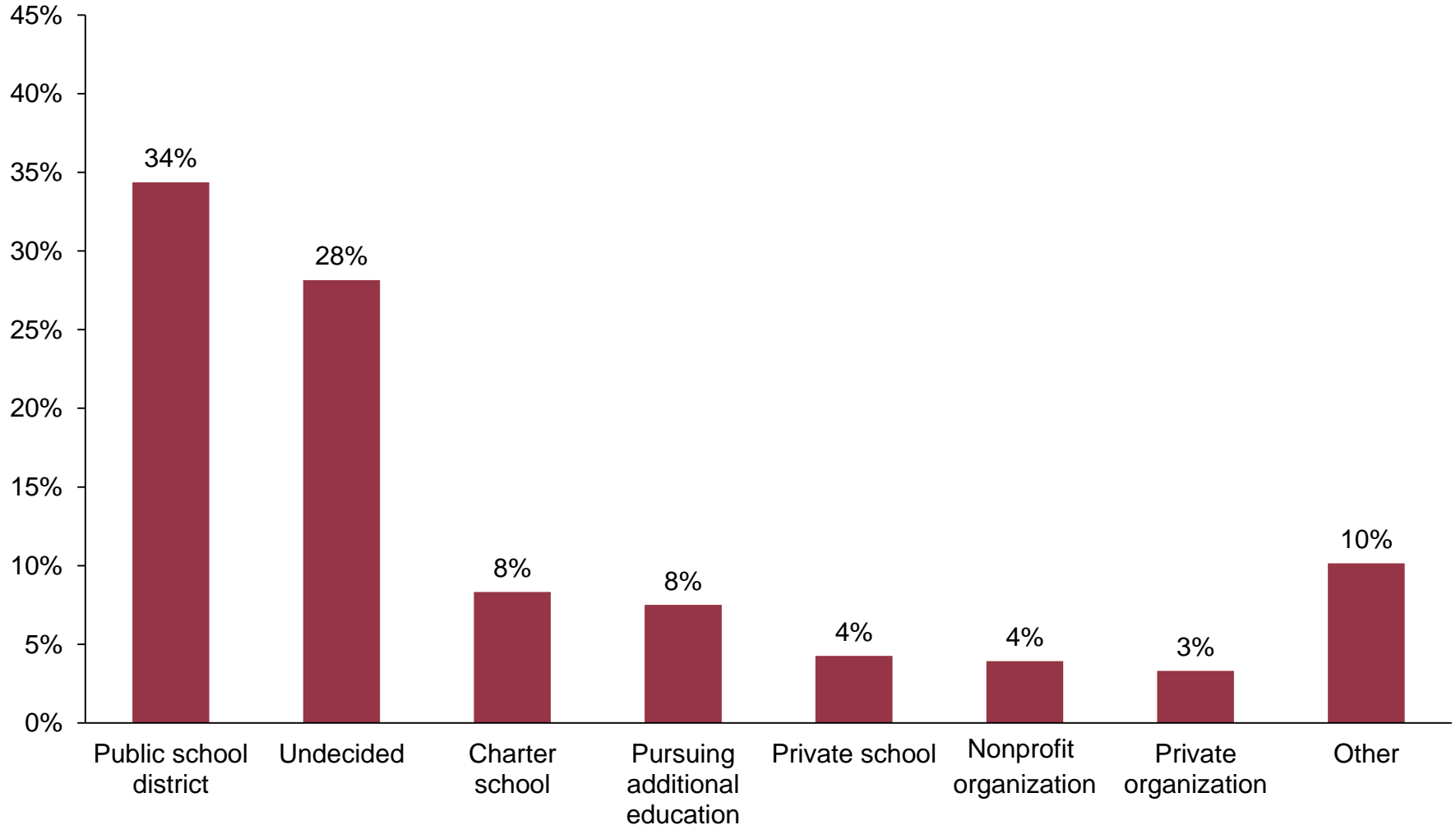
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# One-third of teachers planned to continue working in a public school district; almost half planned to work in a school setting

