Understanding teacher turnover: Insights from the School District of Philadelphia

From school years 2010–2011 to 2016–2017, in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), an average of about 25 percent of teachers left their schools every year, and 8 percent left the district each year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Turnover</th>
<th>Teachers Leaving School</th>
<th>Teachers Leaving District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015–2016</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–2017</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 years after beginning teaching in a school in the district...

- 77% of teachers had left their school
- 45% of teachers had left the district

These findings are consistent with a research study examining turnover in 16 urban districts, which found that 70 percent of new teachers left their school and 55 percent left their district within five years.¹

Why does this matter?

Teacher turnover is a widespread issue. High turnover rates may be costly to the district,²³ disrupt operations, and lower student achievement.⁴⁵ Turnover can also exacerbate inequities between schools.⁶
Factors related to higher teacher turnover

- Frequent absence
- Teaching in middle school
- Previously changing schools

Factors related to lower teacher turnover

- Higher evaluation ratings (see chart below)
- Teaching in schools with more positive responses to a school climate survey*

*School climate mattered more for teachers receiving high evaluation ratings than for those receiving lower ratings.

The study also found that Black teachers were more likely than other teachers to leave their school, after accounting for other teacher and school characteristics.

Teachers rated as failing or as needing improvement left their schools at a rate nearly three times higher than teachers rated distinguished.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage leaving their school</th>
<th>Percentage leaving the district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failing/needs improvement</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What is Philadelphia doing to address turnover?

- For new teachers, the district offers targeted professional development, an induction program, and additional supports during their first year in the district.
- For experienced teachers, the district provides professional development opportunities customized to meet the needs of teachers and schools.
- The district plans to expand its work with principals to improve school climate and school-level retention.

Endnotes


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