

Teacher Turnover and Access to Effective Teachers in the School District of Philadelphia

Concerned about the expense of teacher turnover, its disruption to schools and students, and its potential effect on students' access to effective teachers, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) partnered with the Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic to better understand students' access to effective teachers and the factors related to teacher turnover. The district already engages in efforts to address teacher turnover by supporting new teachers, targeting retention strategies to teacher needs, and improving school climate. Findings from this study can inform these efforts by improving SDP's understanding of the role of turnover in the equitable distribution of effective teachers and by identifying teacher and school characteristics related to turnover.

This study focused on SDP teachers who taught kindergarten–grade 12 in school years 2010/11 through 2016/17. Methods used included an intraclass correlation analysis and effective teaching gap analysis, to examine access to effective teachers in the district, and descriptive statistics and a hazards model analysis, to examine the factors related to teacher turnover.

Key findings

- *Effective teachers were distributed unevenly throughout the district, but gaps in access to effective teachers differed for different measures of teacher effectiveness.* Teachers of economically disadvantaged, Black, and Hispanic students had lower effectiveness scores, on average, than teachers of non–economically disadvantaged and White students. But these gaps differences were smaller when teacher effectiveness was measured using value-added scores alone. To reduce gaps in access to effective teachers, SDP might want to target its professional development supports for improving teacher effectiveness to teachers of economically disadvantaged, Black, and Hispanic students. SDP might also want to investigate whether teachers of some groups of students are more likely to receive high ratings on observational measures and whether that indicates potential bias.
- *On average, 25 percent of teachers left their school each year, with most of these teachers changing schools within the district (17 percent) rather than leaving the district (8 percent).* Teachers rated failing or needs improvement, the two lowest evaluation ratings, left their school at a rate (40 percent) more than three times higher than teachers rated distinguished (11 percent). However, just 12 percent of teachers rated failing or needs improvement left the district, meaning that many of these teachers changed schools but continued to teach in the district. SDP might want to examine whether the movement of these teachers contributes to gaps in access to effective teachers.
- *Teacher grade level taught, attendance, race/ethnicity, prior school changes, effectiveness score, and school climate had the strongest relationships with teacher turnover.* The study identified several factors that SDP might want to target in its efforts to increase teacher retention. After other factors related to turnover were accounted for, teachers of middle school grades, teachers who were frequently absent, and teachers who identified as Black were more likely to leave their school than were teachers of elementary school grades, teachers who attended regularly, and teachers were not Black. Teachers who had previously changed schools, teachers who had lower effectiveness scores, and teachers in schools with a poorer school climate were also more likely to leave. School climate had a stronger relationship with turnover for teachers rated proficient or distinguished than for teachers rated failing or needs improvement.