## Next work environment

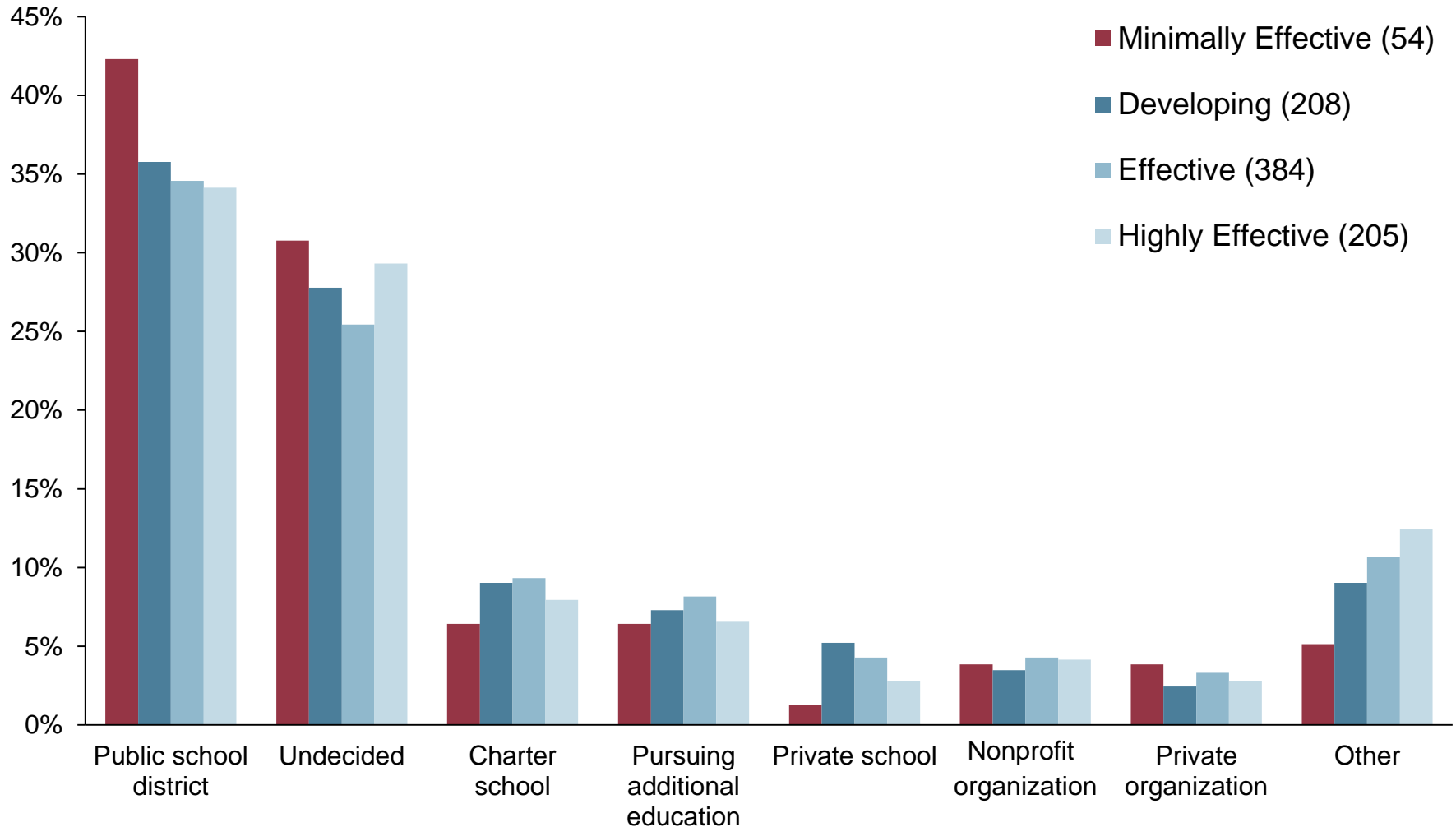
N = 1062



"Retired" (9%) excluded from calculation

# Teachers' IMPACT score largely did not affect where they planned to work after leaving DCPS

## Next work environment



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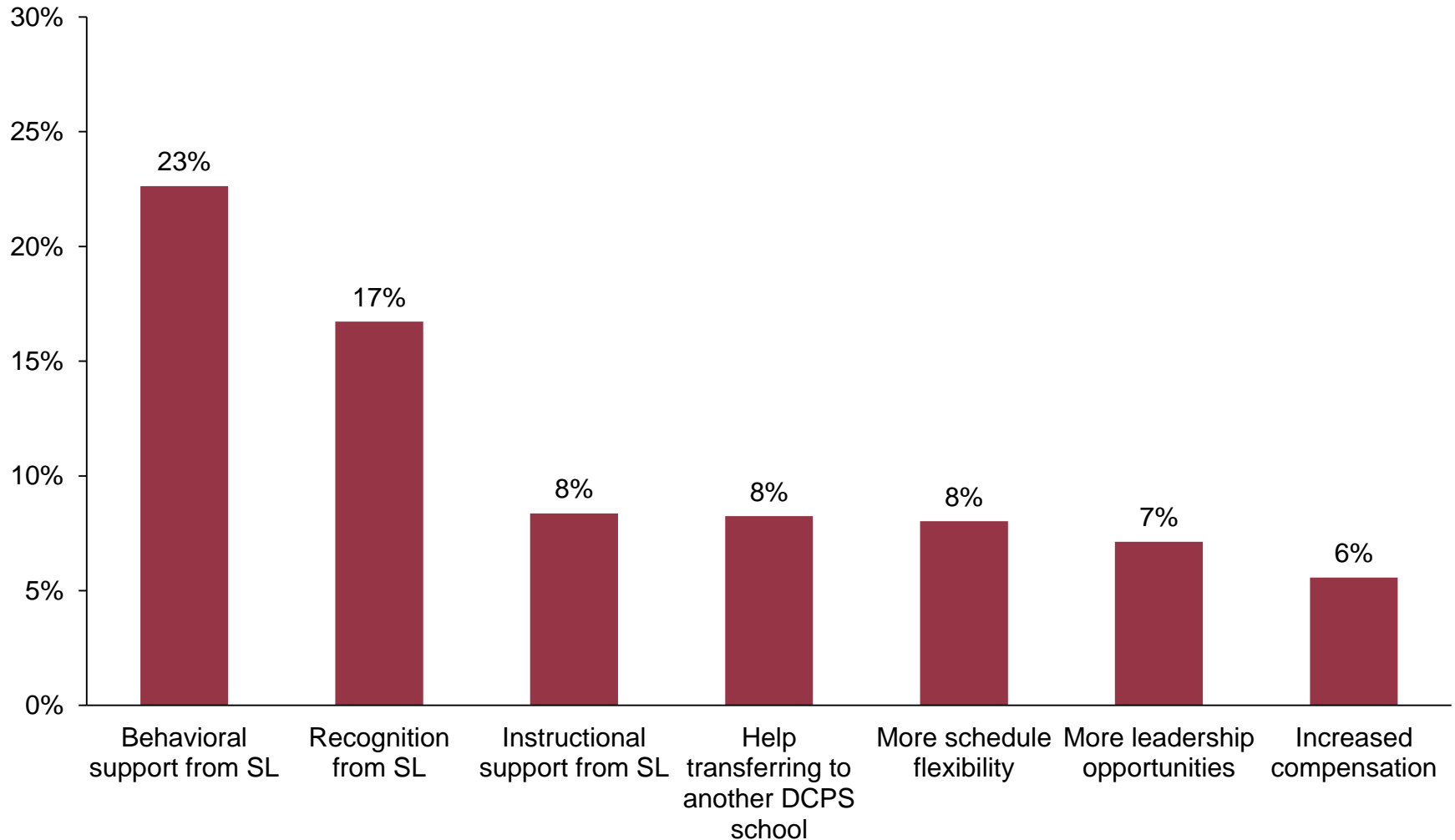
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# Teachers most often reported behavioral support, recognition, and instructional support from leaders as top retention efforts

## Top retention effort

N = 897

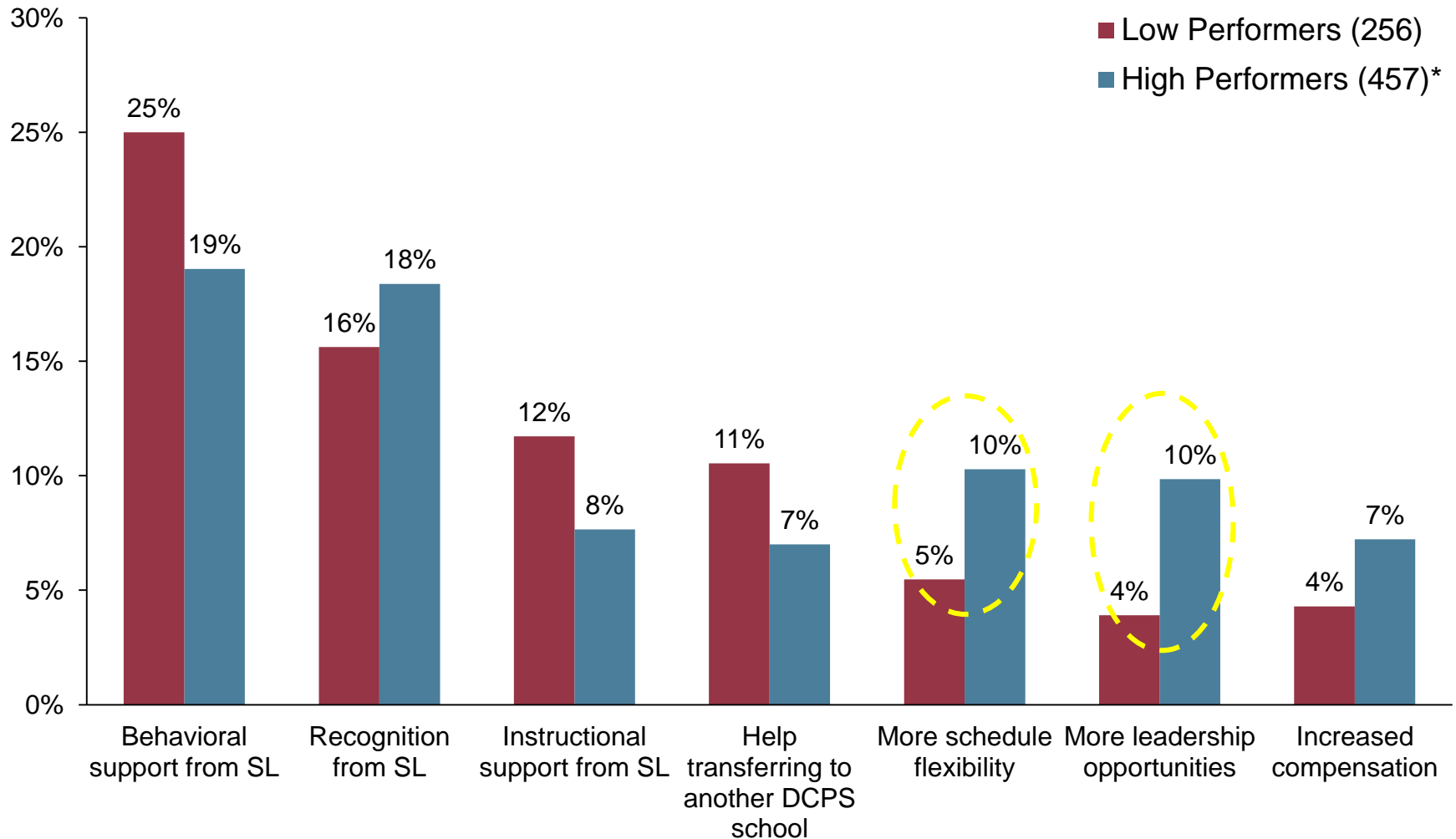


“Nothing school/district could do” (45%) excluded from calculation; SL = School Leadership; Recognition = “Encouragement/recognition”; Other efforts (23%) not displayed



# Compared to low performers, high-performing teachers wanted more schedule flexibility and leadership opportunities

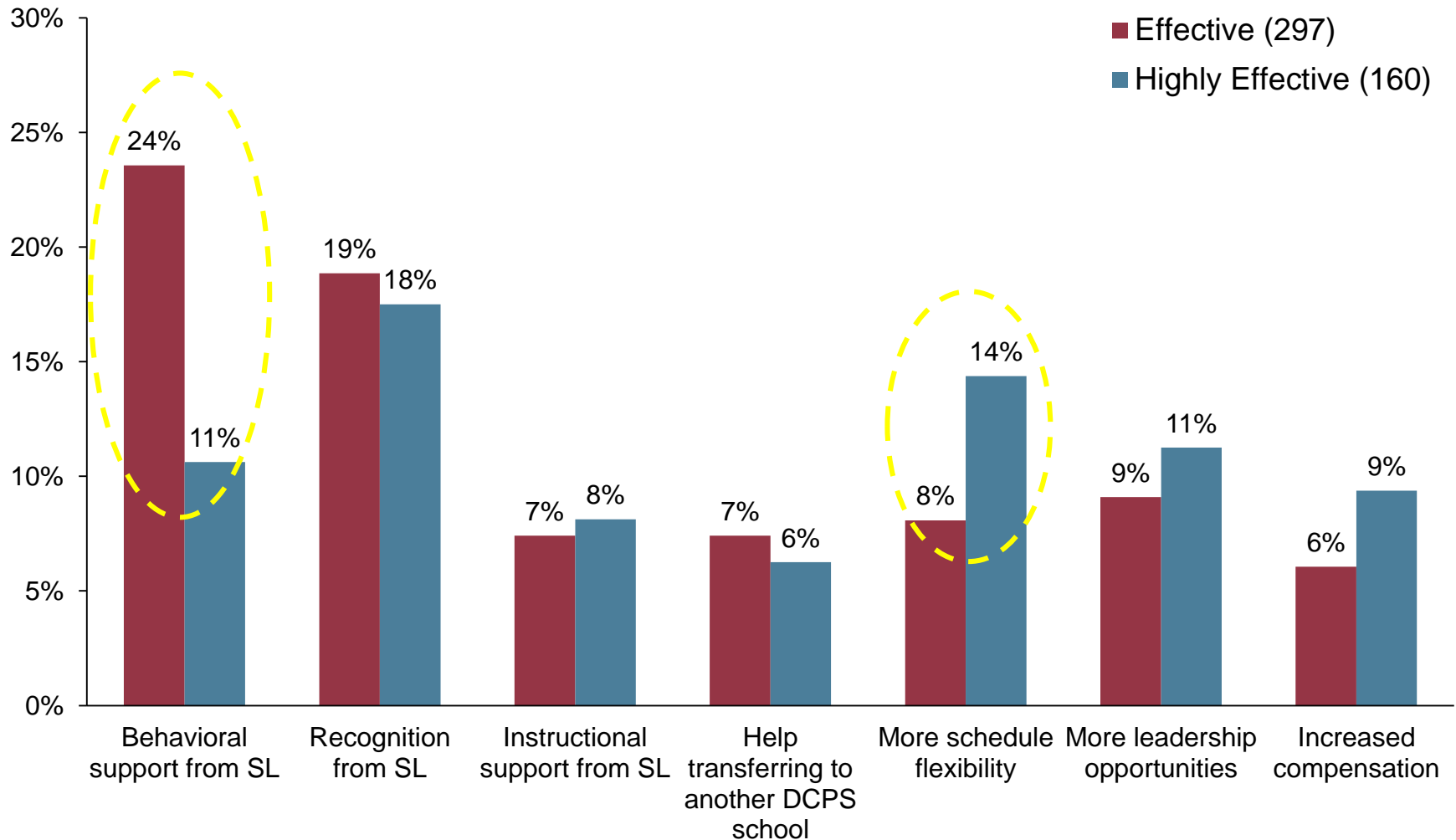
## Top retention effort



"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

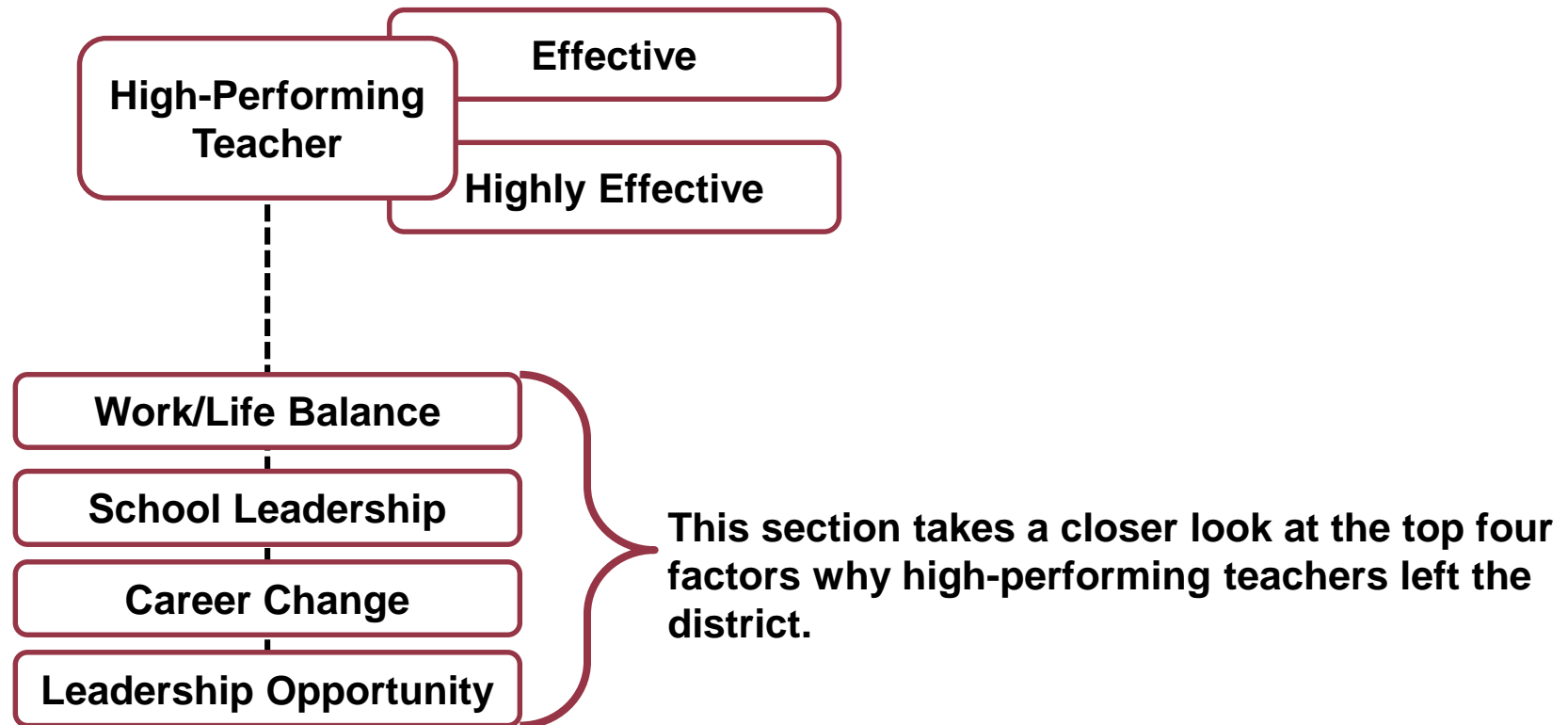


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# Teacher retention strategies should be targeted toward the needs of effective and highly effective teachers

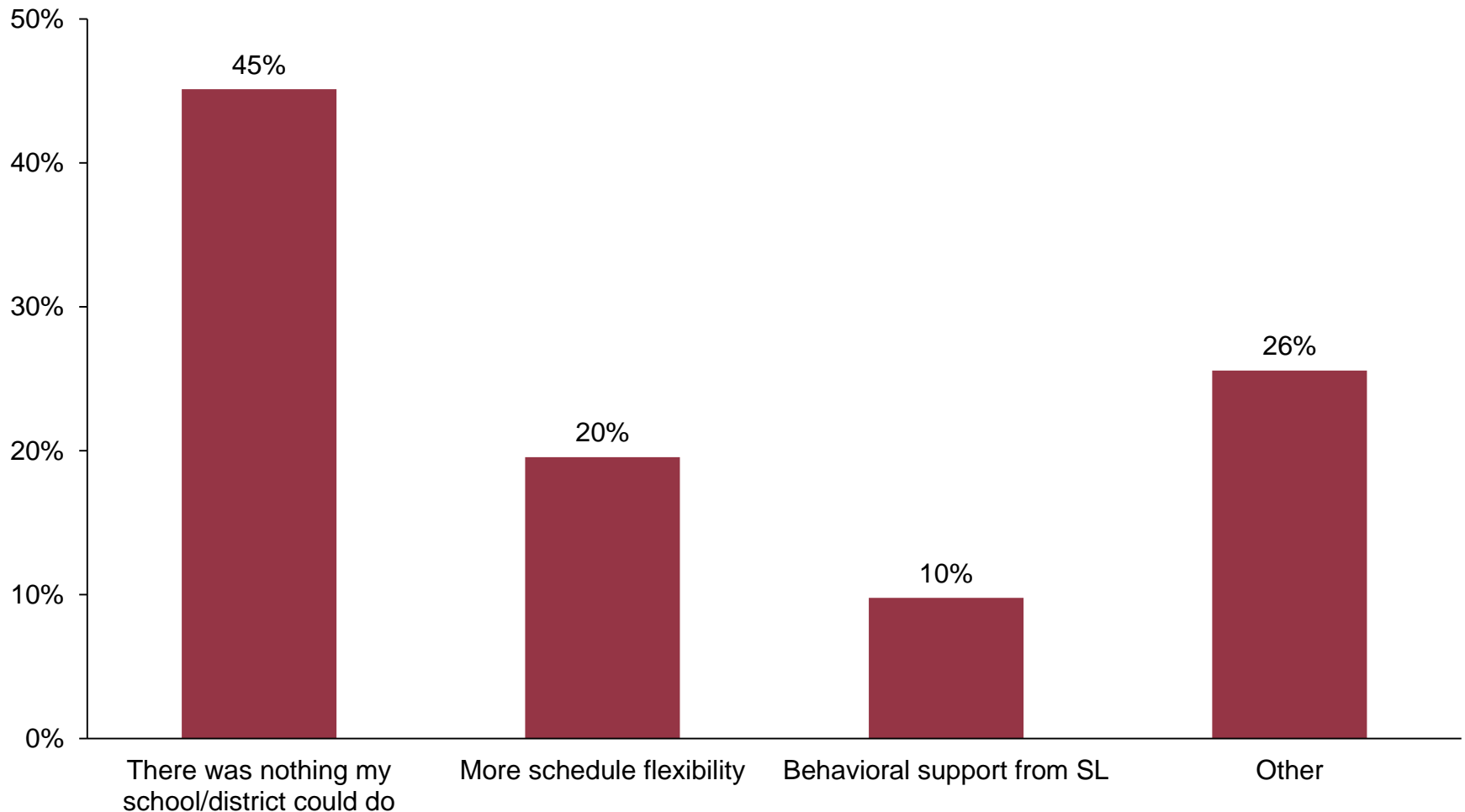


# High-performing teachers who left due to work/life balance wanted more schedule flexibility and behavioral support

Work/Life Balance

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

N = 133



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

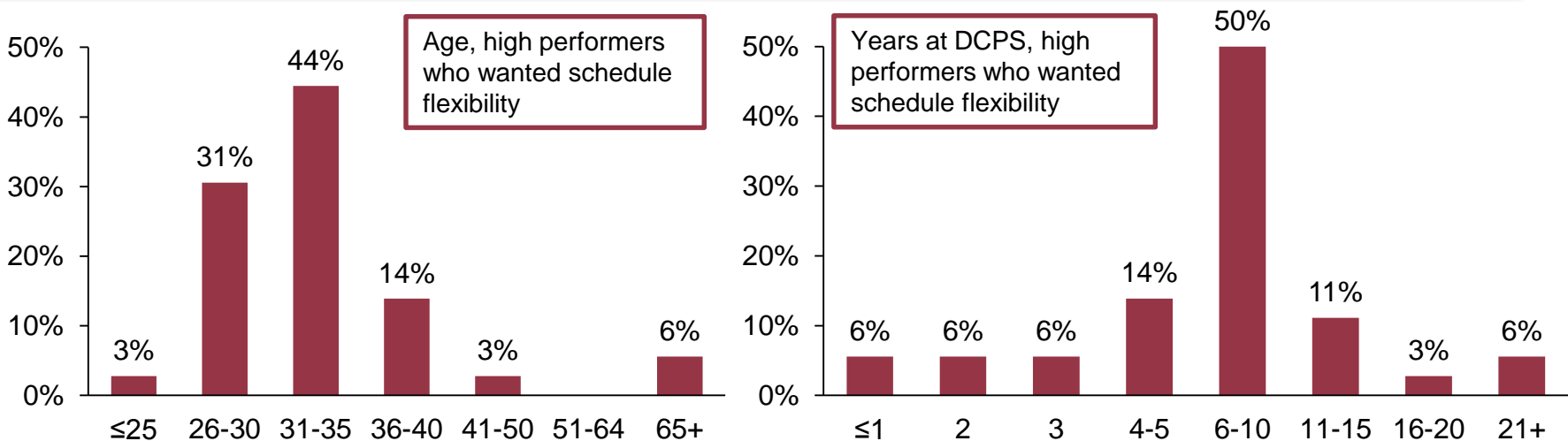
About half the text responses from high-performing teachers who wanted “more schedule flexibility” referred to **more part-time and leave options to spend time with family**. (N\*=18)

“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)



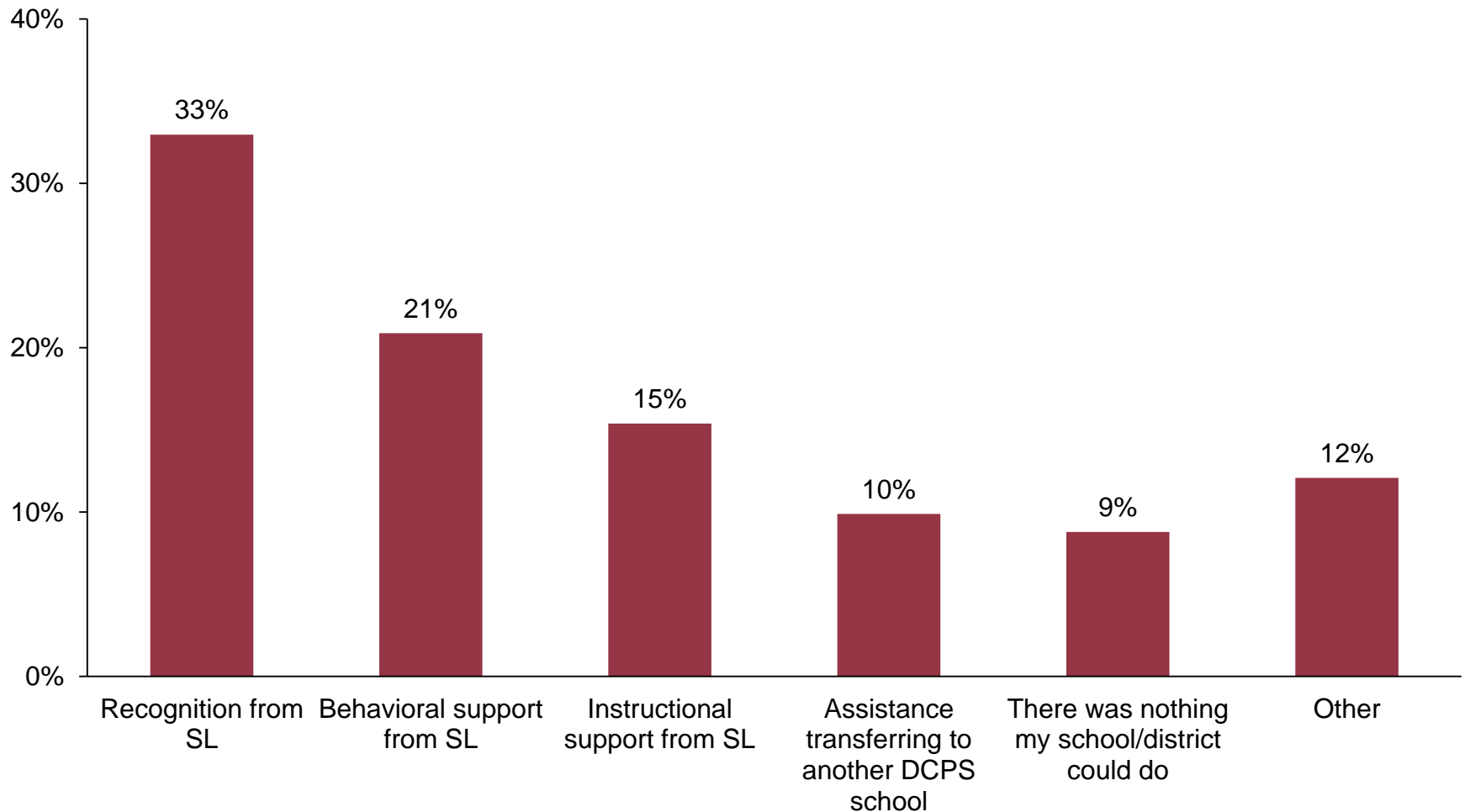
\* Not counting retiring/relocating teachers

# High performers who left due to school leadership would have liked more recognition and behavioral/instructional support

School Leadership

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

N = 91

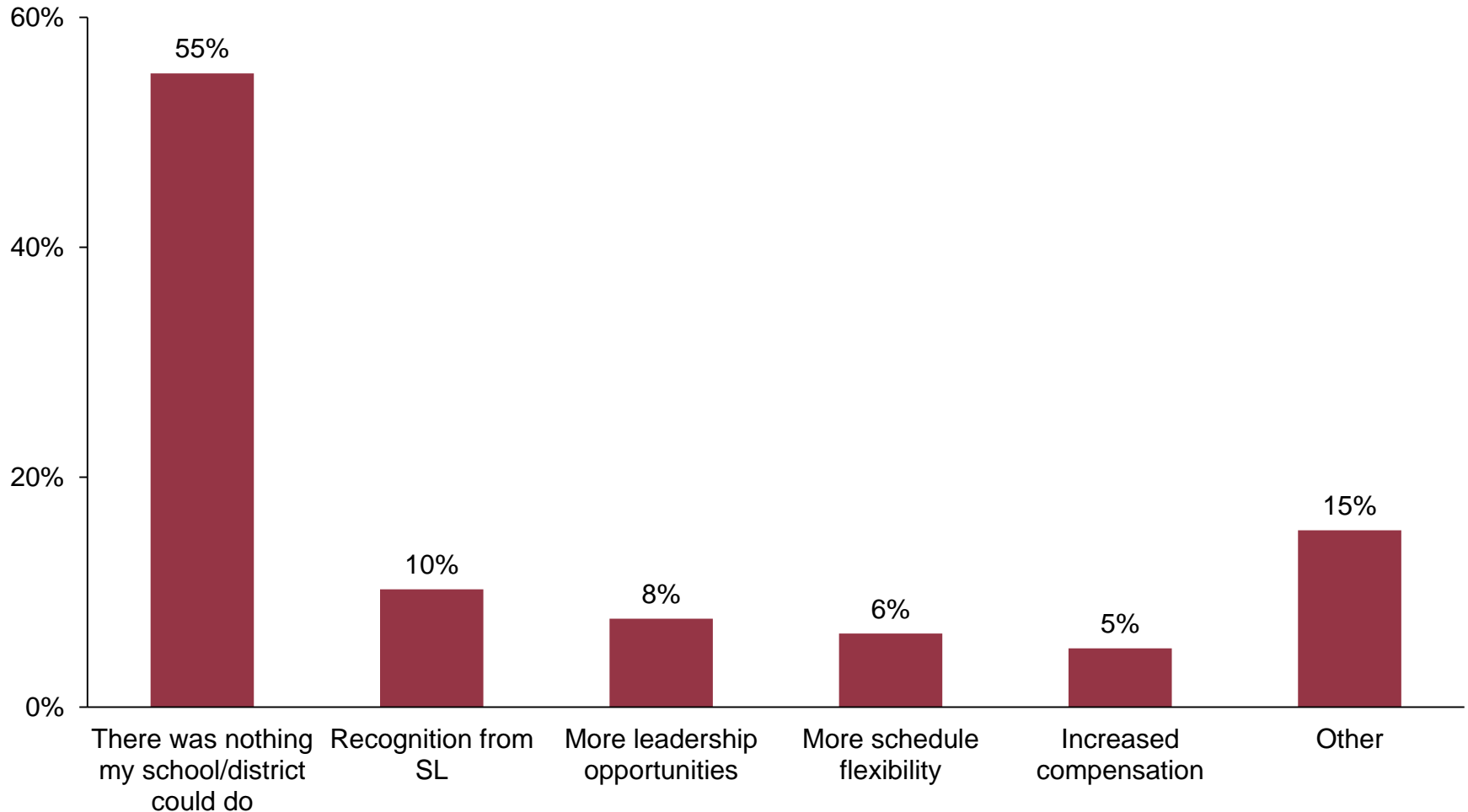


# Most high performers who switched careers said there was nothing the school or district could have done to retain them

Career Change

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

N = 78

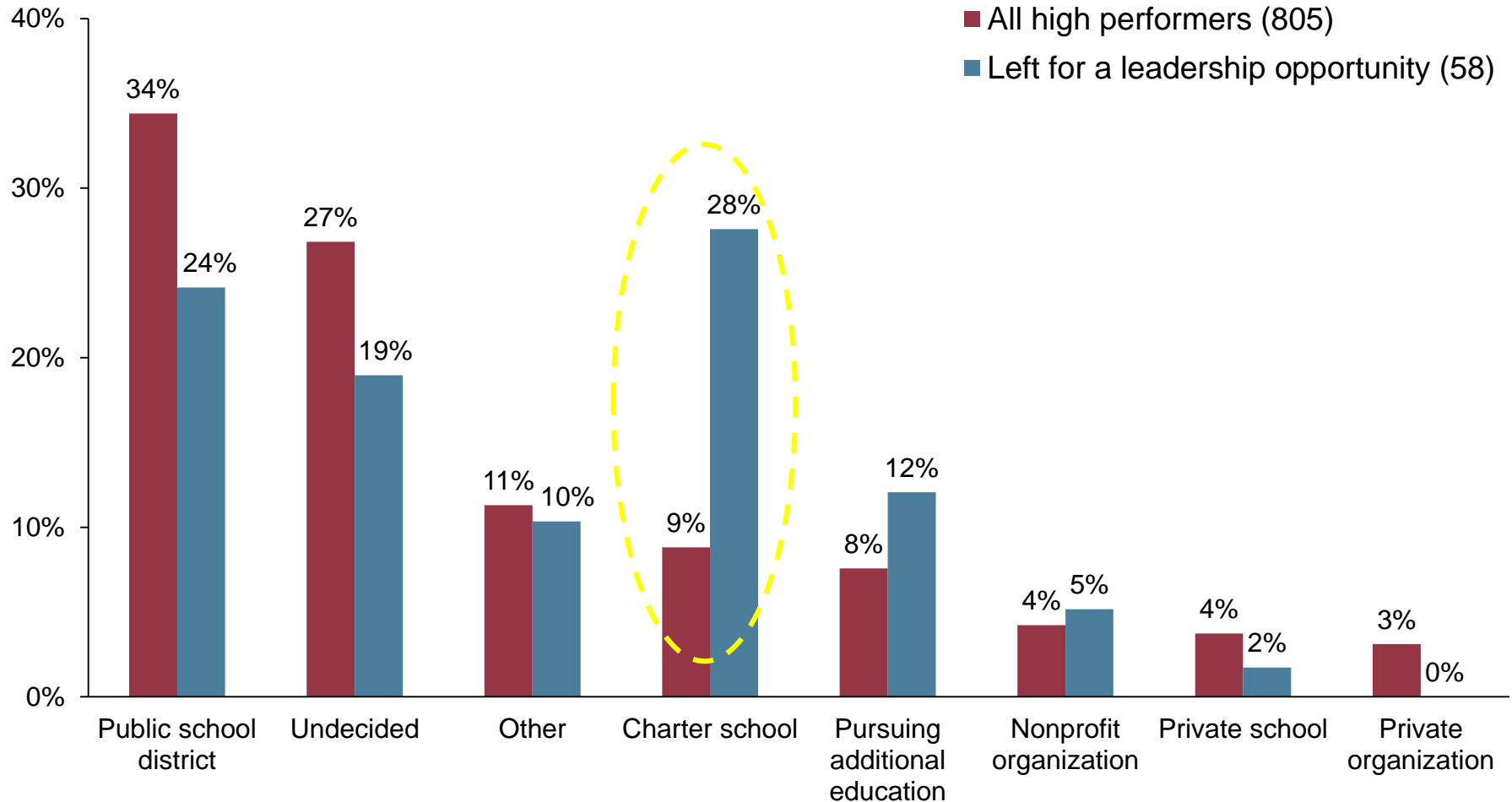




# High-performing teachers who left to pursue a leadership opportunity were three times as likely to go to a charter school

Leadership Opportunity

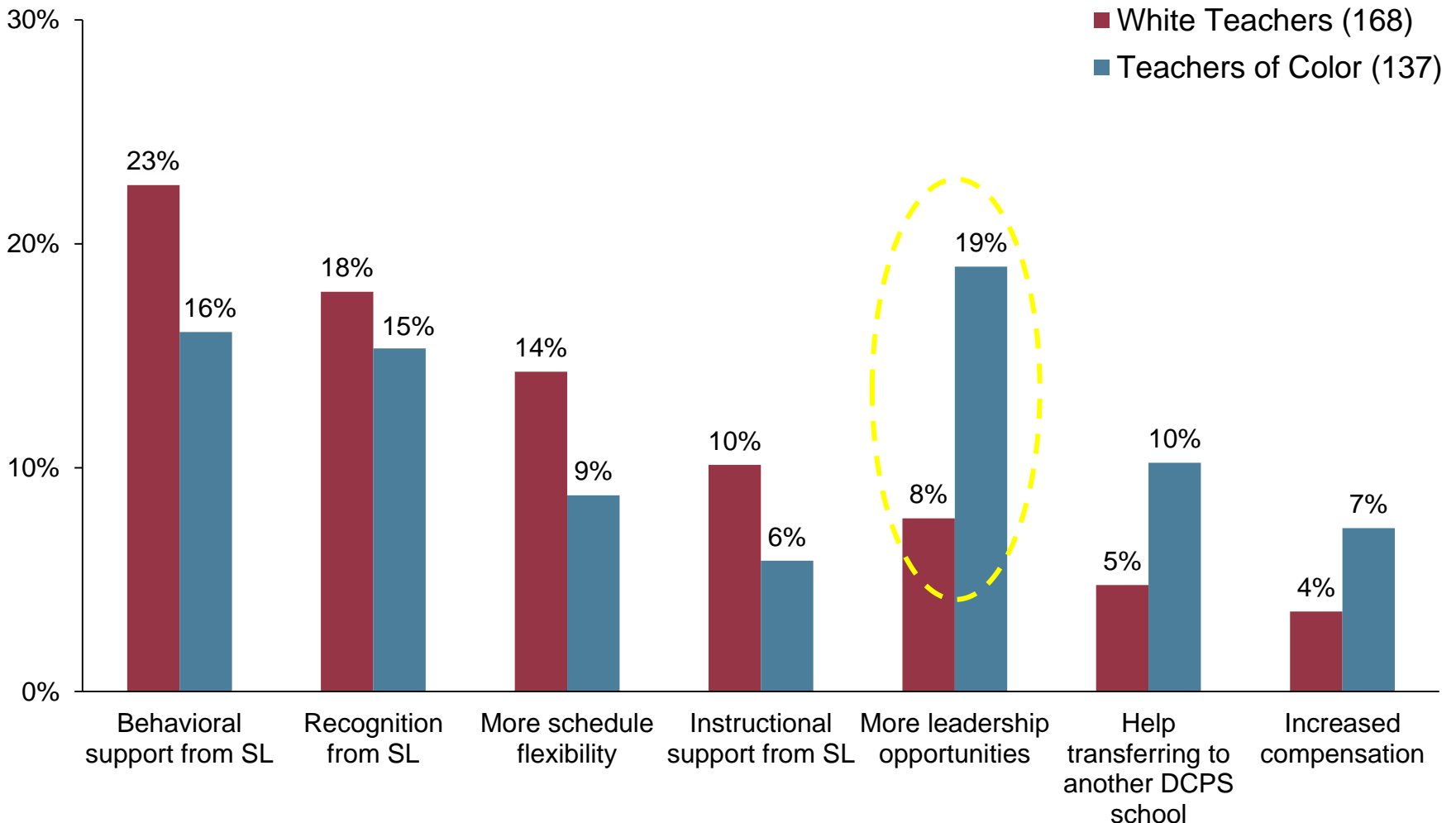
## Next work environment, effective & highly effective teachers



# High-performing teachers of color named more leadership opportunities as the top effort that would have retained them

Leadership Opportunity

## Top retention effort, effective & highly effective teachers



“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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